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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Sociological Studies
Department of Sociology

Dissertation

**2023** **Shreya Bhardwaj**

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# Identities and Lives of Muslim Youth in the Czech Republic

Dissertation

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**Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this dissertation using the
   listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my dissertation has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

Prague, …. 2023 Shreya Bhardwaj

*Our home is far, far away*

*It's behind tolerant mountains*

*Behind golden fields; behind an empty desert*

*That's our home on the other side of water; the other side of impatient waves*

*Behind the pine-tree forest; it's in a fantasy, in a dream*

*Behind a blue ocean; behind pear-gardens*

*The other side of vineyards; behind the beehives*

*Our home is behind the clouds; the other side of our loneliness*

*It is at the end of the wet roads; behind the rain and behind the sea*

*Our home has stories; it has pistachios and cherries*

*Behind its warm smiles; it has tired people*

*Our home has happiness; and has colourful fish in its*

*pond In its front alley it has playing ball; it has pretty*

*cats Our home, warm and friendly; on its walls, old*

*photos*

*The photo of playing on the porch; on the beach on summer time*

*Our photos under the rain; with suitcase in hand and feeling of resentment , going away, far away from nice and kind people*

*Marjan Farsad- Khooneye Ma (Our home) English Translation on YouTube: Kianoosh*

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## Abstract

The research presents the first such account of the experiences of six Muslim migrant youth in the Czech Republic. For the purposes of this research, the data was collected for a period of almost a year. Starting in mid-2019, I pursued ethnographic research with Muslim migrant youth aged 17-22, hailing from Syria, Iran, Yemen, and Italy. Using semi-structured interviews as a primary mode of data collection and participant observations, we have explored topics related to gender, belonging, ethnicity and religion.

I have aimed to look at their stories to investigate how the systems within which the youth exist operate, influencing their quotidian experiences. By putting them at the centre of their narratives, I have striven to understand how the youth navigate, negotiate, and, in return, agentially influence the systems and structures around them.

An overarching conclusion points to how migration issues the youth into quotidian experiences of racism, exploitation, exploration, reaching and belonging, even as global citizens. Across this dissertation, I have argued the youth can not be conceptualized as passive recipients of migration processes, with different responses to their credit. And as such, owing to their organization as age and generation-based cohorts, the youth can position themselves as a formidable critique of "the logic of racial, national and ethnic essentialism." (Gilroy, 1993b: 6). Even in the face of migratory challenges, the youth have created avenues for exploration and growth.

CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

*The party of dozen-or-so people descend to the main street, the Church of St. Ludmila visible against a clear sky in the distance towering over baroque-styled apartment buildings and overhead tram power-lines. In a few moments, Shirin sees oncoming another group of Israeli and Czech students from her school who greet and hug her and her classmates. The chaos of noise and laughter is abruptly ended by the whoosh of a rocket fired up from a curb nearby, and then another and then another. "It's like noises of war," somebody quips aloud, and laughter ensues. Everybody seems to understand the noises of war. The church bells begin to chime, introducing their own musicality to the fireworks. The sky is sparkling with golden, pink, and green glitter from the several pockets of pyrotechnics. Shirin appears to be very cheerful, standing close by. Somebody is shooting from across the road; people are clapping and dancing. Shirin dances close to the curb, looks back at the crowd of us, smiles, and lets out a resounding Kel Keshidan which echoes in the openness of the town square.*

*It's 2022.*

## About the Present Research

This thesis focuses on six Muslim migrant youths living in the Czech Republic. A core question that has been asked is what does identity and integration of Muslim youth migrants in the Czech Republic look like. The dissertation engages with similar debates on youth migration, particularly the Muslim youth, in other countries and offers up the case of the Czech Republic.

The present study is well-poised to expand our understanding of this "othered" group of people- how they interact and negotiate with the world around them. In focusing on the experiences of the Muslim migrant youth in the Czech Republic, this research has wider implications for insight into the lives of people operating at the margins – migrants, Muslims, and people of colour. Spanning over a period of 12 months and documenting

experiences of six Muslim migrant youth aged 17 to 22 – Iranian, Yemeni, Syrian, Somali/Czech, this study bears relevance to policy-makers, NGO workers, and scholars by training a spotlight on a range of migrant youth experiences, their resettlement needs and their own contributions to the structures around them.

In the following chapters, I understand identity in how it is enacted by the migrant youth centred around multiple actors like family, peers, diaspora, and host community. An attempt has been made to understand how the identity and lives of the youth of this study are influenced by and how the youth influences, in turn, the social structures surrounding them – their families, peers, societal realities like gender, race, ethnicities –- that determine the youth's social and material worth. As such, I have attempted to examine the following research questions pertaining to the six Muslim migrant youth of this study:

1. How does migration influence the Muslim youth's gender identity?
2. How does migration to the Czech Republic impact youth's sense of belonging?
3. What tools and strategies do the migrants use, to integrate with the host and immigrant communities in the Czech Republic?

To aid this ethnographic investigation, I have primarily outlined theoretical frameworks for identity and integration. The identities of the migrant youth have been understood with a combination of the Tajfel and Stryker Identity framework, which stipulates that an individual is situated within a social structure that lends them multiple social roles and, thereby, multiple social identities that are inherently hierarchical.

The individual youth was located within Bronfrenbrenner's ecological systems model surrounded by social structures, including influences and domains like family, peer, social constructs, and religious and bureaucratic structures.

Such surrounding structures, exerting their influences, creating multiple identities, and providing the basis for integration, became an anchor for the interview questions, participant observations, and a general outlook as I went into the field. I have also engaged in a highly self-reflexive stance throughout this research.

Further inquiry into the experiences of youth keeping within these social structures revealed the multilateral nature of the youth's relationship with these factors. While these

structures influence the social and material worth of the migrant youth and inform their subjective experience, even when the youth may not be explicitly aware of such influences, the youth emerge as agential actors in these interactions in a constant state of negotiating their unique position with these structures. The identity construction and integration thus become a co-constitutive process whereby the non-passive youth multilaterally interacts with the social influences asserting their place and resignifying the norms on individual, communal, and even contemporary global order. Based on these questions, I have investigated the social structures that carry importance for the youth and with which the youth interact and negotiate in ways that contribute to their identity construction and integration process. As a result, body, gender, diaspora, and technology find centrality in youth narratives.

***Structure of the Dissertation***

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters including this introduction.
Primarily, this dissertation is a compilation of three articles written and submitted for publication to various journals or as book chapters (Chapter 8 published).

In Chapter 2, I begin with a brief history of migration to the Czech Republic, with a focus on Muslim migration. Tracing the Islamic presence within the Czech territory to the early decades of the 20$^{th}$ century informs our understanding of the changes culminating in recent anti-Islamic sentiments. Following this brief history, I have outlined the debate between structure and agency that bears relevance to the approach of this dissertation. In Chapter 3, I have outlined the theories of identity and integration and the ecological systems model. Our understanding of the migrant youth's identity construction and integration processes emerges from the consequent themes of this dissertation, wherein I discussed the importance of gender, the role of belonging, and the significance of a cosmopolitan outlook.

In Chapter 4, I have presented the methodology of ethnography, which does not subscribe to being a voice for the voiceless but rather concedes to the agency of the *Other* in being able to convey their experiences in full measure. I have deliberated upon the ethical concerns inscribed within a participatory observational framework as the primary mode of data collection using my own field experiences. As a researcher, I have reflected upon the

importance of disallowing the dilution of social scientific ethics within neo-liberal logic. Ethics are more than a consent form signed at the beginning of research to free academic institutions from any liabilities, and ethical dilemmas may avowedly present themselves at any point during, before or after the research. Further, I have discussed the challenges in qualitative data collection, especially in the context of a global pandemic. For the purposes of this research, the data was collected for almost a year, starting in mid-2019. The initial proposed period of the interaction of 1 year was hindered because of government regulatory measures to curb the covid-19 pandemic in the early months of 2020, rendering face-to-face conversations not feasible. However, for the achievable duration, I pursued ethnographic research with six Muslim migrant youth aged 17–22, hailing from Syria, Iran, Yemen, and Italy. Using semi-structured interviews as the primary mode of data collection and participant observations, we have explored topics related to gender, belonging, and tools of integration into the host and immigrant communities. The accounts of the youth have been located within the larger structures of power to acknowledge the latter's influences on the youth's subjective experiences.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the ways in which Muslim migrant youth negotiate their masculinities and femininities through their bodies making them sites of exploitation and exploration. Using the works of Ahmed, Butler and Foucault, the chapter has aimed to upset the Orientalised discursive notion wherein Muslim men are singularly portrayed as oppressors and Muslim women are relegated to the role of the victim. Using narratives of Bushr and Shirin, the chapter has illustrated how the young migrant man, in negotiating multiple understandings of what it means to be a man, risked having his body exploited in ethnic economies through long hours of excruciating work and incommensurate pay, whereas the youth migrant woman, in her attempt to approximate and negotiate the feminine ideal, created alternate means of sexual exploration. Borrowing from Ahmed's (2007) Phenomenology of whiteness, my analysis of identity construction and integration has engaged with questions of gender, race, and class. Through examples of Bushr and Shirin, I have illustrated how racialisation of migrant bodies impacts the youth's body motility- what their body can or can not do- based on how they are easily marked out as being out of place. This is manifested in the youth not being able to do, act the way they want, and go where ever they want. Against the backdrop of body motility limiting the youth, I have taken a Foucauldian perspective in my analysis to acknowledge the youth's agency even when acted upon by the power structures surrounding them. Furthermore,

Praechter's theorisation of multiple femininities and masculinities, and Butler's theorisation of heterosexist ideal has helped me understand how the youth are not a passive- receivers of heternormative,cultural, racial influences but rather actively take part in negotiating these heteronormative, cultural, racial ideals making their bodies sites of exploitation or exploration in the process. A key contribution of this analysis has been to consider the youth as agential beings enacting their own influences and resignifying norms through their practices as in the case of Shirin venturing into homosexual explorations as a result of being consistently disallowed to pursue heterosexual relationships.

Subsequently, in Chapter 7, Yuval-Davis' framework of belonging has been used to analyse the extent to which and the ways in which the youth facilitate their inclusions. Mapping of different social locations of the participants- middle/upper middle class Non-European Muslim women/men- has depicted the various influences informing youth subjectivities. Such myriad social locations of the young adults inform their first level of belonging as proposed by Yuval Davis. On the second level of belonging, youth's attachments to diasporic narratives facilitate their belonging, thereby integration. The sense of belonging as mediated by their diaspora determines how much the youth can extend belonging across racial divide. Such diasporic-mediations in everyday life and vocational choices are instated to ensure improvement in social positions of all the stakeholders including and especially the youth. This diasporic involvement occurs against a backdrop of integration measures from the "top-down" level of the government wherein exclusion of migrant spatialities is an a posteriori presentation of policy execution. The third level of belonging is located within a macro framework which involves the larger host community structures from bureaucracies to academic institutions to workplaces to religious institutions. Locating the youth experiences within these institutions and their subsequent reassertion of their identity attachments through deliberations and practice makes salient the politics of belonging.

Lastly, in a macro-progression, we move from talking about identity construction and integration as informed by individual, embodied experiences of gender and migration to the role of a community to finally, locating the migrant youth within a contemporary world order in Chapter 8. Discourse on migration tends to locate migrants, including the migrant youth, within a transnational framework (Horst & Olsen, 2021), maintaining ties with their countries of origin, rooted in their national/ethnic identities. Such discursive iterations

foreclose inclusion of the youth in the cosmopolitan project, capable of a global outlook traditionally seen as the preserve of the white, Western elites. Based on such an understanding seen from a decolonial lens has led me as a researcher to actively look for migrant youth experiences where they are usually not sought.

This chapter challenges the dominant discourse of cosmopolitanism- or a global outlook- being the preserve of white, Western cohort, and centres the migrant youth and how their interactions on digital media and everyday life constructs a cosmopolitan thinking. The youth hail from middle- upper middle strata of their respective communities affording them ownership of latest digital tools and gadgets. Such a digital arsenal introduces and updates the youth to regional, national and global contexts ensuing a process of negotiation with this “throwntogetherness.” Besides digital spaces, the youth interact with a multiplicity of cultures including that of the host community in their quotidian spaces which instills in them a sense of empathy and understanding of other people’s vulnerabilities. Additionally, the youth engage their reflective faculties to ensure they do not lose themselves in this Westernised brand of cosmopolitanism, by reasserting their cultural symbols and values.

In light of different analyses, an overarching conclusion points to how migration issues the youth of this study into quotidian experiences of racism, exploitation, exploration, reaching and belonging, even as global citizens. The next three chapters (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) form the core of this dissertation where I present the analysis of the data collected over a period of 12 months. Lastly, in Chapter 9, I present a conclusion for this dissertation wherein I discuss, in brief, the issues covered in the dissertation and the implications.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Muslims in the Czech Republic

This brief chapter makes broader contextualisation of the six participants of this research. Subsequently, I have highlighted certain key facts and literature on youth migration.

### Context of My Participants' Migration

According to Czech Statistical Office, as of 2021, there were 660, 849 foreigners including foreigners with valid asylum in the Czech territory, permanent residence, temporary residence of EU nationals, long-term residence and long term visa in the Czech Republic. This accounts for about 5.9% of the total population and is largely comprised of Vietnamese, Ukrainians, Russians and Slovaks. Of these, there are almost 20000 Muslims, or 0.2% of total population (with an even smaller percentage of adolescents) in the Czech Republic mostly from Arab countries, the Balkans and the Caucus (Schneider, 2006: 127), based on 2016 statistics by Pew Research Centre. According to 2021 Czech census, the number of Muslims in the Czech Republic stands at 5,132 (Czech Statistical Office, 2021). However, this remains contested as there is no way to verify it given the fact that Czech Population census does not compulsorily require one to declare their religion. After the 1990s the Czech Republic adopted a relatively more restrictive migrant policy especially with regards to the Middle-east impeding immigration through prohibitive requirements like high financial deposits (Murad 2009 in Felčer, 2020: 3) while the conditions in the Czech Republic, like increased GDP and low birth rates, became conducive to immigration (ibid.). Events in 2015 like the civil war in Syria saw a mass displacement of people from the middle-eastern countries to Europe. As a result of this development, a little over 1525 sought international protection in the Czech Republic out of which 71 were granted asylum. Due to this stringent outlook of the Czech Republic to immigrants, the Middle-Eastern countries like Syria and Iraq have ceased to be the top five countries of origin of asylum-seekers (Jurečková and Novotný, 2019).

Ostřanský classifies the Czech Muslims into three categories: a) those who are Czech converts to Islam, spouses of Muslim foreigners; b) foreigners, holders of permanent or long-term residence permit; c) those who hold the Czech citizenship having migrated in the 1970s and 1980s from "progressive regimes of the Third world" that shared their

ideological outlook with the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and studied engineering and medicine at Czech Moravian higher education institutions. Hundreds of students and trainees from countries like Sudan , Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine came to study in industry and military schools from 1960s to 1980s (Zidek and Sieber, 2009: 93 in Felčer, 2020: 2). During this period of communism, Czechoslovakia maintained exceptional trade and political ties, especially in the field of military training and arms export, with many predominantly Muslim countries like Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Sudan and Yemen (ibid.). This history of collaboration between predominantly Muslim countries and the Czech Republic seems to have been forgotten in a slew of anti-Islamic sentiments in the recent years.

Muslim Religious Communities in Czechoslovakia was a first of its kind to be set-up all the way back in 1934. Presence of such ethnic institutions has been found to contribute to integration of immigrants with the host Czech community (Drbohlav and Dzurova, 2007). After several impediments, the Centre of Muslim Communities was founded in 1991 but remained a citizens' association until 2004. To be a religious association in the Czech Republic and to be eligible for state subsidies, the law required at least 10,000 signatories for the petition (Schneider, 2006: 128), an impossible feat given the low numbers of Muslim residents in the country and an even lower rate of participation in community activities by members of Muslim community (Ostřanský 2010 in Felčer, 2020). Around the same time, Islamic Foundation in Prague was also started. In 1994, Islamic Foundation in Brno resulted in the creation of a Islamic centre along with a mosque. During the communist era, Muslim migrants and Islam did not command media attention with the same ferocity as it does in the present times. At the beginning of the new millennium, attacks by terrorist groups in Europe and US led to a new world order where Islam and Muslims became the monolithic "other." In the Czech Republic, the actions and presence of Muslim communities came under scrutiny for fear of terrorism, spread of Islamic values and a consequent demise of Czech and European values.

Several incidents of xenophobia and anti-Islamic offences have been reported to the Ministry of Interior. However, in the political milieu, Muslim migration has occupied a central stage since 2015 with the latest decree from the government mandating compulsory adaptation-integration training course for third-country nationals to be completed within one-year of their arrival to the Czech Republic (Čada and Hoření,

2021).

***Structure Vs Agency Debate***

During the course of the present study, I have located the experiences of the young Muslim migrants within ecological systems (explained in detail later) comprising different social structures that bear influence on an individual. However, as I found through their narratives, the young participants agentially negotiate their position within the social structures insofar as to influence the latter as it influences them.

The dialogue between "structure" and "agency" appears ad infinitum in social scientific inquiry. Most fields of social sciences have been impacted by this ongoing structure vs agency debate including migration studies. To understand this debate, I will first outline the development of various migration theories that have spoken to either the "structural" or the "agential" aspect of migration phenomena. De Haas (2021) has classified the different theories that explain the migratory phenomena in the late- nineteenth century into broader paradigms. These early migration theories can be broadly categorised into two overarching paradigms: "functionalist" and "historical-structural" theories. While originating in different disciplines, these theories share certain basic assumptions about the constitution of society and what aspects within this society social science research should bring into focus. In essence, these paradigms try to understand and explain the "structure" surrounding the migrants.

According to functionalist theories, migration is a relatively straightforward movement of individuals or groups from one place to another based on a cost-benefit analysis in favour of optimisation of benefits. As such, the neo-classical theory (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Todaro & Maruszko, 1987) posits that migration is caused as a result of "macro-differences in labour demand and labour supply" wherein individuals move in order to fill in this labour vacuum where present (Divinský & Zachar-Podolinská, 2018). Similarly, the push-pull theory espouses that individuals move from lower-income economies to higher-income ones, with the idea to secure economic stability.

On the other hand, the historical-structural theories explain migration as brought about by interplay of historical and structural factors like (neo-) colonialism, capitalism that

have resulted in uneven distribution of resources, wealth and power inequalities between and within regions. For instance, the dual labour market approach (Piore, 1969 in Divinský & Zachar-Podolinská, 2018), capitalist accumulation of wealth at the core attracts migrants thereby draining the peripheries of its human capital resources. In the same way, Wallerstein's world-systems theory divides the various regions of the world into the "core" and the "periphery" whereby capitalist economic interventions in non/pre-capitalist economies launches a migratory process in the latter. Such interventions create novel links seen in, for example, colonial restructuring of education and linguistic systems in colonised regions which then opens pathways to migration to colonising regions (ibid.).

However, these paradigms are plagued with their own unique limitations which, criticisms notwithstanding, is just a part and parcel of evolution in any scientific inquiry. De Haas (2021) asserts that functionalist theories tend to view society as an organism wherein every structure has a function to sustain the said organism and the individual or a group is a mere cog in the proverbial machine. A functionalist view of migration narrowly locates an individual's needs and aspirations within an economic framework where the individual is constantly seeking to maximise gains which informs their migration. This is in turn understood to bridge the economic gaps between poor and rich nations and create an equilibrium as the individual fills the labour needs in destination country while sending remittances to their country of origin.

In a manner of speaking, these theories chalk a rather simplistic straight line from a migrant's origin and destination. Such a reductionist standpoint discounts the various macro-structures that determine an individual's reasons and pathways for migration ranging from colonialism, immigration policies and controls to warfare and cultural change. Additionally, states and businesses like large Multi-national corporations play a big role in influencing migration pathways and processes. In the Czech Republic, the state formulated the first immigration integration policy in 2000 which among others allotted a part of state budget to support projects and studies within the framework of migrant integration, emphasized ideas of cohesion, diversity and non-discrimination, bestow similar rights on the long-term residents as Czech citizens.[1] The migration

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[1] https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-

policies of a state greatly influence a migrant's decision to stay on. For instance, during the course of this research, I found that a lot of accompanied youth chose to travel onwards from the Czech Republic to Germany owing to the latter's relatively more inviting stance on migration (Torfa et al, 2021). Besides the state, supranational organisations like the European Union and global organisations like the IOM, UNHCR and humanitarian non-government organisations also heavily dictate the terms of migrant resettlement. In 2020, the Czech Republic was found in violation of the European Union Law by the European Court of justice which stipulated the quota of asylum-seekers from war-torn Syria (and other regions) each EU member state was supposed to host in and after 2015 (the Guardian, 2020)[2]. Such overarching entities play an important part in actively shaping the course of migrations, throwing a wrench into the works of a more functionalist understanding.

The main issue with such a historical-structural perspective on migration is that it eludes a key aspect of the whole migration process- the individual. Neither the functionalist nor the historical-structural perspective captures the complexities of the person undertaking the migration and instead consider them either as a robotic being moving from region 1 to region 2 to optimise their economic dividends, or as victims of supranational and global structures, thrown from pillar to post in a bid to secure a home. Contrary to these ideas, many studies have depicted the human agency in action whereby migrants defy government restrictions, strict border controls by enlisting the services of smugglers, traffickers. Once in the host country, migrants negotiate their identities and belonging through a social and cultural exchange, to mitigate discrimination, xenophobia. Human agency, thus, can be understood as the ways in which an individual makes independent choices to determine the course of their future thereby actively reshaping the social structures around them through their continuous negotiations. De Haas (2021) outlines the symbolic interactionist paradigm that focuses on everyday experiences of migrants, identities and belonging through theories like transnationalism and diaspora studies.

De Haas has rightly proclaimed that it is futile to focus on either structure or agency at

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czechia_en

[2] https://www.theguardian.com/law/2020/apr/02/eu-court-rules-three-countries-czech-republic-hungary-poland-broke-law-over-refugee-quotas

the cost of the other (De Haas, 2021). Borrowing from this, in the present research, I have attempted to understand the experiences, the identities, integration and agency of the migrant youth but I have located them within a social structure of belief systems, traditions and institutions with which they regularly interact and negotiate. I have employed a combination of theories like Tajfel and Stryker Identity theories and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems model to explore migrant youth identities.

CHAPTER THREE

# KEY CONCEPTS

This chapter outlines the central concerns of this dissertation- namely the identity and integration. I have underlined different identity theories foregrounding the ones informing this research- Tajfel's Social Identity Theory and Stryker's Identity Theory. Similarly, different integration models have been mentioned like assimilation, acculturation and transnationalism. Taking off from the transnational model, Chapter 6 (on Cosmopolitanism) diverges from this theoretical basis. Next, I outline the main theoretical framework-Bronfrenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model- within which the migrant youth experiences have been located.

## The Question of Identity

Social scientists have sought to define identity in multitude of ways, largely to understand their respective disciplines be it political science, psychology, international relations, sociology, among others. In this section, I will underline a brief history of "identity" as a construct within sociology and psychology followed by the identity theoretical framework used in the present. The usage of the term "identity" dates back to philosophical writings of Locke and Hume in late 17th and mid-18th century (Gleason, 1983: 911). The term, however, was not popularized until German-born psychologist, Erik Erikson's work on personality development. Influenced by Freudian brand of psychology, Erikson conceives of identity as a process located both within the "psychic" core of an individual, and their community, that is to say, identity is a process of personality and self development through one's participation in the society, acceptance of multiple roles and learning of cultural norms. An integral feature of Eriksonian brand of identity lies in its continuity, permanence and endurance despite the individual undergoing changes across the life cycles (Gleason, 1983: 918).

This understanding of identity is different from one postulated in the field of sociology. In early 1960s sociologists like Peter L. Berger and Erving Goffman defined identity as a by-product of interaction between an individual and society wherein the individual is in constant process of creating and re-creating it to suit different social situations (Gleason,

1983: 918). For them, unlike Eriksonians, it is seen as a dynamic process, "a flickering succession of identities adopted and shed according to the requirements of different social situations" (Gleason, 1983: 919). .

The dynamic nature of identity was soon acknowledged by psychological researchers like Hogg and Abrams (1988) who define Identity as people's understanding of themselves both in terms of the kind of individual they are and in relation to other people (Fearon, 1999). Deng (1995: 1) widened the scope of " identity" by describing it as "the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others" based on ethnicity, language, race, religion and culture (in Fearon, 1999).

This contrast between primordialist (unchanging) and interactionist (dynamic) view of identity in sociology and psychology has informed my understanding of identity as neither being completely dynamic nor completely static. Rather in this research I see identity as a process of reconfiguration, negotiation, assertion and change limited by, located within and influenced by socio-historical, structural and institutional conditions. The identity of the six Muslim migrant youth interacts with socio-historical and political factors like an orientalist outlook in academic and public discourse, histories of colonialism, Czech immigration laws and policies. To make salient this interaction between the migrant youth of this study and the social structures surrounding them, I have used the theoretical framework for identity as outlined by a combination of Tajfel and Stryker's works. Experiences of migrant adolescents have been understood in light of two theories of identity namely identity theory by Stryker (1980) and social identity theory by Tajfel (1981). With his work in social psychology, Tajfel wanted to explain notions like intergroup conflict, discrimination and prejudice by focusing on group factors rather than individual features. One of the questions that has been explored during the course of this study is how the adolescents' identities, as informed by their different social locations, is negotiated in the Czech Republic, a country of contrasting faith, ethnicity (in Burnett, 2013). A great degree of difference between the cultural and social practices of parents and the new society has been found to result in identity confusion in the youth (Arnett, 2003).

In her research on identity, Yuval-Davis (2010) worked with members from Muslim community from different countries to counteract the notion of 'the Muslim,' however, there is a tendency to feel united in common faith or religion as a result of stereotypes (Husain and

O' Brien, 2000). This helps foster a sense of community (Matsuda, 1991 in Trucios-Haynes, 1996). This then becomes manifested into an "us" vs "them" migrant narrative which is the purview of the social identity theory. This theory postulates that an individual exists within a societal structure which is inherently hierarchical with differential distribution of power (see Greenfield and Marks, 2007).

In the present study, the adolescent experiences have been located in the context of these power structures that have a bearing on the process of their identity formation. How does the process of identity formation work once an individual is situated in the context of social structures? This has been explained by Sheldon Stryker's identity theory. According to the identity theory by Stryker (1980), identity refers to the meaning an individual gives to the roles given to them in a social structure, to groups they belong to and to the way they see themselves as an individual entity.

Identity, thus, is not singular. We have multiple identities based on the societal roles we play, groups we identify with and the way we define ourselves. This idea of multiple identities is derived from James' (1890) idea of multiple selves. Identity theory suggests that identities are formed through interaction with one's environment with which an individual engages in constant feedback loop (identity verification), making salient identities which are reinforced by different agents in the surroundings (salience). Such a feedback loop brings particular identities to prominence or in the centre over other identities (centrality/prominence) (DeLamater and Ward, 2013). Identity markers like the status of "subsidiary protection," the colour of a person's skin, the religion that they practice and gender roles they occupy as based in a particular culture attain centrality or salience owing to which of these markers are supported or encouraged by environmental factors. The present study seeks to explore how migrant, religious and gender identities of adolescents become salient in a given context.

In 1989, the author Salman Rushdie's book Satanic Verses was publicly decried and protested for its blasphemous content and hurting the religious sentiments of Muslim groups. The protests were led by Muslim immigrants in the UK which directed the focus of migration researchers to the religious identities and its significance for migrants.

Researchers have located the role of religion in influencing immigrant integration, its

impact on their well-being and endowing its practitioners with transnational capital and facilitating migrant advocacy (Ricucci, 2021). During the course of my research, I briefly participated in weekly halaqah sessions organised by Muslim women in Al-Firdaus mosque in Prague. While studies have discerned and acknowledged the presence of migrants from different sub-sects of Islam leading to the creation of separate Sunni and Shia (predominantly, Sunnis and Shias) mosques (Nyhagen, 2019), the Czech Muslim population is relatively very small to allow for such demographic concessions. From my visits to the weekly gatherings and through conversations with people present there, I could however gauge that the members hailed from Sunni sects which harks us back to the Czeschoslovak Soviet Era ties with largely Sunni-majority regions (Hamdani, 1994).

While I met three of my young adult research participants there, the sessions were largely organised by and for adult women. The sessions served the two-pronged purpose of being both a pedagogical and a socialization space. Studies with Islamic religious congregrations in the Western context indicate that a key motivator for migrants to participate in such gatherings is a desire to acquire practical knowledge about appropriate "Muslim" conduct (Ferrero, 2018). Alongside, the members can get practical information on how to settle themselves into the new environment and navigate their host society- they can get information on jobs, language courses, issues related to immigration, food (Halal food), shelter and clothing concerns from their fellow community members who have stayed in the host society longer. Such an organization as a cohesive unit with mutual respect, support and learning among the members resonated with findings which posit mosques as places where Muslim migrants can learn about Islam and enjoy a sense of community (Ehrkamp, 2016).

Of particular interest to social science research and media has been the idea that young migrants "turn to Islam" which becomes an important aspect of their identities (Bendixsen, 2013: 4). This has happened at the same time when, like other religions, Islam has tried to reconcile its localised traditions with its universalist appeal, as its territories expand beyond its point of origin. As such there has been a continuous tension in attempts to homogenise and ossify certain Islamic practices at the cost of shedding localised beliefs (Vertovec, 2002: 27). Islamic practices like hijab (headscarf) for women have garnered a

lot of attention in Western media and juxtaposed with Western liberal and secular values[3]. When these Islamic principles become incompatible with Western, Christian values, the young migrants' involvement becomes concerning. In their book "Muslim European Youth," Vertovec and Rogers (2000) challenged this supposed incompatibility and observed how the youth negotiate their religious identities to create hybrid modalities of religious expressions (Bendixsen, 2013: 5).

A wealth of literature exists underscoring the experiences of Muslim adolescents-both girls and boys-upon resettling in the country of their migration (Juvonen and Bell, 2018; Boutwell, 2011; Sirin and Fine, 2007). In a 2011 article on American Muslims, in the aftermath of 9/11, Clay underlined how Muslim girls are perceived as oppressed (often times seen manifested in wearing of veils, *Hijabs* (Soltani, 2016)). The outcome of such stereotyping and prejudiced behaviour is "othering," which makes the task of integrating into the new environment all the more difficult. Such experiences of othering come at the heels of even more traumatic circumstances that the migrants have freshly emerged from: war-like situations, bombings, witnessing death and destruction. This has a bearing on the day-to-day experiences of the youth with studies reporting incidences of post- traumatic stress, anxiety and depression (Bronstein et al, 2012; Perreira and Ornelas, 2013).

Now, the process of identity formation associated with this adolescence can become challenging if the youth find themselves embroiled in a context wherein their diverse ethnic, religious, racial, sexual, national origins are brought under scrutiny (see Sirin and Fine, 2007). The primary point of reference for this study was Boutwell's work that sought to understand the identity construction process of refugee girls in the United States. Cultural compatibility is one of the more significant factors that determines effective resettlement in a new place (Kunz, 1981). How the adolescents negotiate with the new environment in terms of their identities is one of the questions that will be pursued during the course of this research. In a 2018 paper, Kastoryano points out how some Europeans are of the view that Islam is incompatible with "universal" Western values. The tenets of these liberal states are being challenged by different cultural, ethnic groups (Koopmans and Statham, 1999). This is true of Muslim migrants who find themselves at the receiving end of misunderstandings and higher level of prejudices than other religious minorities (Fox and Akbaba, 2015: 191 in Estevens, 2018), mostly owing to media portrayal of Islam

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[3] Albeit situated in Christian traditions

and Muslims in the West including the Czech Republic (Jelínková, 2019; Alghamdi, 2015; Bonansinga, 2015). Public view on migration is strongly informed by the issue of International terrorism which necessitates understanding of religion. Otherwise, every Muslim can be thought of as a terrorist fueling Islamophobia (Estevens, 2018).

Similar attitudes toward Muslims are also prevalent in the Czech society which is a direct consequence of partisan media reporting and populism in politics. Other groups like Ukrainian refugees, who have arrived in larger numbers, have been immune to these attitudes (BTI, 2018). A 2003 Social Survey Program in the Czech Republic on national identity showed that being Czech means someone who speaks the native language (Czech), who has lived in the Czech Republic for the better part of their lives and has the citizenship status and also depicted how being Christian is integral to the Czech identity (Burnett, 2013: 2).

Identity is one of the key aspects that has been dealt with during the course of this research. Studies with youth have focused on psychological issues faced by them, including longitudinal studies (Wang, Jeffrey & Xin, 2022; Lincoln et al, 2021); studies have also underlined protective resources like social support systems-family (Herati and Meyer, 2020); influence of peers (Sanchez Guerrero and Schober, 2021 ) and larger community (Ricucci, 2021).

Theorists like Phinney and Rosenthal (1992) have highlighted the importance of family in identity formation processes of migrant youth but there has been a sincere lack of reexamination of such assertions (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006). In the context of the Czech Republic, there has been a concerning lack of studies with Muslim migrants, barring a few. In 2013, Burnett conducted a case study in the Czech Republic on refugee identity and found that the process of identity formation or reformulation is dependent on situational factors which are further influenced by the individual's social, political and physical environments. A 2018 quantitative study presents the faith-related attitudes of Muslims living in the Czech Republic (Čeněk, Kompérová and Smolík, 2018). While considering the Muslim migrants, the focus is largely on how this group is portrayed in media and the attitudes held by the local population (Bell and Strabac, 2020; Doboš, 2020; Topinka, 2016, 2015, 2007). Social science research in the Czech Republic is yet to make a dedicated effort to bring the young Muslim migrant population under its ambit.

Admittedly, the country hosts only a small number of Muslim migrants, the migrant youth will still constitute the next generation of citizens with their own share of roles and civic responsibilities, executing which would entail instilling in them a sense of empowerment and trust.

Therefore this study attempts to fill this apparent gap in the literature and our understanding of Muslim migrant experiences in the Czech Republic. Such experiences have a bearing on the youth's course of development which is largely defined by the process of identity formation (Velez and Spencer, 2018).

For the purpose of this research, I have derived my understanding from two theoretical models. The first is Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979). Since identity is not formed in a vacuum but emerges through an interaction between the individual and the society.

**Ecological Systems Model**

In this section, I will outline the theoretical framework used to understand the experiences of migrant youth. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (see Bronfenbrenner 1974, 1977, 1979, 1986) has been widely used in the fields of child and youth development, ethnic studies and social psychology to understand how a youth's interactions impact their overall development (in Cano, 2015: 55). According to this model, the youth is situated in the middle of various spheres of influences (family, friends, peers, cultures, religions, governments, time, to name a few)- inscribed within one another- all of them interconnected to each other. It then follows that the youth's identity is not formed in a vacuum but emerges through an interaction between the individual and these spheres of influences. A unique feature of this perspective is that it takes into account those sources of influences that exert an indirect influences on youth identities like societal structures, geopolitics. These sources inform the attitudes and policies of institutions around the youth with which the latter inevitably interacts regularly like family environment, school.

Ecological systems perspective has been used to map the experiences of migrant youth across several studies. Notably, Khanlou et. al (2018) have problematised the notion of cultural

identity in immigrant youth in Canada using a systems perspective. Paat (2013) explores the role of family in the lives of migrant adolescents using ecological systems theory. Elsewhere, studies have sought to understand how the cultural transition in the process of migration leads migrant youth to adapt to the new environment and showcase resilience (Chen el. al, 2012). Spending over a period of one year in the company of migrant youth of this research, I found the influence of various spheres playing out in the lives of the participants. Albeit, given the context of pandemic, I could only get the youth's perspective and not reciprocally engage with these spheres- like their school, peers. So the youth's experiences have been mapped into the different systems insofar as they unravelled during our conversations. This is why there is a disproportionate emphasis on certain factors over others making them salient for the youth.

Nonetheless, an important aspect of ecological systems model is its holistic approach to understanding youth experiences and not consider the individual as the be-all and end-all of all experiences. The model takes into account socio-historical events that often predate the individual and that the youth may not even be aware of but that indirectly influence their lives, eg, the Czech history of Muslim migration. An individual's identities are created over their lifetimes and are a product of permutations of different socio-politico-historical factors so it is only right that an approach that takes stock of a host of factors rather than a narrow account of experiences in a particular space and time is more fitting. For example, the youth will be influenced by their family, peers, community, culture of their country of origin and destination, national and supranational structures.

***Detailing the Framework***

***Microsystem***

This is where the individual is directly present and the factors effect her directly.This would include their family, peers, school, and workplace. “A microsystem is the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an I immediate setting containing that person (e.g., home, school, workplace, etc.). A setting is defined as a place with particular physical features in which the participants engage in particular activities in particular roles (e.g., daughter, parent, teacher, employee, etc.) for particular periods of time” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977: 514). Suárez-Orozco et al (2018) proposed an integrative model for

immigrant youth and examined how microsystems like families, schools and neighbourhoods have wide-ranging implications for youth integration and are impacted by socio-historical contexts and events like refugee crisis, xenophobia. During this research, the participants talked about different microsystems like their home, workplace, friends.

***Mesosystem***

This refers to the interaction between the various microsystems, be it between parents and teachers of the individual, between individual's family and peers, with peers over social media etc. While previously separated, social media has enabled different microsystems to come together in an online space. The youth can now communicate with their peers from school/university or colleagues from workplace while still in their home environment. Kim and Shammas (2019) identified social media networks of immigrant youth which served as "home away from home" (p. 226) and helped negotiate identities in the destination country by facilitating belonging.

***Exosystem***

Exosystem is a extension of the mesosystem wherein the individual is never directly present but is influenced by its structures indirectly. "These structures include the major institutions of the society...They encompass, among other structures, the world of work, the neighborhood, the mass media, agencies of government (local, state, and national), the distribution of goods and services, communication and transportation facilities, and informal social networks." (Bronfenbrenner, 1977: 515). First, the youth of the present research are impacted by the narrative peddled by national and international media around Muslim immigration to Europe informing populist and Islamophobic response, thereby determining the social worth of the migrants. Second, the government agencies regulate the mobility of immigrants through policies- creating administrative labels of "refugees" and migrants which determines the level of material and substantial help that can be extended to an individual or families. The youth functions within these societal and national structures. For instance, literature suggests that negative portrayal of Muslim youth as a threat to Western identity and its secular principles led to different forms of identity negotiations ranging from assimilating to majority culture to adopting dual identities to creating a transcultural identity to developing a collectivist Muslim identity (Farooqui and Kaushik, 2022: 83). The three analysis chapters

deal with how the youth of this research respond to this mass-media led public discourse against Muslim. Maryam assimilates to the culture and foregoes the hijab, Jameela and Faiza, inscribed within a network of Muslim collective in Prague, seek counsel on how to conduct their daily lives involving help with their studies and future careers, Adam juggles his identities and continues his attempts to balance his religious identity in the host community, Usman reflects on his religious and cultural values and asserts that part of his identity, Bushr creates a cosmopolitan imaginary.

***Macrosystem***

This consists of all larger societal and cultural factors which have a wide influence on a large number of people in the society the individual is situated in. “A macrosystem refers to the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977: 515). Of significance to the youth of this study is the difference in gender socialization in family and community which differently influences their identity development (Ajrouch, Hakim-Larson and Faikh, 2015: 93). We return to this point in Chapter 5. Besides informing gender socialization, macrosystem also involves other cultural patterns that bear relevance for Muslim migrant youth including the anti-Islamic public discourse and political atmosphere (Rangoonwala, Sy and Epinoza, 2011: 232) in European countries. The youth in the stages of developmental transition are especially vulnerable to such a climate which only serves to relegate them to the margins of the margin.

***Chronosystem***

Lastly, this system comprises the time and timing of important events in life. For instance the age when puberty occurs or the age when a person is married (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Additionally, chronosystem involves historical events that proximally impact the other ecological systems through their cascading effect. For the participants of this study, several chronological events bore relevance- civil unrest in their country of origin, their parents’ decision to migrate, their transition to new educational, linguistic, cultural institutions and set-up, and once in the Czech Republic, historical events like 9/11 attacks on WTC towers in the US have resulted in stereotypes and misconceptions regarding Muslims and Islam (macrosystem) and national and international government policies restricting movement of

Muslims across and within state borders (Rytter and Pederson, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model helps situate the experiences of young people within these different systems that involve and engage with different facets of their lives, leading to development of identities which are an accumulated influence of these facets. The framework also facilitates an understanding of not only how the youth are influences by these systems but also how the former in turn influence the systems through their ongoing negotiations.

**The Process of Integration**

Against the backdrop of identity formation, I consider an important domain associated with identity: Integration (Spencer and Charsley, 2016). In brief, integration can be understood as a complex, long- drawn process of participating and subsequently becoming part of a new community (Castles et al, 2002). With the additional task of integration, a migrant adolescent, thus, has a necessary dual challenge. Not only must they untangle the knots of identity, they must do so in the context of new surroundings, fielding the demands and freedoms that come with it. According to the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), integration refers to the process of change which is dynamic and two-way involving the refugees and the host society, one which is long-term and that starts at the time of arrival at the country of destination, and multi-dimensional, involving cultural, economic, social and political aspects of life (ECRE, 2002).

Researchers have long grappled with the definition of integration and, like identity, defined it in their own ways, best-suiting the interest of their research. Robinson (1998:118) termed integration as a "chaotic concept." (in Ager and Strang, 2008) Such is the chaos inherent in this concept that the migrants and the host community may have very different understandings and definitions of what integration means. Chiswick (1978) defined integration as the process of achieving to avail opportunities and resources already available to the host community. Fyvie et al (2003) underlined five dimensions that are crucial for integration, namely: health, education, housing, labour market and training. Other researchers have defined integration in less utilitarian and more sociocultural terms. Berry (2005) defined integration as the intent of a refugee or a migrant to retain their own culture while participating in the culture of the host community.

The concept of Integration has a long history, its terminology, definition changing with the zeitgeist. Here I will outline how this term has evolved over time and remained the central theme of different theories of assimilation, acculturation and transnationalism.

In early twentieth century, integration was understood as assimilation. Park, Burgess at the Chicago School first conceptualized assimilation as the process by which two groups of people fuse together wherein one group acquires the attitudes, behaviors, memories of the group and becomes incorporated into the latter's culture and social life by sharing their own stories and past experiences. Upon closer scrutiny, it becomes clear that this definition demands an eventual shedding of one group's past for a holistic merger into the other group. Going by this definition, assimilation was seen as irreversible, continuous, one directional (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001:8) where the responsibility of assimilating fell on the minority group.

As the prevailing definition seemed skewered dangerously in one direction, Milton Gordon advanced the theoretical understanding of assimilation by making a clarifying distinction between structural assimilation and acculturation. Structural assimilation is the process wherein a minority group is assimilated into certain aspects of a majority group's life (like education system or labour market) but not into others (like political life or neighbourhood). In contrast to structural assimilation, Gordon defines acculturation as the process by which the minority group adopts "cultural patterns" (Gordon, 1964: 79) of the dominant/host group (Alba and Nee, 1997). Although, acculturation itself was originally conceived of as a neutral term by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936: 146) where a continuous contact between members of different cultures led to change in original patterns of one or both of the cultures (Berry, 1997). In practice, however, the change was oftentimes in the patterns of the minority group and the process approximated how Gordon later perceived it (Castles et al. 2002).

Berry (1997) summarized four strategies through which a newcomer in a given society acculturates, namely-assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization. These strategies operate along the underlying assumption that the individual has complete agency with regards to how they want to interact with members of the majority group. However, the present study acknowledges that adolescents may not posses complete agency with regards to their individual attempts at integration and that they are guided by the external factors

acting upon their decisions-attitudes of the majority group and the policies, rules and regulations in the new society. This is why the experiences of migrant adolescents would be seen concomitantly with their surroundings, by situating them in the centre of Bronfrenbrenner's ecological model.

While assimilation and acculturation models, more often than not, require of migrants to integrate, transnationalism model provides a more conducive analytical framework from which to see a migrant's integration (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Transnationalism involves maintaining ties with the home country or with the larger network of people from a particular community. This helps foster a sense of community and in evolution of existing notions of liberal values (Matsuda, 1991 in Trucios-Haynes, 1996), which Europe takes particular pride in (Kastoryano, 2018 in Koopmans and Statham, 1999). Such an evolution of pluralist, liberal values can lend a sense of entitlement to the community to practice their own culture- promoting, celebrating and sharing it with the host community (Trucios-haynes, 1996). However, a transnational framework posits migrants as rooted in ethnicities/ nationalities which forecloses their participation in a global, cosmopolitan imaginary. Locating the youth in a contemporary cosmopolitan order has been an important point of theoretical departure in this dissertation.

More recently, there has been an increasing focus on interculturalism in governance of migrant integration at the local level. This has advanced our understanding of integration beyond more traditional models of acculturation and assimilation (Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten, 2017). Mezzetti and Ricucci's (2019) work with Muslim associations (Faith-based organisations) in Italy depicts how local and national-level integration policies facilitate civic engagement of Muslim community members by training focus on second-generation young Muslims who bridge the gap between host community and immigrants. In the present research, however, the Czech Muslim community is very small with an incipient organisation. For instance, I briefly participated in halaqa- learning circles for a period of two months which was organised by Muslim migrant women. The halaqah served the two-pronged purpose of being both a pedagogical and a socialisation space. Here first generation migrant women from different countries united over their wish to learn about Islam, imbibe Qur'anic teachings in their daily lives while also enjoying a sense of community. A recent review of migrant integration projects in the Czech Republic showed that while the funding to migrant integration projects has increased since 2016, there

remains a lack of focus on the issues of discrimination and equal rights while the state disproportionately prioritizes knowledge of Czech language and education (Jelinkova and Valenta, 2022).

Over the past decade, several sociological studies have been conducted in the Czech Republic to understand the integration of Muslim migrants in the Czech society. The studies have concluded high levels of integration into the Czech society and the larger integration process as being seamless (Heřmanová and Faryadová, 2012; Kostková, Kramáreková and Jiráčková, 2017, Topinka et al, 2007 in Felčer, 2020, p. 9). Other studies pointed to lower level of integration by Arab migrant women, citing a need for socio-cultural and Czech Language courses (ibid.) However, research studies on migrant integration have largely remained focused on its structural and practical aspects, taking, as Korac (2003) called it, a "top-down" approach. This academic practice is mirrored in government policies. For instance, based on the government resolution of November 20, 2015 No. 954, the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic designed a State Integration Programme for beneficiaries of international protection which has, at its heart, four main goals, namely: provision of Czech language education, access to labour market, access to housing, education of adults and children alike. The issue with taking a "top-down" approach or considering only the structural aspects is that it steals focus away from understanding integration on a more personal scale, through the voices of migrants (Korac, 2003).

Moreover, the studies on this subject have investigated only a limited number of themes like defining integration (Castles et al, 2002; Fyvie et al., 2003), conditions that facilitate integration (Ager and Strang, 2008; Zetter et al, 2002) (in Phillimore, 2011) and process of resettlement (Kunz, 1981).Through this research, an attempt will be made to expand the existing scope of migrant studies by tapping into less researched fields involving understanding of sociocultural processes involved in integration. Through the narratives of migrant adolescents, I will attempt to derive a holistic understanding of what strategies they use that help them better integrate into their new environment, taking into account their unique cultural, ethnic and gender requirements.

CHAPTER FOUR

# METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present the method and research design used in this dissertation. I begin with underlying my ontological and epistemological position. This is followed by a description of the methodological framework employed in this research along with certain challenges I faced during the course of this study. Subsequently, I discuss the data collection and analysis method, along with a brief reflection on my positionality as a researcher.

## Ontological and Epistemological Positions

For the purpose of this research, I use a critical realist paradigm, employing a realist ontology and a relativist epistemology.

Critical realism undoes the consistent indifference to reality outside of individual discourse . According to the critical realist philosophy, the “reality” can not solely be reduced to individual subjective experiences, and there are mechanisms and processes that exist outside of their conceptualizations and interpretations (Bhaskar, 1993).

All entities possess an intrinsic 'structure' which endows it with dispositions and capacities to act, behave or 'work' in certain ways. It is the socially produced, lattice-work of relations between individuals and groups that constitutes the structure of the social world and which is understood to be the enabling conditions for human action (e.g. social rules and norms) (Matthews, 2009 in Parr, 2015: 6).

Through my use of Ecological systems model, I find a prevalence of these overarching mechanisms that impact the discourse created by the migrant youth. Right at the onset of this research, I was confronted with the arbitrariness of labels accorded to displaced individuals ranging from “asylum-seekers,” to “migrants,” to “refugees.” The larger bureaucratic structures effect such categorization thereby potentially creating “real causal impacts” in the lives of individuals by determining their social and material worth (Iosifides, 2018: 96).

Along with a critical realist standpoint, this research additionally reflects my feminist outlook. However, with its strong thrust on objectivity and causality, critical realism has been considered a "masculine" domain, thereby relegated to the margins within feminist scholarship (Gunnarsson, Martinez Dy and van Ingen, 2016: 433) . However, feminist approach and critical realism share certain commonalities like an emphasis on a constructivist perspective which implies that all research inquiry is situated within a particular historical, social and cultural context. Another point of convergence for these approaches is the interaction between the known and the knower wherein exist such real mechanism and elements beyond the understanding and influence of knower (Eaton, 2019: 40).

**Methodological Framework: Ethnography**

This dissertation is an ethnographical work. Within a critical realist paradigm, qualitative methods are more effective than quantitative methods as the former can adequately help in exploration and understanding of phenomena, and description of mechanisms, events and structures (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013: 863). Through its emphasis on the context and the causal processes, critical realist research places importance on an intensive rather than an extensive research. This principle informs the use of ethnographic approach taken by the present research. Ethnography has its roots in anthropological studies (for instance, Malinowski's ethnographic writings).

In the 1930s, the sociologists of Chicago school undertook a study of "street corners" to gain better insights into urban subcultures. However, ethnography has developed into a metaphorical octopus with many tentacles so much so that it eludes a specific style or version. From being conducted in remote colonial spaces, ethnography has come to be conducted in formal, informal, off-line or online spaces like workplaces, schools, shopping centres and the internet. Another reason for such distinct styles of ethnography is the epistemology that informs a particular ethnographic research. For example, feminist and critical ethnographies are respectively endowed with feminist and critical theories (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015: 4). However, despite these developments in ethnography, study of an individual within their socio-cultural environment still remains its basic underlying principle. As an ethnography, the present research is tasked with the responsibility to locate the migrant youth in their social and cultural contexts. Additionally,

inscribed within a feminist standpoint, this ethnography aims to "produce knowledge about people and situations in specific contexts with attention to power differentials and inequities." (Davis and Craven, 2016: 9). The present research acquires an emic perspective- the perspective of individuals who are situated within a social and cultural setting- insofar as my own experiences as a non-white migrant studying in the Czech Republic are concerned. I discuss my position as a researcher in detail in the subsequent sections.

**Data collection**

**Selection of Participants:** For the purpose of this research, six migrant youth were chosen to be interviewed over a period of 1 year. Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson (2011) posit there are multiple issues when it comes to obtaining data from minority groups, central among which is that of building trust and rapport. Migrant groups may display reservation with regards to the research owing to their pre-migration experiences. This necessitates taking time to establish one's credentials, explaining the research process and cultivating comfortable relationships. Such challenges justify the small sample size. There are additional challenges which I discuss later in the sub-sections. Recruitment exercise was done for almost 10 months starting from November, 2018.

**Sampling:** The Muslim migrant adolescents (interchangeably referred to as "youth" or "young adults" in this research) were selected via purposive, convenience and snowball sampling.
Participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) Adolescents- who are typically defined as the group of individuals below the age of 18 years. However, a few points should be noted while considering the aforementioned definition: a) 18 years is not a universally accepted age of transition to what constitutes adulthood, several countries have other limits like 16 years or 21 years (Derluyn and Broekaert, 2008), b) adolescence is influenced by cultural practices (de Berry and Boyden, 2000), therefore, the official age is not always an adequate representation of transition from one stage of development to another (for example, getting married or onset of puberty is considered as the beginning of adulthood, in some cultures) , in early 2018, the current definition was extended to 24 years owing to delay in role transitions like marriage, education and parenthood (Sawyer et al., 2018)

Immigrated from another country; 3) Identify as a Muslim; 4) Studying at a Czech school or college- to asses how their identity and integration processes are influenced based on quotidian experiences with the host community; 5) able to convey their experiences in English.

The data for this research was collected over a period of one year between 2019 and 2020. My first point of contact were referrals at the Ministry of Interior who directed me to contact social workers at state-financed initiatives like State Integration Program (SIP), under the advocacy of the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic. Social workers working on this program further shared contacts from other non-governmental organizations like InBaze community centre and Organization for Aid to Refugees. These institutions, however, had no influence on the course of my research which was wholly independent, and these institutions only served as my primary point of contact with my potential participants, if at all. Through preliminary discussions with social workers at state-financed institutions, I found that not everyone with a legal status of refugee or with subsidiary-protection seeks to go through Integration Programs and those who do are, in no way, obliged to finish the course. Some choose to drop out and work or follow other pursuits. Therefore, the ability of migrants to initially opt for any form of integration program does not automatically prove their ability to get integrated. Moreover, selection of participants was an exercise in snowballing whereby the selected participants referred me to someone who had never opted for help from state-financed or independent institutions like the ones mentioned above.

For the purpose of recruitment, I approached these organizations to explain my research in person. Alongside, the organizations were provided with a letter stating the purpose of my research and a call to the participants. Initial contact with the gatekeepers or participants was done over Whatsapp, following which meetings were arranged. The participants were assured either verbally or in writing in the consent form that the information they provided would remain confidential and would be used only for research purposes. Furthermore, the participants were requested to refer about any persons potentially interested in taking part in the present research. At the same time, I started to volunteer at Organization for Aid to Refugees in Prague through which I had the opportunity to understand, first- hand, the

issues of "illegal" immigration[4] and process of asylum at the grassroots.

**Sample size:** I undertook the recruitment exercise for 10 months. Participants were recruited from Prague, Czech Republic. Three participants were recruited from my visits to the weekly meetings at the mosque in Palmovka. Two participants were recruited from contacts at the NGOs. While one participant was recruited from Charles University dorms, where I stayed, who became a "cultural bridge" between me and my research field.

**Demographics of the sample:** The participants of this research are: Bushr, Shirin, Adam, Usman, Jameela, Faiza. Each of the participant was given an opportunity to either choose a pseudonym to ensure anonymity or use their real name, this yielded different results where five participants chose to use their real name and one did not. I share Hurst's (2008) discontent about the power of researchers that enables them to rename their informants. Retaining the real names of the participants however necessitates acquiring process or iterative consent, meaning seeking consent repetitively and not just once during the signing of the consent form (Lahman, et al, 2015: 7). However, owing to the covid-19 crisis, I lost contact with three of my participants and could not seek iterative consent which led me to use pseudonyms in place of their real names, while another participant chose to use a pseudonym as well. I continue to wonder if I had been able to seek repetitive consent from the remaining three participants, what name would they have chosen instead of the one I imposed as a researcher in an attempt to correctly represent their ethnic origins.

The age range for participants of this research is 17 to 22 (at the time of the first interview) and they arrived in the Czech Republic between 2 to 7 years ago. Three of the participants are from Syria, one from Yemen, one from Iran and one from Italy.

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[4] The securitization of migration-informed by a perceived threat to a community from "outsiders" or migrants- over last several decades has resulted in increased militarization of international borders and narrowing of the migration criteria making it increasingly difficult for people to migrate and thereby forcing them to resort to risky alternatives to gain entry (William-Woods in Divinský and Zachar-Podolinská, 2018: 118 ). And in a world where "global inequalities are territorial," citizenship becomes a legal tool for subjugation and limiting people's access to opportunities and resources that can effect real change in their lives; Kochenov (2020) calls it passport apartheid.

| Name | Age | Gender | Country of Origin | Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bushr | 17 | Male | Syria | Subsidiary-protection |
| Shirin | 20 | Female | Iran | Student visa |
| Adam | 18 | Male | Italy | Czech citizenship |
| Jameela | 22 | Female | Syria | Subsidiary-protection |
| Usman | 18 | Male | Yemen | Unaccompanied Minor |
| Faiza | 19 | Female | Syria | Subsidiary-protection |

**Recruitment of Participants**

By far the biggest challenge I faced during the course of this research was recruiting participants. This was largely due to the negotiations on field with the community gatekeepers which positioned me as the researcher as an "outsider." In total, 26 interviews were conducted with six participants. Soon after receiving a few leads from the social workers, I followed up on the same in the spring of 2019. The first was a young Syrian woman with three daughters, all fulfilling the age criteria I had set for this study. I met her in a mall to discuss my research. She listened to my research proposal inquisitively. Subsequently, she cited that her daughters were largely busy with school and medical college and therefore would not have any time to participate. On another occasion, I reached out to a research participant to ask if their sister would be willing to participate, recognizing how the female perspective was sorely lacking. The participant referenced their sister's shyness in talking to new people as the reason for their refusal to participate. Later in the year, I met a group of Muslim women at a mosque in Prague who met weekly. *On my first visit, I had shared the idea of my research with a young girl who had come to the mosque with her parents and siblings and invited her to be a part of it. During my second visit, I thought of inquiring where she stood on the whole matter. She declined*

*participation in the research shyly. As for the reasons, her father did not approve of the idea as I later found out upon talking to her mother….I brought up the mention of her participation with her mother, Amreen*[5]*, because I was curious as to the reasons. I found no more than I had from the young girl; her father was not comfortable with the idea of her participation. Incidentally, at the moment, Amreen's son- who I did not know about- walked in. And Amreen said, partially in humor, that I was welcome to interview him instead. The suggestion piqued my interest. I immediately took her up on her offer, and proposed to talk to her son.*

*Soon enough, he re-entered the hall to let me know that he was now free. The women did not keep me waiting. I followed the young man out of the hall and into a dining area of sorts, lined with playthings for children. I just wanted that time to brief my new "accidental" participant about my research. Composed, his arms folded close to his chest, he heard me resolutely. As it turned out, he had just finished giving an interview to another Czech researcher who wanted to understand his experiences in the Czech Republic. That was his first ever participation with a research study. In a bid to make him comfortable, to build some sort of initial rapport and ease him into the process, I reiterated the nature of this long-term research relationship, dotting my statements with jokes. I noticed his stern expression gradually turn to a smile. I had no intention of interviewing him especially having learnt that he had just gotten through with one moments earlier.* (Field notes, Nov 17, '19)

Since the Muslim migrants in the Czech Republic are a small community in making, the only gatekeepers that I approached for this research were family members- parents and siblings. Quite rightly, for the recruitment of all participants, I was at the "goodwill of the gatekeepers to a very large extent." (Heath et al, 2006 in Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008: 549). Despite a marked interest in research and science, the gatekeepers displayed a pattern of refusal to allow the young women to participate, citing issues of shyness or studies whereas a similar focus was not directed at the young men as was evident in the vignette presented above wherein a young man was immediately offered up as a replacement participant for his sister. Further, it became evident that the gatekeepers would respond to the recruitment call without even consulting the potential participants (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008: 550). For instance, upon visiting a participant's house, I found

5 All third-party names altered.

out that their sister had supposedly not even been informed and was rather quite enthusiastic about participation. This, however, changed during my subsequent visit to the house which hinted at some kind of "tutoring" that may have taken place after my last visit.

Such safeguarding measures in order to limit participation of girls led me to negotiate my access to the young women which resulted in a highly disproportionate number of interviews I conducted with the young women and men. I could only conduct one interview each with Faiza (plus four participant observations in presence of the other older members of the community) and Jameela (plus one informal conversation and one participant observation). Even this participation came to a grinding halt due to covid-19 pandemic in the early months of 2020.

Besides my concerns as a feminist, this recruitment exercise noticeably revealed the colonial underpinnings of such a research approach. During our first meeting, I asked a participant if he had ever taken part in research. He informed me that he had just given an interview to a Czech student researching with migrants. Orientalized (Said, 1979) and other such over-researched communities show a certain mistrust of the very idea of research. When the very idea of research is rather violent in nature and underpinned by the philosophical assumption that a striving for knowledge of self/Other justifies trespassing boundaries and conquering bodies and territories, I can alternatively understand limitation to participation of young women as "attempts to place limits on conquest and the colonization of knowledge by marking what is off limits, what is not up for grabs or discussion, what is sacred, and what can't be known." (Tuck and Yang, 2014b: 225)

**Data Generation**

During the course of this research, I got an opportunity to reflect upon the research methods in the larger context of power structures and thereby reconsider them in light of the research and its participants. According to Clifford (1988), ethnography as a science refers to

> [a] form of culture collecting . . . [which] highlights the ways that diverse experiences and facts are selected, gathered, detached from their original temporal

> occasions, and given enduring value in a new arrangement. Collecting - at least in the West, where time is generally thought to be linear and irreversible - implies a rescue of phenomena from inevitable historical decay or loss. (in Tuhiwai Smith, 2015: 61)

This definition of ethnography makes salient how the Western scholarship has overstated its relevance in treating localized knowledge to further the aims of social scientific inquiry, cautioning against an inevitable decay or loss in their natives sites. This colonial context of ethnography informs the present inquiry wherein I employ a qualitative methods approach primarily using semi-structured interview method and substantiating it with participant observations. My choice of interview method as primary source of data collection in an ethnographical research stems from two major concerns. My first concern is that, at heart, ethnographical approach derives from the colonial project of *studying* the Other wherein the participants are relegated to being a voiceless entity fit to be observed by a person in authority, a scholar. The very rationale of participant-observation presupposes the superiority of scholarly gaze capable of reproducing knowledge of the culture in question in line with objectivist epistemological principles of social scientific disciplines. In doing so, the scholar concomitantly dismisses and discounts the relevance of Other voices and ways of knowing. However this fastidious machination of subjectivity-disdaining academe additionally calls upon the scholar to substitute their observations with their own personal experiences in the field to lend credence to their claims and to legitimize the interpretations of ethnographic fieldwork.

The not insignificant discursive authority of the scholar resists attempts by Indigenous peoples to reclaim their knowledges and traditions or even to intervene against the violences of misinterpretation or decontextualization—the voice of the ethnographer not only displaces those upon which it is predicated, but also avers absolute license as the ultimate arbiter of Indigenous knowledges and traditions (Beier, 2005: 77). Additionally, while participant-observation may facilitate an understanding of material practices of a participant’s life, it limits the understanding of intersubjective meanings and interpretations (Beier, 2005: 78). No matter how long an ethnographer stays in their field, at the end of their research, they still have the privilege to wholly disassociate from their field, disregard their months or years of participation and dismiss the vicissitudes of their participants’ lives through a singular gesture of leaving.

For instance, I come across a similar issue while trying to negotiate the extent of my participation in the lives of my participants. I illustrate this with an example of a brief encounter I have with a woman whom I meet at one of the mosques in Prague, during weekly Sunday meetings of women who discuss Qu'ran over tea and snacks. Such gatherings are called halaqah (plural: halaqat) which means learning/study circle. It is here that I meet two of the participants of this research. One evening, as the women at the mosque are preparing for Salat (prayer) one of the oldest women approaches me and says something in Arabic. I gauge that perhaps she is inquiring as to why I was not praying. I respond that I am not a Muslim in English, shaking my head, trying to show my reverence despite abject declination the best I could. The lady nods, smiles and says a few things in Arabic. I can only catch the mention of "Musalmaan." I look to Jameela, my research participant, who is still fixing her hood/headscarf, using her sweatshirt hood as a headscarf by tightly tying the lace to the point of covering her chin and forehead. Jameela approaches the pair of us and translates the last statement made by the old lady, "She hopes that one day you will become a Muslim because you are a good person." I smile and bow my head a bit to convey my humility. I feel truly humbled. The woman's age would not permit her to kneel down or stand up again and again at regular intervals. So she goes and sits in a chair in the last row, besides Jameela, and prays with all the devotion she has amassed over the years. Her words carry too much weight and they ring loud and clear for a while after, especially during the silence of Salat. While I could not still bring myself to join in the prayer, I stand up, as one would for any country's national anthem, for example, before a football game.

Having grown up in a Hindu household, I turned to agnosticism during my teenage years and finally to atheism. The timeline is not particularly memorable. Just by the virtue of being an atheist, I could not shake the understanding, or ignore the existence of religion. It is around me, and if my ironical expression can be excused, all omnipotent. I look to this megalith of a conception with respect, like an opponent that must not be underestimated. Its evolution is fascinating, one of the reasons I was keen on the pursuit of this research. As a feminist woman, religion also intersects with my gender identity which makes it doubly complicated. Plowing through religious texts after texts over the years, I have found little of merit in religion to women. It was not even exceptional examples of discrimination but rather how in simple terms, women are accorded secondary place in the religious discourse.

In a discussion with a male colleague who has converted to another religion during the course of his research, all the while maintaining his original religion, I realize how easy it is for men to step in and out of such a system with only technical challenges to their credit. As a woman, it would require an overhaul of very core embodiment of my feminine identity ( for example, from not wearing a headscarf to wearing a headscarf during Salat (prayer)), let alone the feminist aspect. The other option is to not give in completely and yet participate in certain parts of religion (for example during my Sunday meetings) as done by my colleague. That brings me to the issue of moral corruption and a question of ethics. Could it be a kind of abuse? Could I give-in just like that?[6] Religion, I would reiterate as a firm opponent, is a sacred space. On a personal level, as a researcher, it feels non- conscientious to partake in something so profound halfheartedly or toward a rather materialistic end of an academic research.

Through the above example, I have illustrated my primary concern with participant-observation in ethnography of enormously privileging the voice and authority of the scholar by allowing them to reproduce and even (mis- or) reinterpret the voices of the Other, and enter and exit the field at their own behest.

My second concern with traditional ethnographical observation is how it privileges established communities "waiting to be observed" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997) over geographically dispersed communities-in-making as is the case of the Muslim migrant community in the Czech Republic where my participants were separated by entire cities. Appadurai (1991: 191) points out that migration by groups, their resettlement in new places and a consequent reconfiguration of their ethnic selves complicates "the ethno in ethnography" which "takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality." MacFarlane (2021) laments that the limited forms of data that are gathered, mostly interviews, based on short-term engagement during ethnographical research in recent times brings to question the authenticity of such "ethnographies" and "ethnographers." One can as well argue that it is more a reflection on the inexplicably vertiginous demands of modern academic scholarship than on scholars who are called upon to conduct operations with limited time

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[6] In ethnographic research, Kurt Wolfe has conceptualized this as "surrender," which is essentially the state wherein the researcher suspends their preconceived notions thereby making everything in the field important. This level of involvement or state of "surrender" also comes with the risk of being hurt (in Wacquant, 2004: 11)

and resources. Given such constraints of time, resources coupled with Covid-19 pandemic, I chose instead to employ semi- structured interview method as the primary mode of data collection. In the next sub-section, I briefly discuss the interview method.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Within an ethnographic framework, this research uses semi-structured interviews as the primary mode of data collection. The questions and prompts were designed in ways to elicit recollection of participants' life and times in the Czech Republic, narratives which "are a way of collecting people's stories about their experiences" (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016: 631). The interviews were based on the assumption that in the process of telling their life experiences, the participant helps to reconstruct their social events, thereby inviting the researcher to examine and reexamine the social context (Muylaert et al., 2014: 185). The interviews assumed the youth as being perfectly capable of presenting a narrative of their experiences. Multiple narratives from adolescents of different ages were collected for over a period of one year. The rationale being that in the context of understanding experiences of migrants the processes of identity formation (Klimstra et al, 2009) and resettlement and integration are dynamic in nature and significantly long-drawn (Nunn et al., 2014) which necessitates seeking multiple narratives from the youth.

The interviews were conducted at the time and place of choosing of the participants. During the first meeting, I informed the participants about the long-term nature of this research and read verbatim the contents of the consent form they had to sign, clarifying their doubts along the way. The interviews lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours, and presented me with challenges of their own, largely centred around the level of comfort and trust the young participants felt in my presence. Bushr, Shirin and Adam, ever so animated in their storytelling, were comfortable in being audiotaped. On the other hand, Faiza was not comfortable with the idea of being audiotaped owing to what she had been taught at school with regards to cyber-security and how the information provided by her maybe potentially misused. Jameela felt inundated by the very procedural and formal aspect of this research at large- the consent forms, the necessary monthly conversations. She sought a more flexible and informal method one where her real name would also not be used. Both Faiza and Jameela took issue with signing the consent form, a reservation common in the Eastern communities (Pelzang and Hutchinson 2018: 6; Killawi et al 2014:

5) which I overcame by doing away with written consent altogether for Jameela, while Faiza eventually signed when I attempted to explain the need for such a written consent (Killawi et al. 2014: 10).

However due to unequal access to the participants because of gatekeeper interventions and covid-19 pandemic not all participants could be asked all the interview questions. With intimacy and face-to- face interactions being the cornerstone of ethnographic research, covid-19 pandemic that swept the globe in the late 2019 and early 2020 created a rupture in how social scientific inquiry is conducted, limiting access to the participants (Fine and Abramson, 2020: 8), which in case of my research dwindled to negligible especially concerning the two female participants with whose gatekeepers I had negotiated limited access. Faiza, being uncomfortable with any audio-recording, could not be contacted at all save for a few whatsapp messages I could exchange asking after her and her family's health. Through access to Jameela's facebook public profile, I found out she had "graduated" from her medical school which could only mean she had dropped out as she was only at the end of her first year and during our last (and only) interview, she had intimated, at length, about being unhappy in her academic pursuits. Usman categorically stated about not being able to meet once the state of emergency was declared in the Czech Republic. Bushr deleted his social media accounts and engrossed himself in his work at the kebab store, working 10-11 hours a day, about which he told me during our last interview in August of 2020 when the measures were temporarily relaxed. The only two participants I managed to have regular monthly contact with were Adam and Shirin.

In the semi-structured interviews, I would ask the participants about their average day, their family, friends and school life to understand the different identity roles they are called upon to assume in their day-to-day life and ascertain the nature of their quotidian interactions with their peers and community members. Questions regarding their migration experiences with emphasis on their life in their country of origin juxtaposed with their life in the Czech Republic account for how the location and positionality (or translocational positionality) of an individual influences their identity (Anthias, 2002). Further, migratory experiences were seen along the intersections of gender and religion due to their unique influences on displacement outcomes.

Additonally, Wengraf (2011) insists for the scholars to look at "the unsaid of the said." I

borrow and extend this theme to acknowledging the unseen of the seen. In order to gain a holistic picture of their lives, I had requested the participants to bring photographs from certain milestones in life personally, and not strictly socially, relevant to them to ascertain a timeline of events significant for them and that may have potentially shaped them as a person. However, I soon found out that while the participants could dwell in nostalgia and paint a picture like Bushr does below in his recollection of a particular memory

> *I miss that a lot actually. Like the sound when it comes out…I love it..I love it when they do it. I really love it. It reminds you the time is going, the time is flying. You hear the azaan in the morning and after a few minutes you hear another one but you go like oh my god, it's been 5 hours. Really? Like it reminds you even if you don't have an hour to look at…this azaan reminds you of the time as well. It's always good to hear it in the sunsets. i love that. I still remember most of the time when the sunset we sit outside on the balcony in Syria.. sat there with mom and dad. Most of the time with my mom because my dad was here. And we had tea many times you know and my aunt was there as well many times. All of a sudden the azaan comes. So it was a good time. Damn! You remind me of a lot of stuff right now. I really forgot about it you know but it was a good memory, they were good memories. (Bushr Int 4, 19 yrs)*

Not all participants had an immediate access to photographs from life before migration as they had been left back home in care of kith and kin, also given the limitations on what someone forcibly migrating can reasonably carry along, in hopes of recovery upon return. This made salient a certain privilege of situatedness, not afforded to displaced people. Besides the interviews, I carried out four participant observation sessions during weekly community gatherings in a mosque in Praha 8-Liben. The interviews were recorded with the permission of participants (or notes were taken in case recording was not allowed) and they were transcribed manually.

**Data Analysis**

For this research, I considered from a selection of approaches for data analysis like phenomenological analysis and grounded theory. Phenomenological analytical techniques

aim to understand "the subjective meaning of experiences and situations for the participants themselves" (Fossey et al., 2002: 728). However, the basic tenets of phenomenology as it was envisioned by Husserl counter those of critical realism as, according to phenomenology, there is no external reality and what is known can be known through an exploration of an individuals' immediate experiences (Groenewald, 2004: 43). Such an exploration fails to account for social and historical context of the phenomena under study that, nevertheless, influences the individual's subjective meanings.

Another method that was considered for data analysis was grounded theory (GT) approach. Right from its onset, grounded theory has proven to be accommodating of different theoretical and philosophical standpoints. At its conception, grounded theory reflected the philosophical positions of its creators with Glaser, a positivist realist in pursuit of a generalisable theory and objective reality, and Strauss, a pragmatist who espoused that "social worlds seen as mutually constitutive/coproduced through negotiations" (Clarke, 2003 in Oliver, 2011: 7). A critical realist grounded theory can be conceptualized given how GT has adapted to several philosophical approaches in the past. Such a GT approach can employ the subjectivity derived from fluid hermeneutics while, at the same time, taking into account the events and the meanings given to it understood through a lens of "preconceived analytical concepts" (Oliver, 2011: 8). However, the present research did not intend to develop any hypodissertation and construct theories based on the interpretation of data which rendered a GT approach to data analysis unfeasible.

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that thematic analysis can "be a 'contextualist' method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism, and characterized by theories, such as critical realism (eg, Willig, 1999), which acknowledge the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of 'reality'" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 81).

Thematic analysis lends itself to providing a better understanding of the data in broader terms, and a deeper understanding by focusing on case particularities within the overall data. In the present research, I focused on identity and integration experiences of Muslim migrant youth in the Czech Republic, the data for which was derived from 26

semi-structured interviews and four participant observation sessions conducted from 2019 to 2020. Through the analysis, I aimed to understand how the experiences of identity development and integration processes were depicted in the narratives of the youth. Additionally, I aimed to understand the context of such narratives in line with the methodological framework of this study. The six participants for this research were chosen using purposive and snowball sampling. The sample did not intend to be representative and instead, aimed at depicting and furthering our understanding of the identity and integration processes of Muslim migrant youth in the Czech Republic.

At the first stage of data analysis, I read the interviews like a story, marking out noteworthy themes, vignettes, dotting it with my observations, reflections and questions that needed to be asked in the next meeting. I began with a deductive, theory-driven coding based on the markers derived from Ecological Systems approach- family, peers, school, neighborhood, gender, faith, race, nationality. To code and organize the data, I used MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. In the process of generating these codes, I consequently identified "three levels" (or "spaces") along which to understand the youth's identity and integration processes- personal/individual, communal, global.

Next, I examined how the youth articulated their positions within these "levels." The levels accounted for the context within which the youth was located and how they positioned themselves. Based on the above levels derived from the thematic analysis, I examined how the participants positioned themselves in relation to their narratives.

On the first level of " individual," the participants performed a certain identity role for their audience, in this case, me. Further, they brought their personal experiences of identity and integration to our conversations leading to emergence of gender as a key influence on identity and integration processes. On the second level of "communal," experiences were positioned within the larger social discourse and how the youth experience a sense of belonging to their own and host community. On the third level of "global", the youth position themselves within the global context vis-a-vis cosmopolitan ideals. In summary, these experiences centred around gender, sense of belonging and cosmopolitanism. In this manner, the thematic analysis provided space within which I could situate the narratives of the young adults. Focus on such particular narratives led to an organic graduation in thematic analysis by shifting focus from semantic to interpretative level, showing how

themes can essentially interact within and across cases. Together, this positioning within the broader themes helped to understand the factors that continue to influence the identity and integration processes of Muslim migrant youth in the Czech Republic.

**Researcher's Positionality**

I situate my experiences as a brown, woman researcher from India working with Muslim adolescents in the Czech Republic.I negotiate my own stance as a young, non-white, female researcher sharing to a small extent with my participants what Butler calls the "zone of uninhabitability" (Butler, 1993: 3) in the Czech Republic characterized by a barrier to understanding the host community as it threatens and challenges one's own sense of identity. The Czech Republic is a state with an overwhelmingly white population, including Moravians, Poles, Slovaks and Germans, although the population is not too large, to begin with. The anti-immigrant rhetoric is strong, with the state failing to take in its quota of refugees according to the European Union laws. My work has been concentrated in Prague which has a respectable number of foreigners, a lot of them tourists. I walk around in the Prague centre and see a lot of well-dressed tourists from China or South Korea; my hearing re-centres upon detecting "desi" (colloquial way of referencing South Asian people) English accents or Indian languages. In the tourist areas, it is relatively easier to get lost. But for most part, my brownness remains salient.

Taking the escalator down to the underground metro, I see the gaze of the locals burning into my skin. There are entire train rides when I am the only brown person in the car, with every seat filled except the one besides me. The intersectionality inherent in being a researcher from the Global South (in my case, India) is a complicated mesh. Being of a Brahmin[7] (dominant caste in the Hindu caste system) status in a largely Brahmanical state

[7] I argue for development of a theoretical framework of the "caste of migration" along the lines of Rodriguez's "coloniality of migration" which seeks to understand migration policies from a colonial lens. Epistemic universalism of Global North phenomena comes at the risk of undermining social systems and hierarchies prevalent in the Global South which, nonetheless, may effect interactions between members of different Global South regions. Migration research frameworks, as they stand now, seek to look at interaction between black/brown and non-black/brown populations disregarding the intra-community dynamics. For instance, India contributes to the largest number of international migrants at 18 million (IOM, 2019). In the US alone, an estimated 2.5 million people of India origins reside of which 90 per cent belong to dominant/upper castes. In such a case, caste becomes a very potent framework to see its interaction with members of host and other migrant communities alike, informed by

of India, I am equipped with the privilege that comes with having access to avenues traditionally not available to Indian citizens of oppressed castes or minority religions, in terms of education where the teachers and professors themselves belonged to the dominant castes. Growing up, I found myself represented in any and all aspects of life, in media, in movies, in laws and policies. This Brahmanical privilege instills a kind of confidence that even convinces the dominant caste citizens that success in the West is not wholly unthinkable, resulting in emigration of aforesaid citizens to Western countries. I talk about the social category of caste because as MacFarlane (2021) points out that talk of "positionality" within methodology section of dissertation or dissertation have increasingly come to be "ritualistic" and "inauthentic"- all qualitative researchers *have* to do it, so they do it. And in this ritualistic procession, the researchers risk reiterating oft stated categories like gender and race, ignoring other facets of identity that may complicate a researcher's connectedness with and assumptions about their world.

For my doctoral research, I had initially sought to explore the experiences of Muslim refugee adolescents. On the ground level, the boundaries of the definitions for refugee and migrant became blurry in some cases and thus, I decided to expand the scope of my study, incorporating the experiences of Muslim migrant adolescents. My supervisor introduced me to a person who knew a person who knew a person who ran an NGO. They put me in touch with social workers at other NGOs. It was an exercise in snow-balling. Every step of the way, every meeting, I could feel that I was that shiny, new toy, who told stories from the land beyond. About the festivals in India, about the people, how I was seeing snow for the first time here. I had to wear my Indianness on my sleeve. The noise from all the celebrations of the Indianness muffled any attempt at inquiry into and about the Czech society. It formed a nice tapestry in the background. It just was. The NGOs were welcoming but I could not remain indifferent to the thought that I was just someone adding to their diversity clientele. This line of thought, even as I write it, comes across as ungrateful and indubitably skeptical. However, this continued insistence on seeing India as an "exotic, mystic land," served to revise a political understanding of my country, where I assumed the onus of discussing, and if need be, rectifying certain notions people had regarding India.

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traditional caste diktats which are precursors to but find resonance in modern xenophobic and racist iterations.

Propojený obrázek nelze zobrazit. Příslušný soubor byl pravděpodobně přesunut, přejmenován nebo odstraněn. Ověřte, zda propojení odkazuje na správný soubor a umístění.



I found myself instating defenses, amassing a list of my privileges. Besides being a Brahmin, I added to t the fact of being a research scholar, something that was not culturally-bound. In addition, I became acutely aware that English as a language carries immense weight in this globalized world. The Brahmanical privilege of excellent education which resulted in English speaking and writing abilities shamelessly lent a sense of superiority. As if my knowledge of this language cancels out my third-worldness. While it makes it difficult to navigate the daily life with the host community, it becomes a common point of acknowledgment with my research participants, all of whom come from the countries in the Middle-east. The language still remains a secondary characteristic. Primarily, there are other concerns. For instance, I could not simply venture into new spaces without permissions, preparations and assistance. I would like to informally meet my adolescent participants outside their school once they are finished for the day to observe their identity processes, as part of the doctoral research, but I do not for the fear it would raise suspicions. A few months ago I asked Shirin, my research participant from Iran, as to how she thinks the Czech people perceive people from the Middle-east. “They think we are terrorists.” she said, without mincing her words.

Her response felt oddly relatable. Not in the precise sense of the phrase. Life as a brown researcher in a white country (I use the terms “brown” and “white” for simplicity while still finding them alienating) is an exercise in tiptoeing on a minefield. You do not want to be found in the wrong places at the wrong time. The mind gets trained for taking care of something as simple as standing too close to someone on the sidewalk, while waiting for the tram, or running into somebody while walking. The knowledge that you maybe perceived as a threat gnaws at the back of your mind. As a researcher, I become expansive in the limited spaces afforded to me. I come to share the same space as my participants which makes it easier to understand them on certain accounts. Their reminiscences of foods and festivities mirror my own. My participants call it “our culture” (theirs and mine) when talking about their own country. There is a shared understanding of our differences from the host community.

Right at the onset, my participants and I share a history of having migrated from another country (within a few years of each other). As a migrant, albeit student migrant in Shirin and my case, our lives in the Czech Republic began in the corridors of Immigration Offices- to sort out proper documentation to ensure legal residence within the Czech

territories. Although this was differently done- independently in case of Shirin and I, with the help of parents in case of Bushr, Faiza and Jameela, and with help of Czech social workers in case of Usman. Further, I along with my participants had to adapt to the new social, cultural, ecological, political and economic environment.

Further reflecting on my interaction with the participants, I became aware of the shifting nature of the power dynamics between me and my participants. Being that I was a researcher, I could sense the participants' reservation while discussing certain matters. When all is said and done, a researcher is still a stranger at the end of the day, and I wonder how forthcoming I can be with a stranger. During our second and last meeting before pandemic, Usman had delved into the political situation in Yemen more than he must have liked. Because he insisted that for the next interview I do not take an audio recorder and that we "go outside and talk and walk..like friends" (Whatsapp conversation). However, given I had to negotiate access to a few participants via gatekeepers, given the respectability accorded to teaching professions in Middle-eastern and South Asian cultures, I found that the gatekeepers were, thus, very welcoming. "We have a professor among us," Amreen quipped during a halaqah session when I told the gathering of women that I had arrived at the mosque after finishing taking a lecture. It was an inviting standpoint.

Despite this, I was dabbling with multiple identities- some apparent, some not so apparent. While at times, certain identities became stumbling blocks to gathering information, at other times, certain other identities facilitated this process. So even if I was pursuing a respectable profession of an academic researcher for my gatekeepers, I was a non-adherent to Muslim faith, which demarcated me from the group at the mosque where I met half of my participants. Additionally, being a non- Muslim from India where the news reports have been ablaze with anti-Muslim sentiment and outright violence toward Muslims especially since 2014 contributed to my personal concerns about my presence in their space. Even if they were unaware of the political situation in India- even though some events made international news like CAA/NRC protests- it felt violatively disingenuous to occupy their space and keep silent about the political atmosphere.

Here it is important for me to mention that the participants' religiosities were markedly different from those of their parents and thus, I could engage with them on other aspects of our identities. Foremost of this was my age. I believe my age had a big role to play in this

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wherein I could meet my participants on a more or less even ground comfortably partaking in discussions about their interests- largely the media that they consumed (TV shows, movies, games). Because I was able to understand their references regarding social media, memes, etc, I was later entrusted with their secrets. Against the backdrop of this comfort, over the course of our conversations, I began to see the problematic inherent in how the Muslim migrant youth come to be associated with the language of vulnerability, conflict and radicalisation as a perusal of academic literature revealed. Specifically during the course of this study, I found that there were pronounced differences in social class wherein my participants all belonged to a higher socio-economic status than myself- with family members based abroad or international education or high social ranking. This led me to re-look at their narratives and introduce them as agential beings, capable of effecting change through their choices.

Lastly, I would reflect on the process of undetaking this doctoral research. This dissertation began in 2018 and thus reflects the chaos of change in educating, learning, understanding and producing. The writing practically began from Day 1, not out of any program compulsion but in an effort to get into a habit of writing as an academic- writing poorly, writing cowardly, writing nonetheless. More importantly, the writing began to offset the anxieties as a migrant researcher, whose stay in this country is tagged with an expiry date. As such, the writing of this dissertation appears veritably incompatible at times. Beginning as a psychology researcher, enmeshed within Western epistemic logics, I was introduced to works of feminist, decolonial and postcolonial scholars along my journey. Initially, the terms “feminism,” “decolonization,” “post- colonial theory” were mere embellishments, diffident wallflowers in my writing. Below, I reproduce the fleeting ways in which I acknowledged these terms (in a now erased paragraph, if the reader humors me).

> *First and foremost, the theories of identity and integration will be informed by post-colonial and feminist theories. These latter theories will afford an opportunity to “zoom out,” in a manner of speaking, and examine the identity and integration experiences of migrant adolescents in a larger socio-politico-cultural context which is precisely impersonal yet all pervasive. First, a brief look at post colonial theory: Britain and France had significant control over Middle eastern nations in the 20th century (Cole and Kandiyoti, 2002). Post colonial theory, thus, argues that policies of*

*such colonizers in their colonies led to civil unrest and subsequent migration of the people (Hyndman, 2000). In order to construct a narrative of displacement, it is imperative to consider the historical and political events that culminated in the aforesaid displacement. On the other hand, the recent advancement in Feminist theory aims to explore how gender relations (constituting power, emotional, symbolic relations) become reestablished after displacement through interactions with new institution and structures of power. The focus here is not just on women but also on men (Nawyn, 2010) which is of particular interest to this study. Hondagneu-Sotelo describes, "…the extent to which gender permeates a variety of practices, identities, and institutions. Here patterns of…citizenship, sexuality, and ethnic identity are interrogated in ways that reveal how gender is incorporated into a myriad of daily operations and institutional political and economic structures"*

*(2000: 117)*

Such was the indifference. Such was the disregard. But I take recourse in bell hooks' (1984: 55) understanding of how, "Women of colour must confront… absorption of white racist beliefs, "internalized racism," and Rolando Vazquez' (2012) analysis of how decoloniality is reached through a process of understanding modernity and coloniality.

In so doing, this journey has been unsettling, unraveling, upsetting through torment of lengthy reflections on the colonial, patriarchal violence and my unlettered participation in it. And yet the participation continues, saying otherwise would be a startling admission of falsity and deceit. The researcher (if the impersonal, but less vulnerable address may be excused) is a work in progress.

Therefore, for the reader, I deliberately produce this dissertation as a portrait of my doctoral journey where introduction to new scholarships led to several changes in my writing and thought expression and the subsequent negotiations with academic conventions. This dissertation, which when reduced, is nothing more than a collection of letters, words or paragraphs, may read differently at different junctions- in terms of the writing style, expression, depth of reflection. Dear reader know that this then becomes an anthology of a researcher's tryst with decolonial and feminist ideas, which informs their work, briefly but personally, intimately and continually.

Over the course of last four years, I had the chance to reflect on issues that emerged through my engagement with the topic of migration both on a theoretical and a practical level. In recent years, Western academia has witnessed a clarion call for "intellectual decolonisation" (Moosavi, 2020) which asks for an overhaul of all existing scholarship and scrutinise its colonial underpinnings. I hope to reflect on this ongoing debate about decolonising, including migration research which is undergirded by racist, imperial and colonial notions. I now understand that migration research needs to shift its colonial gaze inwards, and deliberate upon what it means for migration studies to become truly decolonial, a notion which may potentially foreclose its pursuit.

This dissertation has been an exercise in change. In 2017, I decided to carry forward my interest in migration from regional Tibetan migration to an international level, the eye of the storm, as it were, by proposing a research topic with Muslim migrants residing in Europe- either temporarily or permanently. The news media was riddled with articles and interviews on how Europe was *reeling* from *a surge* of immigrants- thousands *streaming in* at the European borders by day, a "crisis" that had started in full only a couple of years previously. As I undertook a short-lasting research with Muslim migrant youth in the Czech Republic, I was increasingly confronted by my changing understandings of the two key terms around which my thesis revolves- identity and integration. The idea of understanding identity development concomitantly with integration processes was informed by a host of literature complicating integration of "Muslim" migrants owing to their "Muslimness." Since, in the public discourse, it was the Muslimness of Muslim migrants[8] that was a central problematic during and after 2015 settlement of Middle-eastern migrants in Europe, that is where I aimed my focus (Bruneau, Kteily & Laustsen, 2018). But now I ask the questions, belatedly but perhaps just in time.

**Future of Migration Studies: My Reflections, In Leaving**

[8] Report on Extremism in the Territory of the Czech Republic produced by Security Policy and Crime Prevention Department of Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic documents instances of extremism - including its racist and xenophobic iterations- within the Czech territory in a given year. The 2020 report spanning 34 pages mentioned "Muslims" ten times wherein it variously reported on religiously motivated extremist attacks by individually radicalised Muslims in the Czech Republic like former Prague imam Samer Shehadeh; elsewhere the Czech Police recorded nine crimes motivated by a hatred towards Muslims (MVCR, 2020)

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**Whose Identity?**

While working with the Muslim migrant youth of this study, I always kept the questions about the youth's religious beliefs at hand, ready to pop. They were after all not just "migrants," but "Muslim migrants." There was a religious angle to Bushr not playing football til late in May of 2019, Maryam watching sexually-explicit tiktok videos, Adam avoiding certain Netflix shows and on and on.

If the analysis chapters lack an emphasis or rather even an address of the young people's religiosities, it is by design. While I met three of my participants, as already discussed previously, through serendipitous contacts with NGOs, I met the remaining three while attending Halaqah sessions in a Prague mosque. But as sociologists of religion would argue there is a tangible distinction between organized and private religiosities (Jensen, 2011: 1156). So the presence in an organized religious setting does not automatically guarantee that such settings would necessarily engage young people's personal beliefs. On a scale of their religious involvement, the participants ranged from assuming atheistic ideas as a result of their interaction with new ideas encountered on the internet or through meetings with people from different cultures, to active involvement in following their own personal interpretations of Islamic diktats as Adam explains as follows

> *Basically my understanding is that Islam is something natural. That it should enter your life and make it better. It shouldn't complicate your life, shouldn't make you behave unnaturally, shouldn't invade your thoughts too much like it shouldn't make you paranoid. Like is this allowed, is this not allowed, oh my god, am I doing something wrong? It shouldn't be like that. And everything should make sense so I guess it's not not everyone agrees with this view. There are those who say you shouldn't use logic when confronting religious issues. And then you have these people who don't believe, in my understanding of religion there should be certain situation it should become easier some rule or they are flexible. You are in different times, different place. The rules are flexible. So it's not like this is the rule in the 8th century and if you are in Las Vegas in 30th century, the rule can't be changed. So I believe it can be flexible. Other people don't believe. That's like generally speaking my view (Adam, Int 1, 19 yrs)*

In such a case where I could not find the participants' religiosity (or the lack thereof) at odds with the secular make-up of their host community, what does it mean to continue to use the prefix of "Muslim" in Muslim migration? Is it a bid to accommodate their Muslim identity in a European (perhaps Christian or "Secular"?) host community, if so, what becomes of their other identities? Their ethnicities, their regional affiliations which are also assuredly at dagger-heads with their host community.

In Muslim Diaspora: Gender, Culture and Identity, Moghissi (2006, xiv) points out that the idea of identities being embedded in particular populations has been mostly cast aside in the study of ethnicity. Still, this idea persists with vigor while one talks of a "Muslim diaspora." Mamdani (2004) argues that this imagining of the Muslim population as monolithic owes to long-standing Orientalism which comes to politicize cultures and peoples (Moghissi, 2006: xiv). Despite their ethnic, national, class, sectarian heterogeneity, when these populations come together to share and resolve their common challenge, it is done in order to counter the imposed salience of their religiosity in media and politics rather than because of what, Moghissi (2006) terms a "cultural impulse." As I customarily log onto google scholar to update myself on the latest research papers on migration, *Muslim* migration, without scrolling, I find Preljevic and Ljubovic's (2021) paper in Journal of *Muslim* Minority Affairs propped at the top of the list. Upon perusal, I find the authors postulate, at one point, that "both the Muslims and the receiving countries bear joint responsibility for the failure of Muslim integration in the EU. Muslims in the EU sometimes "behave in ways that feed rational Islamophobia"." (p. 270). Elsewhere, the authors conflate religion and culture wherein their claims of cultural pluralism (p. 269) are positioned as being inclusive of "Muslims" as a monolithic entity.

Earlier this year I become privy to a new publication- Migration Studies and Colonialism (2020) by Mayblin and Turner. There is one available copy of this book at one of the Charles University libraries. As such, I set up an appointment to collect it from the Hussite Theological Library. What is a book about migration and colonialism doing at a theological library, I voice my confusion to someone who seemed to be assisting the librarian in-charge at the time of my collecting the book as the latter was facing difficulty in locating the same. The assistant clarifies in no uncertain terms that despite being largely concerned with Christian theology, the faculty/library also finds it necessary to monitor other religions like

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"Islamic terrorism… Hindusim, Buddhism." This curious quip, best left to a psychodynamic analysis, gets me thinking back to and again about religion being at the fault-lines of migration scholarship. The othering of Islam is informed by colonial ideas that emerged in Christian empires which saw non-Christian religions as inferior. This sense of superiority continues to be retained among the erstwhile Christian empires and now nation-states who now position themselves as secular and liberal (in Maybin and Turner, 2020: 140).

**And Whose Integration?**

In a January 8, 2021 interview on Prague Morning- the Czech Republic's leading English media outlet- Jan Janousek (Prague City Hall Officer) working on Migrant integration, when asked what he means by successful integration talked about Migration being a multi-lateral process involving participation of both the migrants and the host society. According to Janousek, successful integration largely involves migrants learning the Czech language and migrants being autonomous in their lives- "not to be dependent on some NGOs or public administration or organisation." Integration, thus, is "about orientation in the society and in contact with the society." Janousek goes on to say, "when we speak of majority society, we as Czech people don't need to be integrated." He however concedes to a general atmosphere of caution exercised by the locals in the face of incoming foreigners- a legacy of communist era, he posits. What strikes me curious about Janousek's words is the inherent contradiction between integration being a multi-lateral process, and the local Czech society not needing to integrate.

In line with Janousek's definition, at the beginning of this research, I myself understood "integration" as a natural step in a migrant's settlement trajectory. Why, of course we must integrate into the local ways of living! In the review of literature chapter, I outline the changing definitions of integration over the years variously constituting concepts like assimilation, acculturation and more recently transnationalism. However, what ties these many definitions of integration together- and its current iterations- is the assumption that the onus of integration lies with the migrant, at the end of the day. This assumption becomes reified in social science migrant research which, in some shape or form, problematises the migrant others (Schinkel, 2018). Instead of paying attention to the racist structures in a host society (Saharso, 2019) and the largely white people upholding and participating in these racist structures, academic institutions in the West largely fund research that retains this racist

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view of integration by a tacit non-acknowledgement of the host community's race and even class playing any role in migrant integration.

Here, I cite the example of research by Slačálek and Svobodová (2018) on Czech Islamophobic movement which concludes that Czech Islamophobia, unlike Islamophobia found in other Visegrad nations, stems from a need to defend the "liberal" and "secular" values. This makes Czech Islamophobic movements closer to populist movements we see in Western Europe. As a global south migrant and researcher, the research comes across as an attempt to undermine the racism inherent within the Czech context alone by clubbing it with the "first-class" Western Europeans in the hopes that the latter may absorb the critique as "Czechs are playing a long-term role of second-class Europeans who are meant to 'learn democracy and the market economy' from the western countries." So the discursive make-up of the paper inscribes Czech populism within the populism of bigger, more powerful Western European nations who arguably are to be blamed for Czech populism within Czech territory led by Czech citizens. That being said, Western European nations do continue to dodge any consequential indictment of their policies by projecting themselves as bastions of liberal, secular and democratic values. But the migrant research rarely problematises or aims the spotlight at European nations.

The present research is an example of the same. I went in to my field, considering the idea of integration as given. However, had it not been for the covid-19 pandemic, I may have attempted to secure interviews with Czech locals, like classmates and teachers of my participants to understand how the migrant participants are received in their everyday spaces. Although, this is complicated by yet another factor. Due to historical conditions like colonization resulting in disproportionate wealth accumulation, the educational institutions in the North still direct and drive research and funding to the rest of the world. This uneven control on funding processes further reinforces the great Global South/North divide whereby the South remains relegated to being the subject/the participant of the research projects led by the North. Therefore, projects led by researchers from the Global South in the North make for a very uncommon sight. The Global South/North hegemonic divide manifests in crucial ways. For instance, when researchers from the South do come to study in the North, they often end up making the South as their field of investigation, preserving the status quo of the South as the "lab rat" and the North as the "researcher." This also points to the problem of lack of access to Global North populations to Global South researchers especially in social

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sciences.

Such a turning of gaze inwards seeks to make visible the invisibilised host community which is positioned as default, simply there and “problem-free” (Schinkel, 2018). Which ways the researchers train the spotlight- the migrants or the host communities-have far-reaching consequences for academic and policy discourse with social and material ramifications. Migrant research thus focusing on migrants as being “problematic” in some ways becomes instrumental in assisting governmental attempts at strengthening of border control and securitization. (Barbero, 2012: 754). Therefore, a continued “problematization” of migrants in academia is akin to examining the symptoms while the root cause in the form of colonial and imperial legacies of white, Western nations,  that have created conditions for socio-politico-economic rot in migrant countries of origin, goes unnoticed.

For migrant studies to trek on the path of decolonisation, it becomes imperative to, first and foremost, study its own ontological foundations. In so doing, not only do we evolve the current “migrant” discourse and produce well-informed research and policies, but also ultimately deem it fit to foreclose the pursuit of “migration studies” as we know.

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CHAPTER FIVE

# MEET THE PARTICIPANTS

Now that I have outlined the context of this study, presented a review of literature and the relevant arguments regarding the methodology used in this research, in this chapter, I would like to introduce the readers to the participants of this research. As simple facts dictate, this dissertation does not exist without the contributions of the six young people I have had a chance to work with for a short duration. To give the reader a look into how I spent my time with my participants, I recount below my interactions with them, albeit, in different settings. As I have already pointed out in the previous chapter, my interactions with all the participants were not uniform- with a few, I managed to spend much longer time than with a few others- which points to the nature of my relationship with each one of them. Through this, I also aim to present my field to the reader, the everyday settings existing within non-established communities that are not "waiting to be observed."

## Shirin: Vaccination Blues

My phone screen comes alive with a whatsapp message from Shirin: "See you at 13:00" It's about our meeting later that day. It's around 9 am and I am working on my dissertation or at least trying to but at this point in the morning after failing to muster any motivation to write, I spring to send her a reply right away "See you!" I feel rushed and remain convinced that making breakfast would delay my meeting with Shirin so instead I unwrap two pieces of Gaz that Shirin had brought me as a present from Iran because she knows I quite like these Iranian nougats filled with pistacios and almonds. Shirin returned to Prague in May after staying at her home for 5 months. She left and arrived in the thick of covid-19 pandemic, availing opportunities to travel provided by a brief loosening of international travel measures. When I go to receive her at the airport and inquire as to her journey, she tells me she has faced no problems whatsoever except for the tedious long-waiting hours at her transitory country- Turkey. She has been living in Europe on a student visa for the past 4 years. She has come to study medicine and eventually settle down in Europe at her family's behest. Coming from a well-off family, she could afford funding her medical education at Charles University. However, owing to political turmoil in Iran, the family has

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to abruptly stop the financial support once Shirin clears the first year at medical school in 2019. But she decidedly can not go back to Iran because getting a visa for a European country would become close to impossible from her country. So her parents give her enough money to enrol herself in a cheap Czech language course run by a private Russian agency which can serve as her proof of study for when she has to extend her visa for the year 2019-2020. The agency, as I gather from Shirin, is meant precisely for such purposes and acts to fill such unprecedented gaps in a migrant's residential trajectory. Meanwhile Shirin starts preparing for a medical entrance exam in Italy wherein she has found they give handsome scholarships and student support. Her younger sister moved to Italy in 2020 and Shirin tells me of the financial support that her sister's university has given her (along with all other foreign students) during covid-19 pandemic. After two unsuccessful attempts, in the autumn of 2021, Shirin's family decides for her to stay on in Prague and continue her medical studies. To this end, they decide to pool in resources from another family member, Shirin's aunt, and additionally, sell one of their houses, to fund Shirin at least for the first two years of her medical school studies.

Presently, it's 12:55 pm and I message Shirin about meeting her in the corridor of our shared Charles University student dormitory. Shirin is the one participant with whom I have spent the longest time owing to this shared living space. The amount of time we shared in each other's company was only accentuated as a result of covid-19 pandemic, especially the initial months of abject uncertainty.

Together, we walk outside and are immediately ambushed by the chilly prickles of wind rendering useless that sunny afternoon of early October.

Me: Oh dude it's so cold! I didn't realize that. Inside, obviously because of the heating….

Shirin: Yeah it's damn cold. You know yesterday I was out, it was so warm outside. I didn't even have to wear my jacket.

Me: Really? Damn! Now it's just going to get colder from here.

Conversations about the weather comprise more than a small talk for both of us. Hailing from places with hot weather conditions, talk of the weather is underpinned with awe and concern, especially during the winter months in the Czech Republic.

Me: We're taking
the bus right?

Shirin: yeah

We are headed to Prague city centre for a second covid-19 vaccine dose for Shirin. It is

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supposed to be at a walk-in vaccination centre in a shopping mall. At the vaccination centre, Shirin tells me, they only take cards and no cash transactions are allowed. Shirin does not have a bank account and thereby a credit/debit card in the Czech Republic. As she recounts,

> *So you know that I've had like problems with my residence permit, right, and it was because of the bank statement right so it's a circle. So I've had problems with my residence permit because I didn't have… So the first year that I came here I did not open the bank account, because I was too busy with studying and I just didn't bother to open a bank account until my residence permit was expired and then when I attempted to extend it, they asked for a bank statement right. And then when I went to the bank for the bank statement they told me that I needed to have like your residence permit or basically two identification documents, one being the passport, and another one being the residence permit or visa.*

> *Yeah, so I didn't have that because obviously I needed the bank statement for the extension of my visa, and or to get the residence permit I needed to get my residence permit. But obviously that did not happen, I had to stay here for a year without the resident permit because I was like, struggling to figure this whole thing out. So I did not have my visa, because I didn't have my bank statement. You know it was a cycle. And so, and then I figured you know it's a, it's a thing in the Czech Republic, and also in a lot of countries, because we're blacklisted, and also because of the sanctions* (on Iran), *I have, I think it's, it's got like a sort of like a relation with the sanctions either directly or indirectly.*

As I clarify with her, it’s not that Iranians in general can not open bank accounts in the Czech Republic but that due to the international sanctions imposed on their country, the process to open a bank account is made just that much more difficult. I have accompanied her on a few occasions to a money exchange store in Staromestska where she goes to get Czech crowns in exchange for the euros she deposits, wired in to the Czech Republic either from her parents in Iran or, as it was for a brief period in 2019, a family friend in Germany, talking to whom made Shirin feel immensely uncomfortable. She has to carefully budget her daily expenditures because receiving the money from home can take anywhere from 1 to 3 months. This, besides causing her problems in conducting her

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day-to-day life, has ended up impacting her ability to get vaccinated.

“But I finally have a bank account!” Shirin informs me, while we are sitting in the bus. However, she still does not have a bank card and thus requires someone with a card to accompany her. For her first dose, she was accompanied by an Iranian friend but since she was not available this time around, Shirin asked me to come along. In about 30 minutes, we reach the madness of the city centre, slithering our way across crowds of people zig-zagging their way around the city on trams, buses, cars or foot. The shopping mall is a picture of a certain leisure and work. We make our way to the first floor where Shirin recalls the vaccination centre to be located. In a few moments, we learn the government has dispensed the walk-in vaccination centres from all over the city, narrowing the scope of where one can possibly go for vaccine dosage. We are directed to a clinic some half an hour away and since Shirin does not wish to incur the fallout of the second dose during the weekdays, lest she misses out on her medical school classes, she assuredly wants the second dose over the weekend such that she will not have to take any time off school. At the clinic, situated in a quiet locality up a busy hill, Shirin inquires from a Czech receptionist. While she starts the conversation in czech (which she is able to speak and understand at a beginner’s level), she falls short of understanding the entirety of what the man at the reception has to say. So we turn away and walk out.

**Usman: Falafel Cake**

It’s been a couple of months since Marketa, the volunteer coordinator at OPU, knows about my research. She intimates me about potential participants whenever possible, although there have not been many. On one such occasion, while we return from volunteering at the asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants’ camp at Bela Jezova, she tells me about Usman. Usman had arrived in the early months of 2018 as a minor, and has been living at a children’s facility. In 2015, his family of 14 siblings along with his father and step-mother moved to Egypt in the wake of the civil war in Yemen, his country of origin. The family finds a comfortable house in Egypt owing to his father’s connections who was a prominent political figure in Yemen. Eventually, the family decides to relocate yet again, this time to Europe, to avail better education and work opportunities for the younger generation. While, a few of Usman’s family members live in the Netherlands including his mother, the others have moved to different countries based on where they have managed to find visa and work

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to do. While Usman has lived in a children's facility in Prague, he mentions an older brother living in Ostrava within the Czech Republic.

As it turns out, Marketa has an invite for Usman's birthday party and she extends the invite to me. I immediately take her up on her offer. We are to meet sometime next week, in the middle of October. Klanovice is a reticent municipality tucked away in the eastern border of Prague. Everything is the crimson purple of smudged ink and the walkaway is matted with golden- yellow autumn leaves, crackling under our feet as we go. Marketa and I are walking between houses with huge glass windows and well-kept lawns. We finally come upon an old house. The house has a large play area at the back, fitted with a goal-post net and a few swing sets. We are received by Ms. Irena, the house warden and escorted to a common room. The room is empty but for us, we are the first arrivals. Usman and his friends have gone to bring the cake. The room is decorated with streamers and balloons. Soon, a couple of people who turn out to be instructors at different children's facilities arrive. I strike up a conversation with one of them. The man is quite enthusiastic to share his experiences working at children's facilities, and as he confides, "looking to do a PhD on it."
Me: Do you know Usman?

Him: Yes, Usman is very sincere. And they make no problem at all. Usman, he loves to play football. And he get good score in school. Very good boy.
In about half an hour, the room starts to fill with other young residents of the house, pre-teens and teenagers. Some of them are engaged in noisy conversations with each other while the others make a beeline for a quiet spot on the sofas or the dining table. The room is now abuzz with chit-chatter of 15-20 odd people. Soft drinks, salt and paprika chips and cookies have been laid out on the kitchen table for the guests to partake.
Usman and his friends arrive amidst this buzz. Having seen him in his facebook photos, I figure that the young man holding a tray with what look like falalfel rolls is Usman.
Warden: Usman, is this the cake? (in English, perhaps because she is standing close to me) Usman: Yes, it's a falafel cake.
Everyone bursts out in laughter. Usman hands the tray of falafel cake to his friend and leaves to get changed. The friend, Reban, later comes to join us at the dining table
Him: Where are you from?
Me: India. Have you been to India?
Him: (shakes head) Hindi aata hai (I

know Hindi) Me: (surprised) Oh you
speak Hindi!
Him: Hindi…. Urdu…. Arabic… (he has a tough time speaking in English). Bollywood
Me: Shahrukh Khan? (Reban has a huge grin on his face and nods his approval) (Over the past 1 year of volunteering at the migrant detention camp, I have become aware of the cultural impact of Indian film industry or Bollywood in the Middle East. During this time, I have met so many young adults consuming the latest offerings from Hindi cinema and recounting the movies of their favorite super stars like Shahrukh Khan and Salman Khan. This seems to have also helped them in understanding Hindi, albeit at a beginners' level)
Me: oh wow, that's a lot of languages. I can speak
Urdu too. Marketa interjects: You can?
I nod excitedly. Reban says something in Urdu which I completely fail to understand. His friend then asks to ascertain if I do indeed understand Urdu. Reban shakes his head. I feel a bit embarrassed having failed the test. Meanwhile, Usman returns to the gathering wearing a long gown, a black blazer, a head-covering and a sea-green, golden finely adorned holster. The dress, as Usman would later tell me, is a traditional Yemeni attire called Thawb. Everyone applauds as he walks in. He arranges himself at the center of the room, with a precocious look about him. His long, thick curly hair are sticking out of his head-covering on either side and he keeps arranging the look of his blazer. Soon everyone gathers around him and the party breaks out in the Czech birthday song. The words are Czech but the tune is ever-so familiar to me from the English birthday song. Once the song is finished, everyone is beckoned to queue up in front of Usman and wish him personally and hand over their gifts. This is rather new for me. I see Usman exchanging pleasantries with his guests in Czech. Once he has been wished by everyone present, including myself, the warden insists on a group picture right away as some people have to leave. A few kids start bursting balloons which more often than not follows a thunderous cackle. Thereafter, Usman starts serving the falafels to people seated on the couches and dining table. As he approaches me, I borrow him for a minute Me: Hey, happy birthday!
Usman: Thank you
Me: So Marketa says you are interested in my research When do you think we can talk about it? Usman: After school. You write me and we meet in Prague. I work at Pankrac Mall. I can meet you in Prague, in evening.
Me: That's great, thanks a lot!

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## Jameela: Strained Throat

I see the last of light go down behind the hills from tram no. 1 bound for Praha 8-Liben. It is my third visit to the masjid and I leave at my regular time but soon discover that the tram I have boarded has altered course due to construction work and renovations. This delays my arrival. As I reach the mosque, I see a group of women standing outside the masjid gates in front of parked cars. I can not recognize anybody which is partially due to very poor lighting. I enter the masjid and go straight to the meeting hall, lined with carpets and kids. The women recognize me, starting with Saba's mother who catches my eye and smiles. I am late to such an extent that I only manage to catch the last twenty minutes of the discussion. Apart from the familiar faces of Saba, her mother, Amreen, Faiza, the hall is abuzz with new voices. Propped up between two sofa chairs, between Saba and Faiza, are a pair of young girls I have not seen before. They are not wearing any head scarves. Dressed in a lime grey hoodie and a crimson jacket each, they seem ill-placed in the setting. One of them has her silken brown hair resting on her shoulders, while the other one, bespectacled, has her frazzled hair cut to scruff. It is not difficult to put two and two together to figure out that these are Saba's two older daughters, one of whom (at the time I did not know which one) is studying in another city.

The lecture comes to an end with people now beginning to talk about other topics that catches their fancy. Several parallel conversations are initiated. Soon the congregation breaks for salat. I move to a chair next to the couch to get a better view of the prayer procession. Everyone is getting in the position. Adam enters the hall, to guide the prayer, standing at the very front with no one by his side. In the quiet of the prayer, I am reminded of the chill in the hall as a result of poor heating and wisps of cold air sneaking their way in from under the door.

After the prayer, I can see the scurry of footsteps wanting to leave. I find out that Saba has misplaced her car keys. The couches are being pulled up, the chair pushed to a side, the kids are squatting and even prostrating to look under the tables. Shortly after we find out that Faiza has accidentally carried the keys on her and is on the other side of the city as the keys are being searched for, and thus have to drive all the way back which would be a while. It is already half past seven and I seek to leave for the day. Bidding my goodbyes, I

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go downstairs to the shoe-rack.

There I meet Saba's daughters whose names are Jameela and Aisha. I start talking to them. Jameela is a second year medical student at Pilsen. Oldest of three sisters, she is 21 going on 22 and migrated with her family to the Czech Republic in 2012. One of her younger sisters, Aisha is 16 and in school here in Prague. Jameela is taller with short, ear-length hair, and Aisha is shorter with longer wavy hair.

At the time, Jameela has a sore throat so she launches into a passionate tirade in her husky, strained voice. Her expressions are a mixture of doubt and animation, and her humour self-deprecating ("I have all the problems a person can possibly have," she jokes when I start talking about her medical studies).

Jameela: My mom told me you are doing some research. Sorry I couldn't talk to you about it before. I just get no time from my studies. We always have exams and I am just studying.

Me: No, it's okay, I

understand Jameela:

So what's it about?

I tell her about my research, my sentences sparsely punctuated by her intermittent coughing. She points out how a lot of successful people around the world have Syrian origins like Steve Jobs and that Syrians remain ignorant of their own contributions. We have been talking for a while and Jameela offers to talk more but upstairs. She has been feeling cold for a while because of the cool breeze from the open door in front of which we are standing.

Once we are settled back upstairs, in a dining room with children's playthings, Jameela, Aisha and I each take a chair and sit facing each other in a triangle. The conversation now veers to skin colour where Jameela and Aisha each take turn explaining how while different skin tones can be found in Syria, everybody is predominantly light skinned with blonde hair almost indistinguishable from Europeans.

They start with the interesting declaration that everybody in Syria is light skinned.

Jameela: (I can see her running a finger across her hand) you know sometimes even lighter than this. (cough)

Me: Oh, in India, it kinda depends on where you live. Like if you live in warmer places like in the South of India with a lot of sun, you can have darker skin tone and the more

North you go, the skin tone sort of becomes lighter.
In response, the girls deliberate upon examples from their own country. They start talking to each other in Arabic as if trying to reach an agreement. Apparently they know people from their paternal side who do not quite fit their original statement.
Jameela: hmm yeah actually, we have some uncles from our dad's side who have dark skin tones. It's because it's really hot there where they live.

I express my interest of potentially visiting Iran and Syria because of my interest in the shared histories of India with these countries. Aisha responds by sharing about her recent visit to Syria, in summer. She has visited Damascus with only her grandmother after many years and thus is representing her family living here in the Czech Republic. In a manner of speaking, she had been entrusted with the task of carrying out the socialization on behalf of her family members. Her dramatic rendition of her journey has hilarious undertones. She talks of the politics within the extended family where members don't talk to each other but rather use messengers to communicate with each other or to keep track of each others' lives. She laments how she is not diplomatic like her mother and so would simply "zone out" when certain relatives during her visit started talking about the other relatives. Aisha talks about an aunt in particular. In Jameela's view, this aunt is supposedly very smart to the point that she had once defeated Jameela (an avid player) and another lady in a game of chess even though she did not go to college.

This is an interesting segue into another topic that is broached at that table: a comparison between Syrian and Czech education. Jameela mounts a critique of the Syrian education wherein children are encouraged to pursue only very selective career options making the competition for a few seats extremely intense. This is in stark contrast to the Czech education system, which according to Jameela fares much better. She explains this with an example of how children in the Czech schools, from very early on, are taken on garden walks and taught things through observation and practical learning-observing leaves and then learning their names, etc. This, according to Jameela, can lead to long lasting learning. Aisha adds to this by taking the example of how children in the Czech Republic are taught to be efficient where different school classes and activities require of them to wear a different article of clothing- swim suits, clothes for outdoor walks, attire for climbing activities, etc. It is unanimously agreed that it is a very useful life-skill. However, Jameela can still see some merit in the Syrian system of education. Aisha cites

how one of her classmates' dream in the Czech Republic is to get a job at a grocery store. They critique this lack of ambition and how giving free reins to children to do/become anything may lead to a generation of directionless adults.

I marvel at the coherence of the sisters' arguments, that are complementary to each other. Our conversation is brought to end when Saba comes into the dining area and expresses surprise at my presence there. I was supposed to have left an hour earlier. In conversation, I had lost track of time. As I thank the two sisters, Jameela offers to drop me off to the nearest metro. I do not want to bother them so I politely decline her offer. While Aisha studies here in prague, Jameela informed me that she would visit during Christmas and that's when we could meet again. Aisha, perhaps next week.

**Bushr: At his home**

This is my 6th meeting with Bushr. We are meeting after a month. And before that, we take a longer break of two months owing to Bushr's exams. I am waiting for Bushr to arrive by tram at Hradcanska tram stop in Prague. Even as I write it, I can not help but chuckle about how every time I try to pronounce the name of the tram stop, Bushr has to help me through my untrained tongue. He has developed a really good grasp of the Czech language in only a few years. But to be fair, as a migrant school student in a Czech-medium school, he hardly has a choice. As I wait, there is rarely a dull moment around me at Hradcanska tramp stop, people hopping across platforms, women running with kids in strollers beckoning tram drivers to stop a few seconds longer, old people huddled in tram shelters with little dogs at their tail.

Customarily, Bushr arrives late and starts apologising dramatically which is altogether too funny, "Oh man, I am late again! You come so early! Sorry that you were waiting."
"No, no I just arrived too." I lie, almost as part of our ritual (not that I was waiting long anyway). At Hradcanska, we have to take another tram to Dejvicka because today we are going to Bushr's home. At Dejvicka we have to board a bus. Bushr reminds me how Dejvicka is the place where we met for the first time. It has only been a few months but my increased familiarity with Prague makes that memory distant as if from another time. As the bus arrival time draws closer, Bushr asks if I have my bus ticket in place and looks at my PID annual transport ticket as I hold it out for him to see.

This is consistent with Bushr's general demeanour around me- jovial, talkative, careful and respectful. Of all the participants of this research, I have had most formal meetings with Bushr (informally, given Shirin and I share the same student dormitory, we have spent the most time together). As a matter of fact, when I meet Bushr for the first time at Dejvicka tram/metro stop, we make our way toward a cafe of my choosing, chosen over whatsapp the previous night. The criteria for choosing it is simply that it is quiet and that it is not a pub. However, it is so non-conspicuous a building that even after going in circles for good 15 minutes, we can not find it. Bushr is more familiar with the place, having lived with his family in the locality for a brief period. The specific area is also where a few of his classmates used to meet. Having been unsuccessful in finding the place, Bushr suggests we just fight the disquiet and sit in a KFC. He insists on ordering my drink and as he does, he ends up paying for it as well. I figure anymore insistence to pay on my part may actually come across as disrespectful.

Bushr arrived in the Czech republic in "either October or November 2014" (Int 9, Bushr, 21 yrs). It was through an invitation from his father sent to the embassy of Lebanon that Bushr, his mother and sisters could arrive in the Czech Republic. Bushr's father was a permanent resident in the Czech Republic because of which he could invite his family members. For the first two years, Bushr and his family (excluding his father) had long term residence permit and now he has applied for a permanent residence given his family has now stayed in the Czech Republic for five years continuously.

Presently, Bushr is his usual talkative self. I can hear the urgent crunching of autumn leaves under his fast moving feet; I have to keep up with him. He is telling me how his school is organising school trips for students
Bushr: Yeah I am really glad that it is the last year, like before the last year and we are not staying at school whole year. But on the other hand, I go out with my friends a lot.
Me: Really?
Bushr: Like right now I am very popular at
school… Me: Oh really? Is this a new
development?
Bushr: Really! Yeah I don't wanna talk about it but at the same time I wanna talk about it. Especially I wanna tell you since we are good friends you know, we talk about lots of stuff.

There’s that one girl that I like. Like I was popular before not like that popular but everyone knew me but now everyone is talking about me.
*Bushr’s voice is drowned by the arrival of the bus, lending a thunderous soundtrack to our conversation. We find a place somewhere in the middle of the queue, pausing the story til we get on the bus. Finding a calm spot on a double-seat at the back, we resume.*

Me: So alright Mr. Popular, what’s up?
Bushr: So yeah the girl that I like. So there was this one time, I mean I knew her since last year. There’s that one time she fainted in front of me you know and I went to help her
Me: what was the situation? Paint me a picture…
Bushr: She was going to the girls bathroom and I was normally chilling with my friends in the corridor you know and then all of a sudden she faints, she falls on the ground. I don’t know if it was stupid but I had that cologne with me and I tried to make her…you know..smell it. She didn’t feel anything so they called the emergency. We had to stay with her. Yeah so this day has passed. Since then I started texting her, I started texting her how she is feeling and this. And it turned out she knows how to speak English. So I told her I am fine with anything, English, Czech.
Me: She is Czech?
Bushr: yeah..so sometimes we text in English, sometimes in Czech but most of the time in Czech since she is Czech. So yeah and last week she had her birthday so now she is 17. so I was like oh come on, let’s do something, so I brought her a rose. And during the big break you know we have like 5 mins break, 10 mins break and we have like this 20 mins break. So everyone was out you know in these corridor and stuff. I was just waiting for her, she went out of class, I wished her happy birthday and gave her the rose. And I swear, everyone was looking you know everyone was looking. Even the people I don’t know. So she gave me a hug, a kiss on the cheek you know normal what would a girl do and the very next thing, after like 5 mins I am checking my phone, two guys I don’t know as me what was that…and I was like it was her birthday today so I just gave her a rose and wished her happy birthday. And they said do you like her? I said I am not gonna lie, I do but it has nothing to do with that, it’s her birthday. And after that we had like two lessons.. you know I told you in the boys’ bathroom they smoke
Me: You never told me that
Bushr: I didn’t? it’s like you don’t feel like you are at school, in the bathrooms. You know

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it's like a club or something, you go inside, they have music and stuff, some rap. I mean different kind of music, they smoke, they don't smoke weed but lie normal cigarettes you know and some of them have vape and "I-quaz" (?) you know what's that?

Me: What's that?

Bushr: It's like electric cigarette, the new one. So I went there after two lessons and there were about 30 people inside and the first thing I hear.."the hero! Yey!!!!" I was like what the fuck. I mean I wasn't ready for this. I thought it was normal to give a girl a rose.

Me: Really? Is it normal in Syria?

Bushr: It's not..but I thought it's normal here Me: Why did you think so?

Bushr: Because in Syria, we don't have that thing where you invite a girl out and go out with her you know. Like you do but only if you want to marry her, but here they normally go out with a lot of girls, they hug a lot of girls and these stuff. So I said to myself, it's okay I am not going to give a shit about any other opinions, I am going to give her the rose and wish her happy birthday.

I start to tease him and his face turns pink with shyness, so unlike him. By now, we are almost at his stop. The wind is slightly chillier, the sky overcast. A short passage-way sandwiched between two garages ends in a staircase leading up to Bushr's apartment. Bushr's younger sister receives us at the door and Bushr, his sister and I huddle in the tiny square hallway as the two hosts start to remove their shoes and stack them up in a rack. I follow suit. Inside, Bushr's mother and father come to greet us. I have met Bushr's father once before during Festival of Embassies Food & Culture. His mother is every bit how I have imagined her from all of Bushr's stories- composed and affable. They invite us to sit in the living room while his mother momentarily steps into an adjacent room to invite Bushr's older sister to make introductions and his father retires to watch "YouTube videos on his phone." As Bushr's older sister, Amira and I am talking, Bushr's mother comes in with Sherbet, dates, and brocolli soup. Such a classic example of what we, in North India, call "mehmaan nawazi!" (hospitality)-an Urdu/Arabic phrase. Presently, Amira is telling me about her farewell scheduled for a few weeks later. Just as she says it, Bushr's mother says something to her in Arabic which she seems to resist. A comical back and forth ensues and even Bushr is dragged into the discussion. In a few minutes, the two siblings make way for their room and return in smart new attires. Amira in a sparkling red gown

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and Bushr in a three-piece suit. It's for Amira's big farewell party at school.

Their mother has a wide smile on her face and she looks expressly proud as the two siblings exhibit their new apparels. Minutes melt into an hour and then two. By now, it's dusk outside and the sky is a palette of green and grey. As I say my good-byes, Bushr decides to come along and drop me off at the bus stop, a stone's throw from his home.
"Man, I thought I would get to talk to you but they just wouldn't stop talking." Bushr remarks "We will do it next month."

**Adam: Game Night**

I religiously tune in to a sports livestreaming website that Adam has told me about only a day before. While we will not watch the match together over a video call, we would still watch it. It is Newcastle vs Arsenal, Adam is a life-long Arsenal fan, while I am supporting Newcastle. Born in Italy, Adam moved to Prague when he was only year and a half old. In another year and a half, his family moved yet again to London, England. After spending 8 years in the country, his parents decided to move to his father's homeland, the Czech Republic, at his grandmother's request. He is a Czech citizen through his father,

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while his mother hails from MENA region[9]. Adam has pursued his secondary and high school education in the Czech Republic, having the opportunity to compare the British and Czech education system briefly due to repetition of Year 5 after moving to the Czech Republic. He continues to carry with him a more apparent trace of his time in England, his British accent. On our first meeting, Adam is calm, his body language reserved- his arms and feet crossed and his answers brief. This changes as soon as I broach the subject of how he spent his time earlier that day- "I played football on the xbox and I won against the rival team." (FIFA videogame), comes Adam's prompt response. This leads me to ask after his interest in football which perks him, his arms now relaxed, and an engaging smile on his face. Even though Adam pursues tennis as his extra-curricular activity based on his father's suggestion, he has a special affection for football.

My impression of him is that of a reticent, formidable young man but he is an extrovert by his own admission. For most part, a love for football seems to play a key role in even facilitating his friendships at his Czech school where he ends up meeting two of his now best friends based on their shared interest for Arsenal football club. He is always observant and thoughtful, speaking in measured tones about his experiences in the Czech Republic, the transition from the UK, his critical understanding of Islamic tenets, his experience of mentoring a recent Czech convert to Islam, someone around his own age. But talk of football enlivens him, a break from the monotony of conversations about school, about work, about duties, responsibilities, launching him to produce detailed analyses and furtively cheerful chants like "we won the league at Shite Hart lane…. -The stadium is called White Hart lane right- So we won the league in Shite Hart Lane. We won the league at the Shithole. We won the league in the Shite Hart Lane." (Adam, Int 3, 19 yrs)- expletives and all.

**Faiza: In masjid**

[9] While I have discussed with the participants about the usage or anonymising of their names, I am refraining from using as many identifiable details about them as possible without hurting their stories. This becomes even more urgent in case of Muslim migrant youth in the Czech Republic that are very few in number and maybe easily identifiable to various authorities. Presently, the label of MENA (Middle-East North Africa) region is quite alienating insofar as it is underpinned by Orientalist sensibilities of clubbing such vast expanses of the world under one label.

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After Nov 24, the next lecture is scheduled for Dec 1. On this day, I am also supposed to conduct my first interview with Faiza. However on Nov 30, when I send a reminder to Faiza about our meeting on whatsapp, she replies by saying that there would be no lecture or meeting because her grandma, the most integral part of the lecture, is travelling and would only return the night of Dec 1. And so, I wait for the next week- Dec 8. Sending my customary reminder on Dec 7, in anticipation of any news of cancellation, Faiza responds that we would meet, “inshallah.”

In the afternoon of Dec 8th, I reach slightly earlier than my scheduled meeting with Faiza which is at 14:30. I realize that it is perhaps the first time I have seen the mosque during day time. Winter has robbed the grass of its colours and everything looks damp from the previous night’s rain. A big metal door blocks my entrance. Although I am certain that I could have gained an entry with a little maneuvering but I do not feel comfortable trespassing. I message Faiza while standing outside.

While I am looking around to the place, the buildings facing the mosque, the graffiti on their facade, Faiza comes bounding in driving a massive SUV (sports utility vehicle). Seeing that the door is still closed, she gets out of the car and slides the metal door, expressing surprise at me still standing outside. Once inside, she opens the trunk of her car and reveals bags and boxes of food and winter clothes. I offer my help with anything she and her grandmother need carrying. They hand me a small box while Faiza assuredly carries a few other boxes and bags.

Seeing that the lights are not turned on in the mosque, I had assumed that we are the first entrants. However as it turns out, the old woman, who always sits besides Faiza’s grandmother, is already there. Settling the boxes and bags of food and clothes, Faiza requests a five minute recess to help her grandmother settle in before our interview.

Dressed in what appears to be trousers underneath a gown and a grey headscarf, Faiza stares keenly with her piercing grey-green eyes as she settles in a chair opposite me, in the children’s play area where I had last talked to Jameela and Aisha and interviewed Adam. I place two copies of consent form on the table, I hand one of them to Faiza and explain what it is. She reads it in silence and pauses for a minute in doubt. Then, she inquires about the prospect of interviews being audiotaped. She declines to comply with this clause. I

explain why it is necessary. I ask her the reason for her discomfort and she says that in her school, they have had guest speakers and teachers explain to them ways to be cautious in this digital age, where they should not trust strangers with their voice recordings as those recordings can be potentially manipulated and misused. Then I suggest we audiotape the interview on her phone, for her to keep until I discuss the matter with my supervisor.

Faiza agrees. Upon discussion with my supervisor, I understand that we will have to abandon audio- recordings altogether. The interview is a short, thirty-minute affair. Faiza was born in the Czech Republic but her family soon left for Syria because of which she never got the Czech citizenship. She arrived in the Czech Republic when the civil war broke out in Syria. Admittedly, Faiza is the one participant I had the least interactions with. Despite her initial affirmation to participate, I soon learn that there is a certain resistance to participate. As I negotiate my interactions with her so as not to impinge too much upon her privacy, the communication thud to a sudden stop because of covid-19 pandemic. We never get around to understanding her journey in deep, her "legal"[10] status, her initial days in the Czech Republic, leading to the present. We start somewhere in the middle- her stories incomplete, leaving me wondering, assuming. Reticent and gathering her words, she shares in brief about her childhood, about her family, her tryst with racism, her daily routine, her likes and dislikes. By the end of the interview, other people, familiar faces, start arriving. Faiza and I disperse for the day and joined the main gathering in the other hall.

[10] Not being able to know her legal status while has ramifications for the critical realist perspective that I take in this dissertation, given how such bureacratice labels can impact the migrants in material ways. But the public discourse on migration, especially Muslim migration remains divorced from a need to understand such legal status. Public anti-migrant sentiments seeped in racism and Orientalism do not tend to discriminate between immigrants with fresh citizenship status or a Permanent residence or subsidiary protection.

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# BODY, GENDER, MIGRATION

# CHAPTER SIX

# BODY, GENDER, MIGRATION

*At this point, Shirin instructed me to stand up. She examined my posture and I copied her. She saw a tuft of my hair falling to my forehead, "these are not allowed," she said. Then she proceeded to redo my headscarf, tightly tucking in my hair, covering my ears which I thought could remain exposed.*
*Understanding of this bit comes from my experience of going to Gurudwaras, place of worship for members of Sikhism religion in India, where women are required to cover their heads but are not necessarily required to cover their ears. Having redone my headscarf, Shirin started going through what she thought were headscarves on the hanger. She was looking to replace the one she had with hopefully a better one. She took one of them down and inspected it. "This is not a chador." This was the first time I was hearing her use this term but it sounded awfully familiar. In my own language, Hindi, I had heard a version of this very term "chadar," which we meant to refer to a shawl or a sheet for warmth. Dissatisfied with the choices, she settled with the "chador" she had been given. Earlier due to a lack of understanding, I used a generalized term for headscarves namely "hijab." Moreover, I was not familiar with "chador," although I had heard the terms- hijab, niqab and burqa before. She examined my appearance once again and commented on how my headscarf needed to be tighter still, that my shirt was too short and it needed to be much longer, and that the palm of my hands should be showing.*

*Slightly disconcerted by this inevitable study of my appearance, I asked "What about the men?" "They don't have to cover anything."*
*"Fez?" I asked having seen men in Indian mosques wear skull caps.*
*"No. Nothing. Men shouldn't do anything. If you want to pray, it's just the women who have to cover up."*
*We assumed the prayer position, our feet aligning the marking on the carpet. Shirin, her voice reduced to a whisper, meticulously started reciting the first few lines of the prayer, translating them from Arabic to English as she went.*

## Making of a Migrant Youth

This chapter highlights how the migration processes reconfigure the manner in which Muslim youth 'perform' the act of being a girl/woman or a boy/man. I explore these negotiations of masculinities and femininities and how it impacts their bodies, making them sites of exploitation or exploration. To understand these negotiations, I begin this chapter by underlining the relevance of gender in the discourse on immigration. Within this intersection of gender and immigration, I discuss the relevance of body as an analytical medium. Migration, when all is said and done, is a bodily experience involving displacement of bodies across geographical borders and cultural spaces (Parrini et. al, 2007: 63). I argue that Muslim migrant youth become bodies who negotiate the plurality of their masculinities and femininities. Through an exploration of ethnographical narratives of two Muslim youth, I contend that though negotiations may not directly challenge the hegemonic/normative discourses surrounding gender, they exemplify the agency employed by the migrant youth.

I begin by presenting the historical background of gender-based discourse on immigration. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw events of mass migration across the globe with scholars labeling it "the era of migration" (in Lutz, 2010: 1648). During this time period, the research, legislation and policies on immigration largely focused on men as being primary migratory entities, with women at their helms. The women were cast as "victims" or involuntary migrants. However, this overlooked the fact that women were primary migrants in several of the mass migrations (ibid.). This was largely in part due to the general sexist outlook of migration research which accorded women the role of "accompanying dependants" (Carling, 2005:3). Kofman (1999:269) notes that before 1970s, there was a concerning lack of visibility of women in research on international migration. This invisibility was only compounded in case of women who were ethnic minorities. In rare considerations of experiences of migrant women, the studies would reinforce notions of them being emissaries of their traditions and child bearers (Kofman,2000: 40). In the US, researchers questioned the dominant feminist epistemologies that failed to account for different social positions of migrants along the intersections of class, race, gender and culture (Lutz, 2010: 1650).

Subsequent decades were marked by, what Castles and Miller termed, "feminization of

migration" not because there was a sudden migration of women[11] but rather because a) for the first time, women comprised the majority of migrants, outnumbering men; and b) the nature of women's migration was largely independent, unaccompanied by men or their families. Following this development, a whole host of research began to explore the unique experiences of women thereby leading to gendering of migration studies (Lutz, 2010, Carling, 2005, Anthias, 2002, Kofman, 2000, Yuval-Davis, 1997, Morokvasic, 1983). Here it is important to mention that while initial policies and legislation on migration readily assumed primacy of men, the regulations, nevertheless, failed to reflect the intersections of masculinity and migration, resorting to crude generalizations and founded upon gender-based stereotypes (Charsley and Wray, 2015: 404). This was especially true in portrayal of Muslim migrants wherein the men were depicted as villains or perpetrators while women were relegated to being victims of the former (Lutz, 2010: 1653). This led Boyd and Grieco (2003) to take stock of the situation and caution an overemphasis on the migratory experiences of women at the risk of subverting the perspectives of men. Scholarship on interaction between migration and masculinity (Wojnicka and Pustulka, 2019; Charsely, 2005; Chopra, Osella and Osella, 2004) marked yet another shift in the larger discourse on migration.

While research on migration acquired a gender dimension, yet another area of concern remained vastly understudied- the immigrant youth. "Given that gender is both a developmental phenomenon" and it is subject to the influences from an individual's sociocultural environment, the perspectives of the immigrant youth become especially relevant in this context. Furthermore, examination of gender during developmental stages holds valuable information on how behavioral patterns come to be gendered (Suarez-Orozco and Qin, 2006: 166). From a sociological point of view, research on gender provides valuable insights into the issues faced by migrants in host communities. For instance, empowerment of women and the resulting change in power relations has been found to spur familial conflicts; causing reinforcement of traditional diktats from the men (ibid. 169). This article examines the role of gender in identity and integration processes of Muslim migrant youth in the context of the Czech Republic. I argue for the centrality of gender as an intersection along which we can understand migrant youth's experiences. The gender-based identity is a product of their environment- both within and

[11] By 1960, the share of women in the international migration was nearly 47%, amounting to almost half the total percentage (Castles and Miller, 2009)

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without their diaspora, manifesting in how the migrant youth conduct themselves in the country of settlement.

This research uses the analytic medium of "lived body." The conception of body as an analytic dimension has gained currency in the last three decades brought to the forefront in the works on LGBTQ+ feminist scholarship (Parrini et. al., 2007: 63) The focus on corporeality resounds a break from overemphasis on Cartesian axiom that came to situate individual experiences in mind (Shilling, 2016: 1) Initially, the studies with body focused on white, Western categories leaving out the other "non-traditional" categories involving race, class, sexuality, among others. The concept of "lived body" emerged to counter the visibility of a homogeneous set of categories. Another issue with regard to research on "body" is that traditionally the research focusing on young people's bodies often sought to "problematize" them, highlighting health concerns like addiction, obesity, body image issues (Coffey and Watson, 2014: 2). This limiting perspective neglects a more expansive role of body and how it navigates the day-to-day social world. The body is the site where discourses of structural differences and social inequalities are experienced, so imposed upon by prime systems of power (Foucault, 1980: 98). It becomes the location of social, cultural, political and geographical epitaphs, "not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product" (Grosz, 1994: 310). I center the Muslim migrant adolescent as an agential body upon which is inscribed an ever fluid socio-cultural expression.

Grosz (1994) argues that while feminist theory employs "gender" in order to rid itself of the problems of essentialism, it is entirely possible instead to consider gender not as psychological and social attribution on the biological determinant called sex, but alternatively understand it "in terms that link gender much more closely to the specificities of sex. Gender is not an ideological superstructure added to a biological base. Masculine or feminine gender cannot be neutrally attributed to bodies of either sex. Therefore, in agreement with Gatens (1990), it becomes clear that the "masculinity" of the male body cannot be the same as the "masculinity" of the female body, because the kind of body inscribed makes a difference to the meanings and functioning of gender that emerges" (p. 345). Borrowing from Paechter's (2007: 12) definition of femininities and masculinities, I consider the two terms to convey the manner in which we 'perform' the act of being a girl/woman or a boy/man- manifested in a variety of ways including our

behaviors, dispositions, attitudes, and with relevance to the present article, bodies. Ideas regarding one's own masculinity or femininity are acquired through the life-long process of socialization into groups and communities. These notions in turn become part of our identity, and are, partially, experienced and represented in and through our bodies (Braidotti 2002 in Paechter, 2007: 11). Nayak and Kehily's (2006) ethnographic study aimed to understand young people's enactments of gender embodiment among white, working-class girls in Britain. The study drew upon Butler's work on gender identity that theorized how the "performative tropes" or the act of doing gender can upset the cherished gender ontology. However, masculinities and femininities are not monolithic categories, and all individuals are engaged in an on-going project of negotiating a plurality of femininities and masculinities (Nicolls, 2019: 7; Paechter, 2006: 262). Based on the findings of this study, I have found that the Muslim migrant youth is an active stakeholder in their identity creation process, making their body become the site for negotiation of their masculinities and femininities and the site for exploitation and explorations in the context of the Czech Republic.

**Gender, Body, Youth, Migration**

Now I take a look at how a conflation of gender, youth and body has been represented in academic literature. Intersection of bodies and gender has been used to explore sexual health discourses among youth. A 2019 study sought to complicate the essentializing and pathologizing discourse on sexual health among African immigrant youth in Canada. The authors attempted to de-essentialize the very narrative of immigrant youth being potentially "at-risk" by exploring how the risk itself is negotiated in their lives. Information and knowledge on sexual health conduct was not singularly disseminated via dominant formal pedagogies like sexual health courses conducted by experts. Communications regarding sexual subjectivity and health came to be acquired through negotiations in daily lives, including but not limited to, negotiation of migration and resettlement processes (Odger, Frohlick and Lorway, 2019: 312). The study issues to complicate the traditional discourse around youth bodies that tends to problematize them.

Elsewhere, Barbero's (2020) research with African and Latin American youth has explored how the body becomes the site of racialization. The study participant who are "non-white" migrant youth come to accept the reality of being othered in the nationalist

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construct of an Argentinian, who is a quintessentially middle-class, white, European entity. The study explores how the migrant youth encounters the fact of their foreignness through their confrontations with state as well as non-state actors and how the youth, subsequently, learns to navigate freely around the city spaces, challenging the exclusionary outlook that confronts them on a daily basis. The study's reference to Ahmed's phenomenology of whiteness holds significance even for the present research where I explore how "out of place" bodies undertake negotiations to become "in-place." Alund (1991: 93) points out how the migrant youth are portrayed in a negative light and are often times labelled as being culturally maladaptive, "culturally schizophrenic," with the trope of "bad boys" being associated with them. The government policies and research, at large, "tend to focus on cultural differences, ethnic boundary maintainance, conflicts and problems. 'Culture' is squeezed into static and narrowly defined stereotypes, glossing over amalgamated cultural forms which, especially among the youth, are already both a fact and a genuine alternative."

***I broke an onion on my nose***

I went to meet Bushr on August 30,2020, for our last meeting at our familiar spot, the local KFC. What I thought would be a gradual recuperation from months of pandemic was a mere hiccup of free movement. It was but a momentary lull in the seemingly endless state of emergencies and indefatigable curfews put in place for covid-19 crisis. People, cautious and masked, resumed their lives in public spaces. On that August afternoon, I went out masked too, the experience not entirely unfamiliar anymore. I had come to enjoy wearing the mask, it afforded me an invisibility I could use in a country where I could not blend in with the crowd. As a migrant, skin finds a ready significance as it becomes "both barrier to the world and a point of interface with it" (Ahmed 1998 in Wolkowitz, 2006: 140). When asked about how he had spent the past few months, one particular account from Bushr resonated with my own experience at the time. It also clarified a distinction between bodily expressions operating on two levels- first, those that are overt and are reflected in the young adults' appearance that I talk about below.

*I mean, I had a face mask on, so no one could recognize me. My beard was long as hell. Like for real because I was at home. oh my god. I cut my beard like three weeks ago, it was really short, but it was really long. So I was completely different. When I had the*

*facemask, my beard was coming out of the mask. It was that long, I was not lazy, I just wanted to try new things since I was just at home, I could so I did. (Bushr Int 9, 19 yrs)*

Over the course of my conversations with Bushr, he has made several references to the significance of having a beard in that how it would make him look older at his work in the kebab shop owing to which he could pass for an adult in front of the customers, before even turning 18. He contended that beard was a signifying marker for a European to identify a Muslim man. “If there’s no beard, they’ll guess it’s an Indian” (Bushr, Whatsapp chat 01/01/2021). In a 2004 study by Hopkins, Muslim men in Scotland identified what were considered as markers of Muslimness; these included skin colour, clothing style and beards. Bushr presents an acute awareness of cultural symbols associated with Muslims. Upon his family’s arrival to the Czech Republic, his parents had asked his sister to stop wearing the hijab for fear of poor adjustment in her new school environment. In the same way, Bushr has steered clear of any symbols that would mark him out as an outsider, although that did not quite stop his classmates from using racist pejoratives. Since Bushr’s presence comes to be disputed or is marked out against a Czech backdrop, it limits, what Ahmed (2007:160) terms, his body motility, i.e., what his body can do.

In Racialized Bodies, Ahmed (2002) notes that race can not be understood without an understanding of processes of embodiment as racialization itself begins at the juncture where bodies are marked out. This portends negotiations he has to undertake while expressing masculine identifications. So even when he does experiment with his beard, by growing it long, he does so in the privacy of his house to avoid being marked out as a result. Through, what Pred (2000: 75) phrased as “the metonymical magic of cultural racism,” wherein collectives become projections of individual members, bodies of all Muslim men- with their clothing style and facial hair- have come to be seen in a clash with the West. This results in the conception that “some bodies” are more strange, “out of place,” Other than others (Ahmed, 2007:162). This politics of hair exemplified the first, overt level of bodily expression. The second level of representation by the body is relatively covert and underlying. This more subtle conflation of body and gender was exemplified in the narrative of Bushr’s experience at the kebab shop as the cook.

> *In Syria especially in the village, parents want to make their young boys, they want to make of them a man. They want them to get some experience you know. Of course you*

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*get some money but it's not about the money. Because when you are young you don't make that much money, because you are learning more than you are working. So you can do everything, you can pick up everything. So they want to make from us men at the early age. You know what happens. You know the situation in Syria, you know I bet there are younger guys than me that are more men, more of a man than me (Bushr, Int 3, 19 yrs)*

This brief narrative succinctly points to the negotiations involved in, what Connell calls, "being a man" (Connell, 1987). For Bushr, the foremost imaginary identification of what makes a man is work. The idea that work makes men of boys has been instilled from early on during his upbringing in Syria. In the above context, work is the denominating identification, the source of all motivations (to be able to provide for the family) and frustrations (being completely exhausted). This is soon replaced with honor, which becomes constructed as an integral self-identification category. Butler (1993: 97) contends that such approximation of heterosexist ideal of "being a man" is achieved through phantasmatic identification that embodies reiteration of hegemonic rules which in the present case is first labor and then honor. Butler contends that these stylized performances of gender occur within certain rules or "regulatory regimes" that facilitate some performances while discouraging others (Butler, 2020). Within the "regulatory regimes" of a migratory context, Bushr deploys his body in hard and to some level, risky labour to assert the fact that he is, after all, a man capable of said hard labour to offset the socially reprehensible notion of the low worthiness of his job. Given the treble threat of social, racial and legal emasculation in the larger Czech context, the kebab shop becomes a dominant space to agentially perform their masculinities.

Working in the kebab shop kitchens in the vicinity of fire in increasingly hot Czech summers for 10-11 hours without rest with a stoic, uncomplaining demeanour exemplifies muscular masculinities allowing Bushr to approximate his ethnic masculine ideals.

*I had no rest the whole holidays because I decided that I'm gonna work the whole holidays to have money to spend during school. Because I don't want to ask for my parents for money because now I know, I feel like I'm old enough to make my own. Started working first month non stop 11 hours a day 11-12 hours as we say, in Arabic, I broke an onion on my nose, I lowered myself for him. But for me, my priority*

*is to be respected, I told him I'm sorry. Me being respected is my priority, in front, it's ahead of you, ahead of your restaurant, ahead of every single one who comes here. I must be respected by either you or by anyone else….He said, I'm sorry, I'm not gonna say it anymore. But if it happens, just tell me straight away and I will stop and apologize. I told him, there's no point of apologizing because I'm saying it's not gonna happen anymore because I'm not gonna work anymore. I told him my life doesn't depend on you. You are dependent on me right now, you need someone, I don't need you. I'm just gonna try to make some money to help myself. I'm not dying for the money. (...)*

*He said, we don't have a contract. But he said, but your word to me you said you're gonna work until the end of August. So your word is your contract to me. As he said, as a man, you should keep your word. Tomorrow, you can come whenever you want. But if you don't come, you can take your money and I'm never gonna talk to you anymore and you're not a man to me. Well, I was like, Oh shit, this really got into me. Because I don't want to like show up as not a man. I mean, he was speaking true, but I had a reason to leave, but he was speaking the truth that we didn't have any contract. Like we both decided we wanted to, but we both decided not to because it's unnecessary, because we both believe each other, you know, I believe that he's gonna give me the money and he believes that I'm not going to do anything bad, you know, run away with the money or anything. But him saying that my my word was my contract really got into me that I was like, Damn, I'm gonna reconsider it you know. I told him I'm working here today. I'm going to finish my time here (Bushr, Int 9, 19 yrs)*

While working tirelessly for extremely long hours is a feature of masculinity, it is superseded by a sense of honour when Bushr finds himself disrespected by his employer, in front of his colleagues and customers. While the language of shaming is an effective disciplining strategy and the public "loss of face" is doubly aimed to emasculate the men further through humiliation while also securing their submission. Such an experience was also found in the narratives of low-paid migrant men in the UK (Datta et al, 2009). As a consequence of similar experience, Bushr undertakes his first negotiations. For Bushr, the work, the maker of men, is relinquished in favour of yet another identification with a heteronormative ideal of honour and respect, directed at the self. As a result, Bushr's threat of resignation from the job comes in response to the ill-treatment meted out to him at the job. According to Foucault,

there is no such thing as absolute power. Davidson, elaborating on this claim, suggests that even in situations with significantly skewed power equations, the individual being subjugated can still find and exercise alcoves of power. This may largely depend on how individuals are constituted differently, with myriad reactions to their encounters with power. Bushr weighs his need for money against his employer's need for him and threatens to resign. Kelly (2003) also acknowledges that individual agency is not completely foregone when one is victimized (in Wolkowitz, 2006: 139). However, an important factor in this dialogical construction of masculinities is that Bushr's boss who is also Arabic rebuts with yet another identifier of masculinity by invoking "the word," positioned here to mean a sense of trust. This discursive enactment (Nayak and Kehily, 2006: 426) introduces multiple positions that can be identified with masculinity- tireless work, honor and trust. These prescriptions of dominant styles of masculinity are arbitrary, ambivalent and inscribed within each other (ibid.). So even when Bushr tries to comply with conventional notions of masculinity (Wetherell and Edley, 1999: 340), there is evidently a task of negotiations that is underway. When we understand masculinities as "homosocial enactment" where manhood requires constant validation from other men (Kimmel, 2006), it shines light on Bushr's serious deliberation on wanting to work for his co-ethnic employer for fear that the latter would adjudicate the former's manhood negatively. Upon invocation of the "word," the informal contract, Bushr continues to work in physically and later psychologically non-conducive work environment. A transient mention of ethno-cultural relational category of the "word" and trust reframes what it means to be a man and reinstates the threat of emasculation. The co-ethnic employer has a vested interest in positing their employee as a "failed man" in a bid to retain workers employed without proper work contracts. This serves as an effective strategy to manage co-ethnic labour turnover and secure labour efficiency.

Liu and Olivos (2019) undertook an investigation into exploitation of Chinese workers by their co-ethnic employers in Chile premised upon a mutual circumvention of the labour laws of host community and personal connections with each other. Employment of Middle-eastern migrant men in jobs that make their bodies as the site of labour may naturalise invocation of informal, racial contractual categories like trust and loyalty between the employer and the employees, which necessitates closely scrutinizing "such ideologies… in relation to the broader compass of patterns in the exploitation of migrant labour" (Wolkowitz, 2006: 161). The disposability of those migrant men who disengage from the logics of cultural masculine constructions inveigles them into a cycle of

exploitation. This bears special relevance in the context of an established ethnic, “kebab” economy (Wahlbeck, 2007) in the Czech Republic which, perhaps, provides a potent alternative to the general labour market that may exclude the migrant groups. However, an investigation into the ethnic economies in the Czech Republic is beyond the purview of the present research.

***All the beautiful people***

Unlike hegemonic masculinity, a hegemonic femininity is not conceivable due to the manner in which masculinities and femininities are constructed. Femininities do not bestow, upon its participants, cultural dividends like patriarchal power; it does not allow its practitioners a chance to construct the world in a manner that reifies their superior position. The dualism of masculinity and femininity does not confer equal power to both the categories, rather one category derives power at the expense of the other. It is the negation of the feminine that creates the hegemon of masculinity. As a result, what we have is normative femininity (Paechter, 2006: 256). Traditionally, the traits associated with this idea of normative femininity emphasize passivity, submission, lack of agency, docility, nurture, care (see Nicholls, 2019: 6). These adjectives readily imply an automatic control of the female body from the outside. Historically, this notion of control has played an important part in limiting female bodies- be it their body language, postures, movements, a script rehashed across social, cultural and legal domains. However, it remains that despite a normative femininity, there is no single way of “doing” femininity which calls us to the juncture of how, in that case, different modalities of “doing” femininity are negotiated. Below I present the example of Shirin in all her colourful explorations and negotiations of her femininities.

> *I wasn’t under that much of pressure because in some of the countries…you met already my friend, so they are in some of the families who are really strict about it, like you have to have a proper hijab, you have to wear chador or even if you got out of the country, you have to you still have to have your hijab, you know what I mean. I am telling you that my family was different. They didn’t really pressure me to do something. That’s why I was okay with hijab, it was like I was okay in my house, I was okay around I don’t know..my cousins, my aunts, my uncles, I was okay I didn’t have to wear hijab. But in some countries….in some families you still have to wear hijab in*

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> *front of your uncles or cousins I guess (...)*
>
> *So this…in my own country, we are forced to have hijab. Sometimes you just don't want to do something, right? There hasn't…there hasn't…there hasn't… People can not make you do something that you don't want to, especially when it's not a bad thing, right? You don't hurt anybody when you don't want to have hijab. Right? So..but still this is a compulsory thing even if you are a foreigner and you come to Iran, you have to have this hijab. So from my point of view, Islam is like a way to limit mostly woman. Like they want to use it to just limit woman in my country. One is hijab and the other is..they want to limit the I don't know the interaction between the both sexes. (Shirin, Int 1, 20 yrs)*

Shirin recounts her discomfort with being forced to wear a hijab in her country, not precisely in the immediate surroundings of her liberal family but in the larger community. This intersection of class privilege and gender affords her the opportunity to let go of her hijab upon her arrival to Europe. It is necessary to acknowledge that social class is an important factor that mediates how feminist discourses play out in the lives of young women and on their bodies (Nicholls, 2019: 13). Negotiation of femininity is an on-going and continuous process which requires monitoring, reflections and adaptation from one context to another (Laurie et al, 1999 in Nicholls, 2019: 7). So while migration brings about a certain sense of empowerment (Ghosh, 2009: 16; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994), Shirin will have to don the hijab should she wish to return to Iran. To understand Shirin's experience from the lens of Ahmed's phenomenology of whiteness would be to acknowledge that for women the point of demarcation against a Western context is the hijab and thus removing the hijab is essentially an attempt to blend in, rather to stand out. This line of reasoning comes to situate the wearing of hijab as an exercise in individual agency while its removal is relegated to compulsion. But Shirin's insistence that "we are forced to wear hijab," while being inconsistent with the narrative that hijab symbolizes empowerment and freedom (Carland, 2011, Droogsma 2007 in Syahrivar, 2020), marks a reclamation of control over one's own body.

> *So I would say I had a lot of problems to be connected to opposite sex cause what is defined as a good girl in Iran is completely different than what is defined here as a good girl. Know what I am saying? I was a good girl because I was so shy and I was*

*always a nerd, I was always studying so that's why I was a good girl according to like parents. But when I came here it was a really big shock for me because again I was shy I was I guess introverted, I was isolated, I didn't have self- esteem. And the people are not gonna talk to you until you will go and start the conversation.*
*That's how the relationships start. Especially for the opposite sex, that's what I figured, but not in Iran. The more quiet I became in Iran, the more boys have approached me because they probably think I am so mysterious, you know what I am saying? But not in here. The more you become quiet, the more they stay away from you. So I was talking to my mom about this because my mom was like if you feel lonely you go get a boyfriend, I am not close-minded you can do whatever you want. And I am like mom if I go get a boyfriend, after 1 or 2 months I don't even know probably before even 1 month he wants to have an actual relationship with sex. And my mom was like I don't think you should do that. Because you will probably come back to Iran someday and if you couldn't stay there, you would come back. In Iran. And if you are not a virgin, you will have no future. Which is totally true, sadly. Because if you are not a virgin no body is gonna marry you….My mom made me think that all of the men are actually scum. She used to talk about men who are scum and you have to always rely on yourself because you are the only on you can trust. Don't trust any man or any opposite sex. They always sweet talk but they can always dump you whenever they want.*

*Because you are the only one that thinks emotionally. And you are the only one bound to the motions. Yeah so I always had this fear about boys and relationships like something is not true. You always have to be careful with boys. (Shirin, Int 1, 20 yrs)*

*My parents, they have always been in Iran and they didn't have any time to explore things. And I was also a  completely different person when I was in Iran. I am not totally a different person but I changed a lot. And it's because I have seen a lot of people, a lot of mindsets, a lot of backgrounds, a lot of cultures. In Iran, and again, it's like you are being forced to wear the same thing, to think the same thing, even to eat kinda the same things. Even though there is variety and there are people who think different but they don't express it because they are scared to get hatred. Personally still I identify as a straight girl but I am bi-curious, if you will. I think I am straight but I am willing to experience…..things. It's so stupid, I have this app called tiktok,*

> *there are so many beautiful people! It's just that, the gender doesn't matter, human beings are attracted to beauty. I have seen all these beautiful people and I am like, oh my god, who am I? I think I am willing to experience it. It's not like I am straight. Period. And growing up, it was pretty normal. It's not like I had a secret crush for girls. But it could be because in the Middle East, being a part of LGBTQ community is not even an option. In a lot of countries, you are allowed to think about your sexuality. But growing up in that environment, there is only one option, being straight. I knew what was gay and lesbian and how it worked but I didn't know thereis more to it like there is a spectrum and there are other sexualities- pansexual, bisexual, queer. You know I always liked rainbow and all and people were like you know what it means, right? I am like what? "oh so that means, you are gay…if you have that on" I am like oh! But again, I didn't know there was more to it. But there are moments when I question my sexuality but it's like…it's pretty fluid. Somedays I have a crush on this girl and then other day, I am like I like this other thing…oh this guy! You never know! (Shirin, Int 6, 20 yrs)*

In Iran, a "good girl" is shy, introverted, quiet especially in her encounters with members of the opposite sex. The conservative, hegemonic Islamic discourses classify premarital sex between woman and man as haram (Chakraborty, 2010: 1) and sexual expression before marriage is seen as a sign of intellectual and moral shortcoming (Imtoual and Hussein, 2009: 27). After coming to the Czech Republic, Shirin is confronted with an alternative definition of normative femininity or the ideal "good girl"- one who is outspoken and initiator of conversations. Shirin describes her initial isolation and self-esteem as a result of not being able to talk to members of the opposite sex.

However, during the course of this research I *start seeing more of Shirin, she spends more time in her dormitory, in the kitchen or the corridor, talking to people. Her story-telling is at times so enthusiastic that I can hear her from across the long corridor. I hear her striking up conversations with the dormitory residents on topics of food, languages, films, tv shows, lives in their countries. All of 20 years of age, I find her regaling a kitchen occupied by some 6-7 people in her American accent, which she picked up from American movies* (Field Notes, 4.11.2019). However, according to her mother, it is not advisable to develop a relationship with a Czech or a European man for fear of her having to give in to what she supposes is one of the crucial requirements of romantic relationships in the West-

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sexual intercourse. A relationship with a man ruins Shirin's marital chances if she has to ever return to Iran. This caution and refrain from boys has led Shirin to seek comfort in her female relationships, as she once mentioned to me during an informal conversation. Later, Shirin recounts being introduced to "so many beautiful people" through an app called TikTok and the resulting onslaught of confusion regarding her sexuality which is still on-going at the time of writing this. She, however, decides not to share this with her parents citing their lack of exploration and exposure to differing ideologies and thoughts which could exact immense personal toll. From a political and thereby social standpoint, in countries like Iran homosexuality is a morally sinful act punishable by law. However, these are only modern regulations regarding homsexuality as historically and culturally, homosexuality found ample reiterations in Middle-eastern literature (Tolino, 2014: 76).

Construction of homosexual acts as haram, illicit and morally reprehensible renders everyone performing such acts socially outcast and of a questionable character. In History of Sexuality, Foucault views how sexuality can come to be socially constructed.

It only follows that Shirin finally gets a chance to explore alternative sexualities in the relatively safer environment of her host community in the Czech Republic. Theorists have emphasized the need to account for geographical location as a significant factor, along with the oft accounted categories of race, age, ethnicity, gender and class, that helps understand the subjectivities of sexuality. By this, I mean an account of Shirin's spatial displacement from Iran to the Czech Republic itself holds answers to how multiplicity of sexualities come to be explored in a place perceived to be more accepting. Andrews (2009:168) argues that "gendered identities are not given but emerge in practice and as active processes through, in part, the use of space" (in Annes and Redlin, 2012: 3). Shirin retains the "good girl" and virginity norm when not formulating any relationships with Czech or European men while secretly venturing in new avenues of sexuality. This negotiation between multiple femininities- "good, virgin girl," "morally impure girl" can be understood through Butler's conception of "iterability of performativity" wherein a renactment of a normative ideal can fundamentally resignify the norm. In Shirin's reiteration of "good, virgin girl," she explores alternative means of expressing her sexuality all the while maintaining the original norm.

**Summary**

Based on writings of Butler, Foucault and Ahmed, I have tried to understand the negotiations by the Muslim youth that have made their bodies places of exploitation, as in the case of Bushr’s non- contractual work, or exploration as in the case of Shirin’s venture into new avenues of sexuality. The politics of body is integral to the studies of youth as the developmental changes during the adolescence period are first and foremost marked out and witnessed in the change in bodies.

The links between body and gender helps us understand how constructions of “doing” gender are reconfigured as a result of migratory process. For example, in understanding the process of embodiment of the migrant youth, I found how young migrant men are susceptible to exploitation of their labour and how young women experience empowerment and increased levels of freedom. This research also aims to correct the imbalance in current youth studies that is largely concentrated in wealthy regions of the world namely North America, the UK and Australia, while the majority of youth actually come from developing regions like Asia and Africa (Coffey and Waston, 2014: 2). Future studies with migrant youth can help understand the varied manner in which a reconfiguration of gender ideals as a result of migration is approached by the lived body.

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# SENSE OF BELONGING

Propojený obrázek nelze zobrazit. Příslušný soubor byl pravděpodobně přesunut, přejmenován nebo odstraněn. Ověřte, zda propojení odkazuje na správný soubor a umístění.



# CHAPTER SEVEN

# **SENSE OF BELONGING**

In this chapter, I have aimed to understand how the sense of belonging of young non-European Muslims is shaped by interaction with the members of their community along with the larger context of living in the Czech Society, thereby impacting their identity and integration processes. What cultural resources do the migrant youth mobilize to effect a sense of belonging within and without the diaspora? What strategies do the participants use to counter experiences of racism in their host community? I argue that the youth's sense of belonging is diasporically-mediated due to issues of access or a lack thereof across racial lines. The question of belonging has long been examined in the context of migration research. Considered a naturalized process, belonging gains salience and becomes politicized when threatened as in the case of migration (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197). A host of factors influence migrants' sense of belonging to a society like their ethnicity, age, gender, religion, socio-economic status (Wessendorf, 2019). "People's sense of belonging in diasporic contexts is forever in the making, and emerges in constant interplay with 'host' cultures, as Avtar Brah's (1996) germinal work on diasporas reminds us. Making home anew, therefore, is not just a matter of conviviality and tolerance; it is also one of friction and exclusion" (Sigona et al., 2015).

To understand how the sense of belonging is shaped and how it impacts the identity and integration processes, I use the analytical framework for belonging as provided by Yuval-Davis. Yuval-Davis (2006) defines the notion of belonging along three levels. The first level involves social locations, the second level is related to individual's identifications and their emotional attachments to groups and collectives and the third level concerns the political and ethical value systems that govern people's judgment of their own and other people's belonging. These levels will be explained in detail later on in the article by mapping onto them the youth's experiences .

## **Locating the Youth**

According to the first level of belonging as conceived by Yuval-Davis, individuals primarily belong to certain social categories namely gender, class, race, religion,

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community, nation which helps contextualise the experiences of the youth . These categories have been described as social or economic locations of an individual and are far from being mutually exclusive as they intersect in a variety of ways across the time-space continuum such that a combination of two or more particular categories can have different implications at a given historical period, determined by the power relations of the time. An understanding of this first level of belonging for the participants of this study facilitates exploration of the subsequent levels of belonging.

**Creating Ties**

While on the first level of belonging, the discourse on social relations tethers the participants of this study to a particular socio-political context, the second level further reifies the construct of belonging. An individual's identity is reflected in their emotional investments to certain narratives and stories that may be passed down through generation and become modalities of what it means to be a part of a collective, for example, diaspora, family, workspace, culture, religion, tribe, ethnicity, race, etc. In the present research, the youth's sense of belonging remains largely mediated through their diasporic communities to which they look for recreation, educational and vocational advisory and opportunities. This is largely owing to issues of unaffordability and lack of capital resources which limit the sphere of venture and how much the youth can extend belonging across racial lines.

> *Bushr: Basically, these are my dad's friends. When I first came to Czech, he took me to see how they play. And I got excited (...) I got into football, I liked it and now I am good at it. After 2 years, I asked my dad to find for me a football club. But it is expensive. I came here in 2014, and in 2016 I told my dad that I want to get into sports, I liked it, I love it. I started looking myself but it's expensive. Every month you have to pay 600-700 crowns. And saving this money for the school books is better than going there. So I decided not to join any club. My dad said look I will talk to my friends and he talked to them and now I play with them for free. They have a football pitch.*
>
> *And they are renting it every Saturday*
>
> *from 6 to 10. Me: And how old are*
>
> *they?*
>
> *Bushr: Phew..some are 20, some are 30 but most of them are 40-50. but they are pretty*

*much good at football. They're experienced (...) some of them played in pro-league in Saudi Arabia and Jordan.*

*Me: So all of them are from the Middle East?*

*Bushr: Yes, most of them. Some of them are from Czech and Ukrainians Me: Oh that's interesting, how did your dad meet them?*

*Bushr: Oh my dad has been living here for 27 years. So that's how he met them. But he knows some from Syria. He knows some from a long time. (Bushr Int 2, 19 yrs)*

Here, Bushr describes how his love for football and want for pursue of the same led him to play with other members of the migrant, largely Middle-Eastern and Muslim, community, albeit of an older cohort, due to the inaccessible costs of football clubs which range from 600-700 crowns a month. Even when I ask Bushr to describe five things he likes about being in the Czech Republic, after an initial terse "nothing" and a while of contemplation, he exclaims "football!" On the other hand, being classified as an unaccompanied minor, however, has given Usman a chance, with the help of social workers, to join a local football club from which potential future national footballers are selected.

While the Czech Ministry of Interior makes provision of languages courses, access to labour market, housing and education for beneficiaries of international protection sans any recreational facilities and NGO social services espouse recreational provisions for a handful of youth placed directly under its ambit, an investigation into particulate migrant spatialities signals how exclusion is a posteriori representation of policy execution from the "top-down" level of the welfare state, which may limit or delimit the attempts to belong from the migrant youth. Such migrant networks additionally provide vocational opportunities in what Wahlbeck (2007) calls the "kebab" economy. Based on the Czech legislative framework, refugees and family-reunification migrants do not require employment card and enjoy the same status as members of European Union (EU) and European Economic Area (EEA) (Drbohlav and Valenta, 2014: 7) and the Ministry of Interior claims to provide access to labour market to subsidiary protected, ethnic economies

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still come to be created as parallels to the main labour market, revealing shortcomings in integration measures in the legislation.

> *Usman: I don't stop working. My friend he has kebab shop. I go there. On Friday I will go to signature some papers at the KFC (Usman, Int 1, 19 yrs)*
>
> *Bushr: It was also in a restaurant. There was that guy, I told you I play football every Saturday. So there was that guy there and I was normally talking and it was my second year in Czech. I just said out loud that I am looking for a job, I wanna work this summer. Because we didn't have any plans so I said I don't just wanna sit and do nothing. And then that guy said I am going to open a restaurant. First two weeks, I didn't hear anything from him. Then I called him and told him come on I am going to find another job. I am just sitting here, doing nothing. He said come tomorrow (Bushr, Int 3, 19 yrs)*

Simply put, an ethnic economy comprises of co-ethnic self-employed and co-ethnic employers and employees (Light and Gold, 2000) and are consequential in determining the extent to which migrant youth can extend belonging. Since such economies rely on strong and well connected social networks to thrive, retention of co-ethnic employees becomes crucial to survive businesses. To retain labour, ethnic economies may leverage the claim that they principally exist to fill the employment needs of migrants. This may result in use of exploitative practices by the employers- long working hours, poor working conditions-which may likely impede the employee's growth and participation in the host community (Fong and Ooka, 2002 in Wahlbeck, 2007: 546). A feature of poor working conditions and long work hours was recurrent in case of both Bushr and Usman who have worked and continue to work in kebab shops, while Adam assists in his family business of independent coffee rotisserie, remaining immune to coercive implications of ethnic businesses.

However, in the present research, careers- including education and vocation- seem to be predetermined based on family counsel whereby the young men have more leeway in terms of what they wish to pursue in the future- vaguely prompted by fields like economics and business, and the young women have been set on course to become doctors with negligible flexibility. Accordingly, the educational and vocational counsel for women is diasporically-mediated in a slightly different manner. During our first visit to Al-firdaus mosque in Prague, Shirin and I find ourselves encountering what is called a

halaqah[12] The Halaqah at Al-firdaus is an all women, multi-generational group. With ages ranging from 5 to 80 years, it is a dynamic group of Muslim women from countries like Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Somalia, Pakistan, Iran, who have migrated to the Czech Republic. At the end of the discussion on Qu'ran, soon after maghrib (salat performed slightly after the sunset) the sisters prepare to go, leaving a few others to catch up with each other. It is here that Shirin and I strike a conversation with Saba and Amreen, two regular members. They inquire after Shirin's studies wherein the latter shares problems she has been facing with regards to her medical course.

> *So last year….it's going to be my second year that I am studying here. But last year I was studying medicine in Charles Uni but due to financial issues I can not continue my studies anymore. So I am planning to change my curriculum from English to Czech. And I am currently studying Czech language. So my parents are not really supporting me right now so I have to have two jobs to kinda you know for my daily fees. For now I need to two jobs but maybe I will quit one of them. (Shirin, Field Notes)*

Shirin recalls how the situation in Iran has made it impossible for her to continue her studies, how she has started working at restaurants to pay for her stay in the Czech Republic and how her parents are working against time to gather enough finances to support her in her second year of Medicine. The sisters (as members of halaqah refer to each other) listen inquisitively. The discussion soon becomes an exercise in brainstorming

[12] Halaqat or halaqah (singular) loosely translates to learning circles whereby disciples gather around a teacher and discuss and deliberate upon the teachings of Qu'ran. This method of pedagogy dates back to the origins of Islam when Prophet Muhammad would sit in the masjid with his disciples and disseminate the teachings of Qu'ran which the audience members would then memorize and spread further (Boyle, 2004:11). Elsewhere, Ahmed (2018) has defined halaqah as "originally an Islamic oral pedagogy instituted by the Prophet Muhammad" which has effected social change and justice through empowerment of both individuals as well as communities (Zaimeche, 2002). Munadia (2016) describes halaqah in reference to a group of Muslims-usually 3 to 12-who regularly undertake reviews of Islamic teachings. This pedagogical technique emphasizes critical thinking and reasonable argumentation in face of taqlid (blind faith) and "uncritical tradition of pre-Islamic society", objectives as espoused in Qur'an (Munadia, 2016: 3). From a contemporary perspective, halaqah provides an alternative model to Western ideologies of critical reasoning. While in the present study, the Halaqah takes place in the masjid, such gatherings can take place in other suitable settings namely homes of teachers or disciples, community and educational institutions. The composition of a halaqah may vary- divided based on gender and age, if need be.

possible solutions where Saba and Amreen offer advises from their personal experiences. While Saba's daughter Jameela is also a medical student at Pilsen medicine faculty, Amreen has herself studied medicine in Italy. The sisters strongly encourage Shirin to continue the pursuit of medicine and work incisively toward it. They respond to her doubts- how to manage time, the kind of preparation the entrance exams needed; they have suggestions (example, contacts of Czech learning courses), anecdotes, assurances and good wishes. There is a consensus between Saba and Amreen on how the path to success is not simple but the young women have to work really hard to achieve success because according to them, becoming a doctor is the way to gain respect of the members in the society wherein ethnic and racial differences may otherwise create problems of everyday racism which I discuss in the next sub-section. Incidentally, all the three young women who I conversed with for this study have been in pursuit of a career in medicine. Being practitioners of Islam, the two older women firmly believe that practice of medicine is considered sacred in Islam- "Islamic scholars have agreed that the study and practice of medicine is an obligation that falls upon Muslims to have sufficient numbers of followers to practice (Fard Kifayah)" (Chamsi-Pasha and Albar, 2016: 121). Under the veneer of a noble pursuit, such a high- skilled profession also irrefutably comes with increased financial dividends. Moreover, in a 2006 study with young women and men from Sweden eponymously named "Working harder to be the same", Hallgren found how the young migrants felt determined to work harder in the face of racism in the larger society. While the central aim of the halaqah is discussion of Qu'ran, the teachings from the text spillover onto other parts of the sisters' lives. This sets a cultural precedence to nudge the young adults into this career direction as is the case with the women of this study. This brief account at the halaqah showcases how the migrant community strictly regulates the avenues of belonging in a bid to secure financial well-being for the stakeholders involved.

**Ethical and political values**

Yuval-Davis, however, goes onto delineate how belonging is more than just social locations and identity attachments. This brings us to the third and final level of belonging. Here I underline how the political and ethical value system in the Czech Republic establishes a perspective on Muslim migrants, thereby inviting a response from the latter. It is this interaction between the ideological and ethical value systems and individual identity attachments that creates a bridge between "belonging" and "the politics of belonging." For youth, the politics of belonging plays out in their quotidian interactions with members of their

host community. The youth's education and work places are noteworthy sites to understand the politics of belonging. In the following vignette, Shirin describes the conduct of her colleagues at the restaurant where she works part-time:

> *They were making fun of, I kid you not, Indian accent one day. Even though I don't understand the 70% of their Czech but I kinda understand that the other day there were four Arabic people and they were making fun of them that these stupid Arabic people, they are here. And for some reason, they sent me. I don't do that, I never do that. But they sent me to take the order or like take the food.....Sometimes my manager ends up making of fun of me. 'That's why they don't give you visas because you are terrorists.'They think it's like kidding..like a joke but it's more like a sarcasm. (Shirin, Int 1, 20 yrs)*

Similarly, Jameela recounts how she was rusticated from her first year of medical school on account of a technical error in her attendance that had not been accounted for by her school administration. She concludes that this was a result of racist ideas harbored by one of her professors. Jameela's father, who was a professor himself in Syria and works at a kebab shop in the Czech Republic now, explained to her how sometimes professors like to make examples out of their students such that the rest of the students would fear and respect them. Jameela, thus, concluded that her professor allegedly botched her attendance sheet in order to make an example out of her so that his (the professor's) students would respect him. Furthermore, Jameela deduced that he maybe racist as the only other student whose attendance sheet was mismanaged was a Russian student. In an imagined dialogue, she outlines how the said professor's actions would have transpired, "Instead of doing this to a Czech person, why don't I do it to a foreign person who cannot even sue me or does not have experience in the area. And that's what he did and that was a smart move and he ruined my life." (Jameela, Int 1, 22 yrs)

Such tangible, repetitive, familiar and recurrent practices which are a manifestation of ideology and structure are what constitutes everyday forms of racism (Essed 1991). These practices are not limited to interactions at school or workplace but also with the larger legal framework. Jameela reports being stopped by a police officer at a metro station in Prague when she was 15 and asked to show the necessary documents permitting her to stay in Czech territory. Bushr accounts that conditions at the Ministry offices where migrants are

supposed to visit to seek extension on their legal documents

> *People there the place is smaller not as big as this but the people waiting outside the cars... nowhere to park... the looks... the smells everything you hate everything you wait there six hours you stand there for an hour or two, you finally get to sit, you sit you hate yourself like the amount of people over there (Bushr, Int 9, 19 yrs)*

Like interactions at micro-levels, the proverbial bigger picture, the macro perspective, is also marked by politicisation of belonging. An example of this is demonstrated in the relative position and conditions of the Al-Firdaus mosque in the Prague cityscape. The mosque is perched amidst workshops, warehouses and showrooms. Situated inconveniently at the outskirts, the mosque is located in an inhospitable industrial zone, carefully made to blend with the host community aesthetic. Despite this degree of marginalization, the Muslim community members are still hounded by discomforted landlords of the mosque who create unpleasant conditions, like exorbitant rents, sub-par facilities (example, inadequate heating), forcing either a shut-down or an ever anticipatory lookout for another place. The mosque is inconspicuous, bereft of the architectural motifs usually associated with such sacred structures like minarets. This exemplifies the invisibility of Muslims and their beliefs evident in how the Muslim youth partake in celebration of their festivals like Eid.

By contrast, a month or so before Christmas, Prague illuminates with an assortment of colourful lights styled in whimsical shapes like candles and snowflakes, planted at regular intervals on either side of the roads indicating the advent of the big festival. This reinforces an individual's sense of place belonging (Jaeger and Mykletun, 2013) but additionally engages one's temporal sensibilities as Bushr describes it best when I ask him how he celebrated Eid "Here you don't have people around you to remind you of that, you don't feel it. Like in our country, everyone is celebrating it you know so you feel it. You feel like it's a different thing, it's a different day. It's something else. But here it's like any normal day. The only thing you feel here is the Christmas. Otherwise you don't feel anything else here. No any other thing just the Christmas. Everyone closes on the 24$^{th}$ of December. And you see all the lights up you know and these things..the snow. That's the only thing you feel here." (Bushr Int 4, 19 yrs). Such spatial privileging of certain religious symbols in a society has a bearing on temporal orientation of the members from the "outside" who along with a sense of belonging partially barter a sense of "being present."

*Adam: Yes there's always celebrations for Eid which is twice a year. And it's done, it's kind of become a tradition here. We go to Harfa.*

*Me: What is Harfa?*

*Adam: Some shopping centre around here. And on top floor they have this place where.. they have these restaurants and fast food these things. So we go there and someone always pays for x amount of meals and gives away these kind of vouchers or papers and you go and get your food and together the whole community is there. (Adam, Int 1, 19 yrs)*

Adam gives an account of how the migrant community in the Czech Republic creates opportunities for belonging by reinventing traditions common in Muslim festivals. As Yuval-Davis contends that identifications or identity narratives are dynamic in nature and prone to change. The sustenance of these collective narratives heavily relies on their performance by groups or individuals and it is this very element of reiteration that causes these practices or stories to be altered or appropriated for times (Butler, 1997b: 14). Many members of the community gather at a popular shopping centre and partake in festivities, which becomes an efficacious tool to lend the participants a sense of history through narrative and storytelling, The celebrations are but a nifty simulacra of celebrations they are familiar with in their countries of origin and the members straddle the fence of visibility and invisibility in the host community. This is in part due to an acute awareness of the media influence that shapes the discourse on Islam even in the Czech Republic (Jelínková, 2019). However, being surrounded by this monolith understanding of Islamic ideals largely through non-bipartisan media seems to serve as a vaccine, the person becomes immune and carries on.

Yuval-Davis points out how when aspects of an individual's identity are threatened, the emotional attachment to those aspects becomes stronger. In this vein, circling back to the imposed concern with hijab, I also find how, in a post 9/11 world, Muslims in pluralist, non-Muslim societies fashion an alternate understanding of Islamic values, one different from the Orientalist outlook and devoid of Islamic state-based politics, to create unassailable virtues. During our conversation, Faiza narrates the incident when she is asked to remove her hijab during her interview for the medical course in Prague. Since she does not get through the course, there is no opportunity for her to relive or dwell on this demand. Would she have continued to wear the hijab had she been selected? Faiza

nods resolutely. She continues to wear the hijab because she sees it as a symbol of piety and personal faith. She makes soft reiterations of God-phrases (phrases that reference God like “Inshallah” “Mashallah”) (Welji 2012) to identify her on-going struggle to become or remain pious in her daily pursuits. Faiza’s life at the halaqah is expansive, incorporating different roles. She chauffeurs her grandmother in an SUV (Sports Utility Vehicle) from another city on top of the university work-load dutifully following through her role of being a young, responsible adult. By underlining these examples, I aim to shift focus from the borrowed salience of hijab to aspects which hold salience for Faiza, and Muslim women like her, while also exemplifying her myriad attempts to reiterate the sacrosanct practices from Islam against a European backdrop .

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have attempted to explore the sense of belonging of Muslim youth in their country of settlement, the Czech Republic. Using the framework on belonging provided by Yuval-Davis, I have mapped the social locations of the youth which determine their relative social position in the society. I have found that the youth’s sense of belonging to their host community is diasporically- mediated wherein the diaspora becomes their first point of contact with the larger Czech community, thereby determining how much the youth can extend belonging. The youth’s social locations of being non-Czech Muslims relegate them to work in ethnic economies and set them on predetermined vocations, especially for the young women who are called upon to pursue respectable career domains like medicine. Such diasporic-mediations ensure financial well-being for its stakeholders, undertaken in the hopes to effect change to their social positions.

I have examined the politics of belonging in quotidian-everyday- interactions of the youth, in educational institutions, workplaces and in bureaucratic spaces. Furthermore, the chapter has explored how the youth resignify certain identity attachments through both the mere act of practicing them across different time-space continuum and actively deliberating on them as in the case of wearing hijab.

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# YOUTH, MIGRATION, COSMPOLITANISM

CHAPTER EIGHT

# YOUTH, MIGRATION COSMOPOLITANISM

*I mean in every country there are crimes but still stick together. But we don't. even if we are all Syrians…it's a civil war means we don't love each other. I mean I think if we united a long time ago from Morocco to Saudi Arabia or Iran of course. In Iran they have the same alphabet but different language. They speak Persian but most of them speak Arabic as well. So we unite with each other, we would be like a good strong country with good strong economy with better things. I mean look at here in Europe, everyone is from different country but they work with each other you know. Look how nice it is right now (the park). How hard it is to find such places in our countries…. all we have is brown, dry, sand.*

This chapter focuses on how the Muslim migrant youth become active stakeholders in the cosmopolitan project traditionally seen as the preserve of the white, Western elites. Taking a "bottom- up" approach to understand integration processes, I explore how the migrant youth engagement with a multiplicity of cultures leads to their identity construction and integration in their country of settlement, thereby leading to a cosmopolitan outlook. Based on ethnographic narratives of six Muslim migrant young women and men, I show how the youth mobilize tools like media to bridge cultural differences in virtual and real spaces. Additionally, the migrant youth mobilize their cultural resources and assert themselves as different from the local Czech people and thus of equal value. Using writings of Said, Beck and Leurs, I center the Muslim migrant adolescent as an agential beings reflecting upon their own value and creating spaces for themselves in their host community.

## Introduction

When Diogenes first declared himself as "a citizen of the world," he suggested an outlook of openness and tolerance. In Regulating Aversion, Brown commentates that "tolerance as a political practice is always conferred by the dominant." Tolerance is a mark of the civilized Western communities, from which it follows that the communities which are intolerant are thus uncivilized and barbarians, becoming perfect receptacles of violence

and aggression (in Werbner, 2018: 275). This discursive treatment of the West as the bastion of tolerant and open values has made cosmopolitanism the preserve of the Western elites, informed by the scholarship of philosophers like Kant, Derrida, Hobbes, among others (Gani, 2017: 3). As a departure from this traditional perspective, this article focuses on how the Muslim migrant youth in the Czech Republic are active stakeholders in the cosmopolitanism project.

Gilroy (2000), in his book, argues the need for a cosmopolitan, humanistic approach that supersedes essentializing forms of racial identities wherein dwell and fester oppressive ideologies like fascism (in Gikandi, 2002). In recent years, researchers have debated such basic tenets of social sciences that take pride in a certain epistemological universalism of the Western scholarship. In his seminal work, Orientalism (1979), Said challenged this notion of Western hegemony on knowledge production paving way for entire schools of postcolonial thought, alongside subaltern studies, feminist epistemologies and decolonization theories. A key argument presented by the aforesaid schools of thought was a systematic exclusion of the socio-cultural and historical context of scientific knowledge production; it is this dismissal that lent itself to the universal character of all knowledge produced in the West. In becoming truly global, social sciences have been called upon to shed the Western hegemonic garb and take into consideration the local, regional voices in scientific discourse. Therefore Gilroy's well-meaning claim overlooks the paradox inherent in the conception of cosmopolitanism which, while universal in approach, remains inalienable from social categories like race, gender or class. Any attempts to subtract these social categories from the equation is reflective of an individual's privileged location (Calhoun, 2003: 532; Gikandi, 2002). Of importance to the present study is Benhabib's (2004: 174) contention regarding an individual's allegiances- across ethnicities, religions, languages and nationalities- that upset the definition of cosmopolitanism as one *polis.*

Through this chapter, I thus explore how the migrant youth engagement with a multiplicity of cultures leads to their identity construction and integration in their country of settlement, thereby leading to a cosmopolitan outlook . What strategies and tools do the migrant youth use, at their disposal, to counter the inevitable antagonism in their host community surroundings of the Czech Republic? How do they bridge the gap of racial differences and create a cosmopolitan imaginary? Leurs (2015: 47) asserts that youth cultures are viable political groups befitting socio-political inquiry, as they operate at the intersections of

regional, global and transnational politics. Moreover, the youth cultures, owing to their organization as age and generation-based cohorts, can position themselves as formidable critique of "the logic of racial, national and ethnic essentialism." And while the state can institute policies to help tackle racism, youth cultures can additionally mobilize at the ground-level and their everyday interactions with members of other communities or groups may actually help challenge nationalist and racist notions of "othering" by exhibiting "conviviality and cosmopolitanism." (ibid.) Based on ethnographic narratives of six Muslim migrant young women and men, the first two themes deal with how they mobilize tools like media and personal experiences to bridge cultural differences in both virtual and real spaces. Lastly, I show how the migrant youth mobilize their cultural resources and assert themselves as different from the local Czech people and thus of equal value (Beck, 2004: 153).

I begin with a brief explanation of different paradigms of cosmopolitanism as they appear in the academic literature across disciplines like philosophy, social science and political theory. Moral cosmopolitanism, as proposed by Martha Nussbaum in her essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism" aimed at US educational system, argues for a universalist, tolerant and open outlook that supersedes national boundaries and ushers into a space of humanistic cooperation (Komulainen in Vila-Freyer and Özerim, 2020: 175; Nussbaum, 1994). Political cosmopolitanism is informed by Kantian ideology and espouses human rights on a global scale. Kant's conception of cosmopolitan right and the principle of hospitality was instrumental in bringing debates in the field of pure ethics to the realm of politics, informing ideas regarding citizenship, political agency, governance and "probably the European Convention of Human Right" (Gani, 2017). Cultural cosmopolitanism advocates for the diversity of cultures and the rejection of nationalistic pursuits. Kleingeld (2013) defines cosmopolitanism as a multiplicity of positions aimed at a conception of world citizenship, approached either in literal terms (as in through political cosmopolitanism) or in figurative terms (through cultural or moral cosmopolitanism).

Alternatively, Delanty (2006) understands cosmopolitanism as a "cultural medium of societal transformation," and a society can not simply be labeled as either being cosmopolitan or not. It is an ever-evolving process founded upon the principle of openness. The term cosmopolitanism eludes a specific definition as it manifests across every and all

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levels of the society- from the everyday life of "bi-national families, neighborhoods" to global conglomerates or corporations to international human rights groups, only to name a few (Beck and Sznaider, 2006: 3). This study uses the analytical framework of banal cosmopolitanism as proposed by Beck (2000). In congruence with the aim of this chapter, banal cosmopolitanism seeks to understand the everyday processes by which we integrate ourselves into global phenomena. Such a cosmopolitan sensibility emerges out of interaction with opposing cultures (Beck, 2004: 153), wherein media becomes instrumental in this development. Smets (2018), in his ethnographic work, has explored how the Kurdish youth in London understand their regional conflicts using the media. Espousing the framework of diasporic cosmopolitanism, the study concludes that the youth distance themselves from their regional media which helps them better engage with the regional conflicts and consolidate their ethnic identities. I am particularly interested to see the manifestations of this cosmopolitan positioning in the basic, everyday levels of migrant youth living in the Czech Republic. Lamont and Aksartova (2002) in their article "Ordinary Cosmopolitanism" have explored the strategies used by ordinary working-class black and white French and United States workers to counteract racist rhetorics. The study, akin to the present one, aims to see cosmopolitan imaginary in places where it is not traditionally sought, based on the origins of this concept as have already been defined earlier in the first paragraph.

To the best of my knowledge, there has been no research on cosmopolitan identity of Muslim migrant youth in the context of the Czech Republic. However, this nation-state presents a curious case for study on cosmopolitanism. The attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States attributed to Islamic groups fueled media outrage in the country against Islamic fundamentalism. This attitude led to the general public's reaction in 2015, culminating in demonstrations against killings related to Charlie Hebdo cartoon publications and mass migration. Slačálek and Svobodová (2018) have shown how this xenophobic reaction is a result of a collective need to preserve the liberal values upon which the Czech Republic is founded. However, cosmopolitan outreach is not completely unknown in the Czech Republic as demonstrated through its strong ties and continuous support of Tibet.

Hříbek (2015: 218) argues that "in the continuous trajectory of Czech nationalist thought, an imaginary connection with the East has served to endow the Czech historical experience

and national struggle with a universal—even transcendental—appeal.” Since prior to 1989, the communist regime held pro-Arabic sentiments (Slačálek and Svobodová , 2018: 483), the middle-east could be said to have thus been excluded from the construction of this post-socialist consciousness.

**Becoming a virtual, global citizen**

The youth of this research uses various social media tools from Whatsapp to Facebook to Instagram to TikTok. In a few families, television media is also consumed where the participants, along with their parents and siblings watch Arabic or Indian soap operas or films like those from Bollywood (Bushr, Usman) or Turkish Netflix shows (Jameela, Adam). Due to the small size and fragmentation of Muslim diaspora in the Czech Republic, such regional media through its depiction of shared, moral values lends a sense of community and proximity with the region of origin (Georgiou, 2012). However, for the most part, the youth limit their media usage to the internet. On the internet, the youth come to engage with and inhabit a cosmopolitan space:

> *Bushr: in Africa, you can guess that by looking at them they really don’t have food, they are poor. This makes me sad because some got millions, billions, million, I don’t know these numbers and here in Africa people are starving. Here in the Middle East people are killing each other.*
> *And people in South America are*
>
> *selling drugs. Me: Where do you get*
>
> *all this information?*
>
> *Bushr: Internet, google. Like I don’t want to read them but when I am scrolling, I see an ad or I see a page. If I am interested I go inside and I read it. (Bushr Int 2, 19 yrs)*

Here, Bushr describes a typical day he spends on the internet which is marked by ads and news pieces on events across the globe besides his regular social media usage. He describes the differing plights of people from Africa, South America and the Middle East. Internet, in this way, becomes a preliminary introduction to alternative experiences, of people inhabiting “other” worlds. Increased visibility of the day-to-day experiences of individuals on the social media has tapped into the visceral emotions of the consumers,

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while also lending itself to cultivating an environment of empathy. As Beck (2004: 152) argues, “people experience themselves as part of a fragmented, endangered civilization and civil society, whose characteristic feature is the simultaneity of events and knowledge of this simultaneity everywhere in the world.” Such cosmopolitan outlook also comes to be sustained through active engagement on the social media as Bushr exemplifies in the following exchange:

> *Me: (...) you wanted to show the mean memes.*
>
> *Bushr: Oh they are basically jokes about religion, personality. Like some people get offended. They even have in their bio that if you get offended, don't follow this page. I don't get offended like I told you I learnt to not care. I learnt to laugh. Sometimes if I get offended I just scroll, don't comment*
> *Me: Oh you comment on memes?*
> *Bushr: Yes sometimes. I think I have a screen-shot of comment.*
> *Me: Which got many likes or something?*
> *Bushr: Yeah....why would I screenshot if it doesn't have likes? I commented about this guy's hair because I found it funny and many people agreed with me. But many people got offended. Some even texted me that it's normal, you know.*
> *Me: How did you handle those comments?*
> *Bushr: I just told them fuck you! No...I just gave them a like or heart reacted to their comment. I mean they just got triggered from one comment. I got a comment that I insulted the whole culture and I understand it after that guy told me how it is normal for black people. So sorry... I didn't know. (Bushr Int 2, 19 yrs)*

Bushr demonstrates how the migrant youth negotiate this “digital throwntogetherness in a progressive way” (Leurs, 2015). His engagement on the social media is preconditioned by a general awareness of its functionality- there is offensive content, there are offense-takers and that one can stay at the sidelines by not commenting and simply scrolling past. In the presented vignette, Bushr recalls his instagram exchange with fellow, virtual users wherein the latter pointed out his inadvertent racism and the learning outcome as a result. This contributes to the cultivation of what Leurs (2015: 199) labels as hypertextual selves, which essentially refer to the dividends of multiculturalism that enable the migrant youth to relate to regional, transnational as well as global contexts. Being constantly bombarded by news bits, events or entertainment from different socio- cultural locations forces the

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migrant youth to confront the differences. This results in construction of an identity with multiple affiliations- be it cultural, ethnic, gender, religious. Usman (Yemen) posts on Facebook about his experiences of playing multiplayer videogame like PUBG, Faiza (Syria) recounts her love for singers Adele and Fayrouz. Shirin (Iran) watches videos of Italian TikTokers explaining complex nuances of sexuality "you basically can educate yourself from the media if you know how to use it" (Shirin). Such multiple affiliations help sustain the cosmopolitan outlook (Leurs, 2015: 209).

**Cosmopolitanism in Everyday Interactions**

While the context of social media provides noteworthy insight into the development of cosmopolitan imagination, another equally potent space to observe this identity construction is the everyday interactions of the migrant youth. Such quotidian socialization remains bereft of the media and political frenzy that stir debates and anxieties about communal inclusion (Noble in Wise and Velayutham, 2009: 51) especially crucial in the context of the Czech Republic (Kovář, 2020; Georgiou andl Zaborowski, 2017; Meciar, 2016) and thus, provide a more practical glimpse into how the migrant youth negotiate the differences and broker inclusion at the grassroots. An important feature of Beck's cosmopolitanism, which distinguishes it from nationalism, is the coexistence of people with differing lifestyles which compels one to reflect upon "the otherness of others." Due to a paucity of people from the same regional background in their age-group, the migrant youth in the Czech Republic is inevitably called upon to socialize across racial and ethnic boundaries.

*Me: Who are your friends?*

*Usman: Jagar, he was at my birthday.*

*Me: Jagar, who spoke in Hindi? From*

*Kurdistan? Usman: Kurdistan yes.*

*Me: How old is he?*

*Usman: Now 18 (...) he is crazy. That he is not crazy crazy. But he go to work after school direct everyday. After work, he come back to home. Direct to the work. He have to make a lot of money. Because he have to go to Kurdistan and it's difficult for*

*him. (Usman Int 1, 19 yrs)*

Since his arrival to the Czech Republic from Egypt, Usman (originally from Yemen) lives in the Foreign Children's facility sharing the "home" with children from other nationalities. During his time in the facility, Usman meets people from different backgrounds. In the above conversation, he shares about the friendships he has cultivated in the Czech Republic. He immediately delves into the life circumstances of his friend stating the latter's dire need for money which justifies his strenuous routine. Since displacement is a common denominator, friendships become predicated on life circumstances wherein Usman begins to empathize with someone from a different ethnic background, nevertheless, sharing his own monetary hardships. Delanty (2012: 340) posits that cosmopolitan relationships can manifest various ways including an awareness of other people's vulnerabilities.

Similarly Jameela empathizes with her Russian classmate, citing racial discrimination when her instructor at her medical school allegedly fails both of them in a course subject. Such interactions challenge particularistic notions of marginalization and deprivation of the migrant youth by putting into perspective their own experiences in relation to those of individuals from different background. However, the interactions of migrant youth are not limited to their own or other migrant youth. As all participants are either school or college students, they avail education in institutions with a majority Czech population. This inevitable intermingling causes the migrant youth and their classmates to confront and reflect upon certain preconceived notions about one another. Below, Adam recounts one such development:

*Me: So tell me how do you think the Czech society perceives the Muslim migrants?*

*Adam: Living here in the Czech Republic? Basically what I see is that they're scared, they're scared of the migrants. I don't think they have so much of a problem with those already here, living here. That came individually and not in mass but they're very scared of this mass migration and having many of them or all of them come in at once. They're scared and should be honest, from what I have been hearing about the migrants in turkey. In Turkey, nearly the whole country was happy to let the migrants in. They said okay let's greet our brothers and you know…around 2 million Syrian migrants are in turkey right now. But what happened was they started to cause problems.*

*Me: What kinda problems?*

*Adam: You know like gang, like form a gang. Another thing they would do is they would not work, they would just get the resources from the government. Not really a great attitude given you are in a different country that is helping you. Many attacks, littering and these kind of things. So much so many people in Turkey don't want them anymore, those that wanted them at the beginning. That's what they're scared of. They already have a minority of…don't know how you…gypsies! Couldn't find the English word. They have only bad experience, mostly bad experiences with them from what I know, from what I see they are…I have not seen nearly any integration from their side. They don't usually go to school, you usually see them smoking, father just gets the money for children and buys himself things and leaves the children alone. So they don't…that basically effects how they perceive potential migrants. (Adam, Int 2, 19 yrs)*

In this exchange, Adam describes the issues he perceives that the local Czech people may have with the Muslim migrants. This perception has been built upon what he has heard from his teachers at school and experiences of his classmates (for example, "my friend got punched by a young gypsy girl and his nose broke"). He distinguishes between the Muslims already living in the Czech Republic, who came individually and the ones migrating en masse. Accordingly, the already residing migrants are not the cause of problem whereas the new migrants may be a potential cause of problems, as he finds from the Turkish example. In his ethnographical work with Polish migrants in Norway, Pawlak (in Buchowski, Cervinkova, Uherek, 2015: 31) shows how the cosmopolitan migrants, who interact with the host society, can distance themselves from migrants of their national cohort especially the ones they perceive to be not making any efforts at integrating like the mass migrants in Turkey responsible for "many attacks, littering and these kind of things". In the present exchange, I framed the question as an "issue with Muslim migrants" and not migrants of a specific nationality to reflect the diasporic nature of Muslim religiosity.

The migrant youth of this study occupy certain social positions that enable their cosmopolitan outlook. Of the six participants with whom I worked for a period of 1 year, all of them had kinship networks in other European countries like Germany. The youth hail from the middle or upper- middle-class backgrounds equipping them with capital means to avail transnational mobility for education or employment. Based on cultural traditions, similar class backgrounds make it incumbent upon young people to pursue certain

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predetermined career paths, albeit gendered, like medicine for women and business/economics-based higher education for boys. Western countries like the UK, US and Canada have relaxed migration legislation to attract such highly skilled professionals like medical doctors, business managers, etc. (Habti, 2012: 3) thus ensuring their global mobility. However, due to strict migration policies and relatively under-developed institutional infrastructure in the Czech Republic, labour retention within the country presents a noteworthy issue which can potentially result in the drainage of personnel with cosmopolitan imaginary. All of the participants of this study have shown an inclination to pursue careers outside the Czech Republic, foreshadowed in thorough deliberations over which additional language needs to be chosen as a school subject to yield appropriate results in the future. This was evident in the study about intra-EU migration of highly-skilled professionals from central and eastern European countries to Germany owing to a better standard of living, career opportunities and economic conditions in the latter (Teney, 2019: 14).

**Yallah, Cosmopolitanism**

The migrant youth in this research construct a cosmopolitan outlook through virtual and real-life interactions, deploying core cosmopolitan practices of tolerance, openness and bridging racial differences through an outlook of empathy and understanding. Further, these successive experiences with the “Other” and otherness engage the critical and reflective faculties of the youth leading them to evaluate their own value in relation to those of the Others. This boundary between oneself and the other contributes to upholding a plurality of ideas, otherwise at the risk of erasure in societies wherein migrants are mandated to assimilate into the host culture, gradually bringing the cosmopolitan vision into sharp relief. In a 2007 anthropological study by Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt, transnational workers similarly reiterated their cultural and national attributes to achieve “commonality in difference.” The migrant youth of this project demonstrate such reiterations across different spheres of their lives.

*Me: What is this dress called?*

*Usman: This is Thawb. I think for this knife. And this is a shaal. 22 countries speak Arabic…so shaal is better.*

*Me: Shaal like Shawl. They have it in English now, they took the word. What do*

*you call it in Yemeni?*

*Usman: Guthra. This is the knife.*

*Me: Why did your mother give you this knife?*

*Usman: Because tradition of Yemen. For us it is normal. In Yemen, when I wear it, I don't take it out. Only here. We say, for example, when you take it out, you have to put it and you have blood in it. So you can't take it out. Only if you have problem or someone wants to take from you something. You have to take it. Only men in Yemen have it everyday. When I was in Yemen, I had it also. (Usman Int 1, 19 yrs)*

The first time I meet Usman is in the Children's Facility for Foreign Nationals where he has been living since March of 2018. Originally from Yemen, his family of 14 siblings along with his parents and a step-mother relocates to Egypt in 2015 when the war breaks out in their country of origin.

Ostensibly hailing from an upper middle class, his father being an important political figure, Usman shares his experience of studying in a modern school where he shares educational spaces with members of the opposite sex and becomes knowledgeable in English language as " I was left with American people." Noble (in Wise and Velayutham, 2009: 53) asserts that everyday cosmopolitanism should not only be studied through the narrow confines of ethnic and cultural differences but also through a host of relations commonly seen in an ordinary school setting- between males and females, teachers and students, among friends, etc.-which can forge an outlook of openness and tolerance. Like Usman, all the participants show excellent command of English language which additionally eases them into a multicultural sphere (Haque, 2020). In 2018, Usman's entire family moves to Europe-albeit in different countries like Netherlands, Sweden, Slovakia, the Czech Republic- dispersed owing to what Usman cites as "problem with visa." He comes to the Czech Republic along with his older brother who lives in another city. Being a minor, Usman is housed in the Children's facility which is where I meet him first time on his birthday. The house hosts minors from several countries. The birthday invitation is extended to a social worker from a Czech NGO who asks me to accompany her. This way I could meet Usman and talk to him about the possibility of participating in this research. In waiting for Usman and his friend, I initiate conversations with the facility coordinators who recount how they have hosted two boys from the middle-east thus far, including

Usman, and how the boys have displayed exemplary conduct. This challenges the discursive dehumanization of Muslim migrants, especially young men in the media (Szczepanik, 2016: 25) while at the same time, burdening these young adults with carrying the mantle for acceptable racial and ethnic conduct. Usman and his friend arrive with what they call a falafel cake. At one point, the attendees queue up to approach Usman and congratulate him on his birthday as per Czech traditions. Usman also changes into thawb, a traditional Yemeni attire, with a holster for a dagger. He describes the tradition as mentioned above.

Beck (2002) argues that cosmopolitanism can have both "roots" and "wings," which implies that a cosmopolitan identity is not predicated upon erosion of self rooted in one's local culture. The youth reassert their cultural values and present them at par with the others. While certain cultural representations are occasioned by special events like birthdays, remaining invisible for most parts as was in Usman's case, other cultural symbols find perpetual visibility as in the case of Faiza, who continues to wear hijab, observe basic Islamic tenets like conducting daily prayer (Salat) and undertaking month-long fasting (Ramzan).

This cosmopolitan identity is reified and reinforced across various settings wherein youth frequent the most like school and workplace or while pursuing recreational activities like going out with peers or playing sports.

> *I also say, you know what is yallah in Arabic- Come on, come on-yallah. every time we do some sport in school I say yallah yallah, everyone caught that word from me and they even say it. even the teacher, you know, the teacher. (Bushr, Int 5, 19 yrs)*

This particular instance proved to be an important milestone in Bushr's journey as a migrant in the Czech Republic. Having been bullied on account of his ethnic and racial identity by his classmates and peers during his initial years, Bushr has now reached a stage wherein his cultural traits have not only come to be accepted but also adopted by his peers while he plays football with his schoolmates. The literature on political engagement of Czech youth is quite scarce but upon my research, I found a multinational report published by Bertelsmann Stiftung in 2017 according to which 61% of the Czech youth see Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism as the biggest threat facing the EU, closely followed by refugee migration. In order to bridge this racial gap and rectify imagined notions about others, sports, especially football, provide a veritable avenue for developing cosmopolitan

thinking. In the context of football, Giulianotti and Robertson (2009) understand what they term “thin cosmopolitanism” as an “equal-but-different” approach to other cultures which also involves learning and incorporating said learning from the former in order to enrich one’s own culture. This viewpoint is notably altered in present research wherein the migrant youth agentially arrive at the juncture where they consider themselves “equal-but-different” to their teammates but the dividends of this reflection are distributed back to the same team. In this manner, convenient regional colloquialisms like “yallah” or certain sports manoeuvre come to be employed in the games played in host community. Usman, currently playing for a local team, hopes to play for the Czech professional football club, Slavia and represent the country in their international games. Adam, hailing from a multi-cultural background actively chooses his allegiance based on his love for football

> *I was around six or seven. I don't know exactly. And Italy was playing I don't know if it was the World Cup at the time. I think it was the World Cup. And I think my father, my father was watching it. And you know, I was born in Italy. So it was and it must have been a semi final or something. And I always when I was younger, I used to say I'm Italian. I'm not British. I'm not czech. I'm not Somali, I'm Italian. Because I had this connection since I was young to Italy. I really felt that whole, if I can say that way, I really had a nice feeling when I was there (...) And my father was an arsenal fan (…) and we were playing Barcelona and basically there I started really supporting Arsenal and since then it's Arsenal till I die and since then I've learned all the chants and everything about the history and all. (Adam, Int 3, 19 yrs)*

**Summary**

In this chapter I have explored how the migrant youth’s interactions with multiple cultures contributes to their identity and integration process leading to a cosmopolitan outlook. Using the analytical framework of banal cosmopolitanism advanced by Beck (2000), I have inquired into how the everyday processes help the migrant youth integrate into the society and in the larger global phenomena.

The study highlights the ways in which a post-migration life issues the youth into everyday practices of cosmopolitan envisioning. The three registers along which the youth develop a cosmopolitan outlook include the virtual spaces of the internet where

they navigate the reality of “digital throwntogetherness,” which equips the youth to understand regional, national and global contexts by virtue of being constantly fed information on the same across social media platforms. I follow this with an exploration of how a cosmopolitan imaginary is created in non-virtual, physical spaces where abstract ideas of cosmopolitan understanding come to be tested in quotidian spaces like schools. What strategies and tools do the migrant youth use to counter racist ideas? The youth remain aware of the general stereotypes and prejudices surrounding Muslims in virtual and real spaces. They show an awareness of how to operate and function on social media platforms. In the face of opposing beliefs, the youth either chooses to engages in a healthy manner or withhold comment, and continue to educate themselves. Subsequently, I show how the youth themselves become active stakeholders in the cosmopolitan project by reflecting upon their own value and creating spaces for themselves in their host community.

The study serves a two-pronged purpose: a) to upset the discursive treatment of the Western milieu as a bulwark for cosmopolitan values of tolerance and openness; b) to acknowledge the role of social categories like race and ethnicity in cosmopolitan imaginary, based on arguments developed by Calhoun and Benhabib. Since research studies on migrant integration have primarily remained focused on its structural and practical aspects, taking, as Korac (2003) called it, a “top-down” approach, these findings make salient the narratives of identity and integration at the grassroots, directly from the perspective of the youth.

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# CONCLUSION

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# CHAPTER NINE

# CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have been about Shirin, Bushr, Faiza, Adam, Jameela and Usman. About how they have constructed their lives in the Czech Republic. I have aimed to look at their stories to investigate how the systems within which the youth exist operate, influencing the youth's quotidian, including bodily experiences. By putting them at the centre of their narratives, I have striven to understand how the youth navigate, negotiate, and in return, agentially influence the systems and structures around them. Such exploration has been founded upon relationships I have formed with the youth over almost a year- during which I got a chance to understand, process and reflect upon their narratives and my experiences.

Over the course of the last three analytical chapters, I have explored the ways in which migrant youth construct their identities and integrate across different locations- individual, communal and global.

## Answering the Research Questions

*Muslim youth's gender identity and influence of new environment after the migration.*

In the present research, I found that the Muslim youth's experiences and expressions of gender were influenced by demands of being in their place of migration. This was largely reflected in overt and covert embodied ways. Based in more overt embodiment of gender expressions, as Muslim youth in the Czech Republic, the youth are restricted by what Ahmed calls "body motility" what their body can or can not do. Bushr, the young Muslim man of this research, relinquishes signs and symbols largely associated with Muslim men- like beard, specific clothing. Even when he experiments with his physical appearance, he does so in the privacy of his home. At the same time, Shirin, a Muslim woman from Iran, finds an opportunity to stop the use of head-covering- chador, mandatory in her country of origin.

Along more covert embodiment of gender identity, the youth's bodies become sites of

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exploitation or exploration in their country of destination. This is largely reflected in their experiences of navigating work or personal relationships in the Czech Republic. Perceived notions of ideal masculinity which ascribe the breadwinner role to men push them into exploitative forms of labour. Due to a lack of education and resources, migrant men find it difficult to join in the mainstream Czech labour market. As a result, they get absorbed into ethnic economies where the work is marked by long working hours and poor working conditions. Perceived notions of ideal femininity or normative femininity establish certain rules surrounding what it means to be a “good girl/ woman.” In my analysis I found how Shirin, negotiates and effectively reinterprets the rule of protecting sexual virginity by exploring avenues of same-sex relationships, relatively more accepted in the context of Czechia, otherwise considered “haram” based on Islamic jurisprudence.

*Post-migration period and the Muslim youth´s sense of belonging.*

Based on the analysis of participant narratives, I have found that due to migration to a country with a small Muslim community, the youth’s belonging is limited to and mediated by their family and immigrant community.

This is evidenced in the young participants reaching out to their family and fellow community members for recreational activities like playing some sports, celebrating important occasions, for work and education as in the case of young migrant men working in ethnic economies, and young women largely pursuing high status careers like medicine based on family and community counsel. Further, the youth’s sense of belonging is effected by the response of their host environment. According to the experiences of the six participants as Muslim immigrants, the everyday places that they frequent like school, workplace and the larger institutions that they interact with like the government, religious institutions can be marked with racist outlook or an outlook indifferent to the needs of specific immigrant groups.

*Tools and strategies that young migrants use to integrate with the host and immigrant communities in the Czech Republic.*

In the case of the Muslim migrant participants of this study, I noted the use of social

media tools like Instagram and TikTok that have helped the youth to cultivate a sense of empathy, tolerance for and learning from differing views from around the world that they come across on these websites. In their everyday life, the young participants use different approaches to integrate. At times, they create new friendship bonds based on shared vulnerabilities as regards to migration experiences with their peers in school or university. However, due to a paucity of migrants, the participants may alternatively distance themselves from the migrants not perceived as making efforts to integrate and empathise with the the critical outlook toward immigrants held by the local host communities in the Czech Republic.

Lastly, I found how the young immigrants reimagine what it means to integrate in the host community especially in the immediate setting of their school/university by re-evaluating their own value against that of their peers, and asserting themselves as "different but equal" via representation of their ethnic and cultural selves- celebrating special occasions wearing ethnic attires and partaking in ethnic food, introducing their peers to culturally relevant information about themselves in informal settings.

## Situating the Youth Experiences Within an Ecological Framework

The experiences of the participants have been mapped along the ecological systems to understand how the youth relate to the individual systems.

### *Microsystem*

As mentioned previously, microsystem involves the individual herself and the entities with which the individual is in direct contact. The key microsystems for the participants of this study are: home environment, friendships and peers at school/college, workplace or outside. Home environment may comprise of guardian figures which may or may not be parents but also relations like grandparents, members of extended family like aunts, etc. At school and workplace, the youth is surrounded by peers, which refers to the social community within school and workplace beyond the individual's immediate friends' group and with whom the individual may come into direct contact, and friends, the main support structure that

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provide relevant emotional and intellectual impetus. In the present context, these microsystems are key in the youth's identity and integration against a migration context.

Peers

The peer-group in the school and at the workplace can be understood in light of Tajfel's social identity theory wherein individuals have a tendency to belong to a group which has a socially superior status (Plenty and Jonnson, 2017). As such, based on this social hierarchy, the majority group may distance themselves from ethnic minorities to attain a higher social status. This outlook was evident in the initial years where Bushr experienced racist verbal abuse at the hands of his classmates and Maryam was at the receiving-end of offhanded racist comments from people at her workplace. Given the in-group status of the majority in schools and workplaces is determined by certain similar characteristics like appearance, mannerisms, the youth of this study have proactively attempted to bridge this gap. Jameela and Maryam have both relinquished the use of head-covering, Bushr, Adam and Usman have steered clear of markers associated with Muslim men in the West like beard. Additionally, the youth have negotiated belonging into their social groups by finding points of commonalities like connecting over pop cultural and sports interests.

Community

Beyond the school and workplace, largely the youth had more friends with similar ethnic backgrounds or immigrant backgrounds, and in some cases, friends who were also relatives as in the case of Bushr with whom he would travel to Germany or go on camping trips. This may be because extended family networks are more readily available to the immigrant youth (Ajrouch, Hakim-Larson and Faikh, 2015). Within school and workplace, supportive friendship can provide emotional support and strategies for integration and assertion like exchanging cultural information, learning the host community language. Creation of friend groups based on shared interests like love for certain sports helps off-load the immigrant experiences in an indirect, safe and efficient way (Middleton et. al, 2021)

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Home-Environment

For the youth of this study, the home environment represents a microcosm of their culture, surrounded both physically and socially by the host community. The guardians at home often assume a more directive style of parenting whereby the youth are put on a particular course be it in terms of education, career or general conduct which is culturally-sensitive. Additionally, the guardians provide counsel to help alleviate the youth's experiences. The youth's negotiations with guardians reflect the former's attempt at balancing the demands of the host society with those of one's own ethnic origins. These negotiations are successful insofar as they do not compromise the material security and respectable social position earned by the family and immigrant community at large.

In summary, the micro-system identifies the context for the youth's identity and integration experiences which involves challenges like racial discrimination, in-group versus out-group differences, but also the support available to the youth in terms of supportive friendships and directive style of parenting in the home environment. Research with immigrant youth from Arab countries in the US has shown that the youth display better functional, emotional and financial connectedness due to the authoritative (not to be confused with authoritarian parenting style) parenting style (Wrobel, 2013).

***Meso-system***

Meso-system involves an interaction between different micro-systems. In this study, the youth's affiliation with their peers was to some extent guided by their immigrant family cultural and social values (Paat, 2013). This follows from the previous mention of "directive style" of parenting. Upon arrival to the Czech Republic, the families helped involve the youth in wider established Muslim migrant networks. This took various forms like enlisting the help of NGOs to get to know other immigrants, carrying out recreational activities like sports, festival celebrations with fellow Muslim immigrants, participating in Quranic learning circles (Halaqah) and visits to the mosques. By facilitating these cohesive bonds with fellow immigrant with similar backgrounds, it is hoped that the youth will not only find their

community of like-minded friends and thrive in the new environment, but also retain their cultural values.

However, the youth of this research do not limit their interactions to the physical world. Their online interactions with peers from school and friends from community, situated internationally, evolves into a space for communication of ideas surrounding socio-political values and belonging beyond borders. Engaging with peers with contrasting socio-religio-political viewpoints teaches the youth to manage and mobilise perception at the grassroots, whereby the reach of parents, teachers or other figures of authority is limited. This cooperative style of mutual learning ushers the young immigrants into eventually asserting their own values at par with those of the host community.

Typically, the youth have described their social interactions with peers and home environment in two ways- passive and active. While being passive the youth may accept the decisions of their parents with regards to their careers, conduct and relationships; and absorb racial, religious and sex-based discriminatory messages shared by their peers online- through memes, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instragram. But the participants of this study have also been continually engaged in negotiations with other stakeholders in their microsystem to actively assert themselves. They have negotiated with their families to not wear hijabs, sought advice from their family and community to tackle the onslaught of racist abuse whether offline or online, confronted their peers regarding the latter's misconceived notions surrounding Muslim migrants.

Within mesosystem, the chronosystem chronicles how the passage of time has impacted the development of youth identities and their integration. At the time of their arrival, the youth were tasked with adjusting to their new socio-politico-religious environment, finding new friends and peers, learning Czech language, performing well in schools/workplaces using this new language. Aided by their higher socio-economic status in their countries of origin, which afforded them an English education or even engagement with English media, the youth have been able to navigate their host community with relative ease. This is substantiated with Norris and Inglehart's (2012: 242) observation that younger immigrant groups with

higher socio-economic status or higher educational qualification are likely to find it easier to relocate. Gradually, the youth's social integration outcomes in terms of making friends, which has a bearing on their mental health, well-being, self-esteem and worth, improves.

***Exosystem***

Exosystem involves the institutions that indirectly influence the youth. While never at the direct receiving end of the violence, the youth of this research are nonetheless privy to the Islamophobic climate in the Czech Republic and Europe at large which manifests in Czech nationalist public protests, anti-Muslim rhetoric in the mass media which further informs the opinions of political parties and populist leaders (Hafez, 2018). In 2020, the wall of the mosque in Brno, second largest city of the Czech Republic, was vandalised with an Islamophobic message reading: "Do not spread Islam in the Czech Republic or else we will kill you." These protests and acts can create a very unwelcome environment, potentially threatening the youth, their families, their safety and even their lives.

Another institution that indirectly influences the lives of young migrants is the government(s). Right at the onset, the supranational organisations like the EU and the UN arbitrarily determine the number of forced migrants a country may host. However, the policies of a nation ultimately determine their outlook to migration and the number of people who actually end up staying. The Czech Republic with its conservative admission of non-European immigrants is an unfavourable destination. The participants of my study reported how they would rather like to work and reside in the bordering nation of Germany due to latter's relatively liberal policies for migrants. An interesting corollary to the role of supranational institutions is how these institutions lead to extending services to a group of immigrants at the exclusion of another group, typically not categorised as asylum-seekers or refugees. During my research, I found an instance of how under the UNHCR led idobrovolnik program, Usman as an asylum-seeker was provided with an opportunity to learn and pursue football through the non-profit OPU volunteers whereas Bushr, residing in the Czech Republic as a long-term resident with his family who did not arrive as asylum-seekers, could not avail said opportunity nor afford it in an independent

capacity. Indirect influences of an anti-Muslim climate and supranational organisations were the two significant exosystems I found through the experiences of the young participants.

***Macrosystem***

As previously noted, macrosystem is characterised by the cultural patterns which are imprinted through the course of an individual's development. In Chapter 5, I explored one such macrosystem of gender socialisation and how it impacts the identities and integration of Muslim migrant youth (Suárez-Orozco and Qin, 2006). Reconfigurations of gender performances as a result of migration presents both challenges and opportunities for the youth. For the young women of this study, lack of religion-centred social rules, leniency in familial enforcement of appropriate behaviour and negative social feedback in strict religious adherence amounts to experience of liberation and exploration. At the same time, migration foreshadows the withdrawal of young men from their culturally and socially unique context of "hegemonic masculinities" (Charlsey and Ersanilli, 2019: 129). Against this backdrop, employment in low-skilled but labour intensive jobs presents itself as a viable option to reassert their role as a breadwinner for their family (Kukreja, 2021). I found that the young men's conflation of physical endurance, long-hours of labour, work in inhospitable environments with marker of masculinity inveigles them into a cycle of exploitation.

The Bronfrenbrenner's ecological systems framework has helped map the experiences of the youth within different systems and observe the connections between them. I have noted the germinal role played by the microsystem in facilitating the youth's identities development and their integration in their host community. The inclusion of online presence of the youth in the mesosystem ushers us into a unique space where the migrant youth's experiences find expression. The exosystem and macrosystem issue into more abstract domains of influence, providing insights into the participants cultural contexts.

Life in the Czech Republic, as a Muslim migrant youth largely hailing from the middle and upper- middle class is a mesh of everyday instances of racism, exploitation through

work, exploration through socio-cultural freedoms, reaching and belonging across racial and ethnic lines, and establishing oneself as cosmopolitan members of the society.

In this dissertation, I have investigated how processes of identity construction and integration carried out within power structures and influences facilitate inclusion, exclusion and also negotiations by the youth. For this project, I have borrowed Tajfel's (1981) and Stryker's (1980) work on identity which, as combined, posits that an individual has multiple identities given to them by the social structure surrounding them, which is inherently hierarchical and has differential distribution of power. Based on such an understanding, this study has illustrated how identities are formed through constant interaction with one's environment wherein the latter, at times, determines which identity (ies) to make salient. Across this dissertation, I have argued the youth can not be conceptualised as passive recipients of migration processes. As such, owing to their organization as age and generation-based cohorts, the youth can position themselves as formidable critique of "the logic of racial, national and ethnic essentialism." (Gilroy, 1993b: 6). Even in the face of migratory challenges, the youth have created avenues for exploration and growth.

The agency of the six youth participants has not always been singularly used in challenging the essentialist narratives. In other words, the youth have not always excluded but also included the "Other." Such an analysis was made possible by seeing the youth against a cosmopolitan framework which became an important theoretical yardstick to understand enactment of youth agency. Another key finding has been the narrators' expressions of cosmopolitan outlook in the face of a migration discourse which situates migrants within a transnational framework, rooted in and by extension hindered by their national identities. The cosmopolitanism of their everyday lives marked by efforts to engage with multitude of cultures and understanding others' vulnerabilities have introduced the youth of this research as significant stakeholders of the cosmopolitan project. As the researcher, this was a central theoretical point of departure and helped me reflect on the discursive logics of migration and how it works to limit or disallow migrants' inclusion in non-localised knowledge production.

As it must be evident by now, the youth of this study are engaged in active and selective exercise of their agencies- they pick their battles as and when they deem fit. On one hand,

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to extend belonging across racial lines, they may rely on tools provided by the diaspora like advice on pursuit of certain careers to elevate their social status in their host community; on the other hand, their agency is expressed through negotiating heteronormative ideals, debating racist narratives, asserting their cultural values and symbols. There is never a moment of absolute powerlessness (Wolkowitz, 2006: 139). However, I also acknowledge that the participants of this research are aided by many privileges that enable them to challenge the influences of power structures- their middle/upper middle class status, parents with international networks, knowledge of English language in a Czech and rather global context, exposure to international media.

Another aspect that features in the analysis is how the diaspora, including the youth in its ambit, organised in public spaces- demanding their rightful religious spaces, celebrating festivals in small public gatherings. This conflation of public and private spheres as in case of Faiza wearing the hijab as expression of her religiosity is met with terse response from the host community. However the underlying racist, patriarchal, xenophobic notions rears its ugly head once juxtaposed against depiction of religious symbols belonging to the host community as in the case of public Christmas celebrations.

According to the narratives, the decision to migrate to the Czech Republic has been inevitably made by the older family members as all the migrant youth of this study were young underage pre-teens or teenagers when they first came to the Czech Republic. Given the escalation of political conflicts in their region, the migratory decisions have- in case of Bushr, Faiza, Usman and Jameela- been taken in relative haste. Upon arrival to the Czech Republic, the youth is embroiled in long and harrowing processes of obtaining or extending visas. On a macro-level, Middle-eastern migration can be attributed to economic and political violence in the Middle-East as a result of colonial and imperial policies in the 20th century. The youth of this study hail from countries where civil wars or abject economic conditions have made life impossible in their countries of origin. The choice of the Czech Republic, over other more favored European destination for migrants such as Germany, is a result of previous ties the migrants had with this particular country as in family members having previously worked in the region during the Soviet era, owing to the Soviet Union trade and economic ties with “progressive regimes of the third world” along with the Czech Republic serving as a “gateway to Europe” and relatively underdeveloped migration laws in comparison with Western European countries. On a

micro-level, the families of the migrant youth have been guided by a vision of finding stability and decent standards of living which would eventually (no body knows when) help them return to their homeland. At the meso-level is the “migration machinary,” that facilitates entry of migrants within Europe- network of smugglers that charge inexorbitant amounts to transfer migrant across state borders; institutions providing short-term courses for migrants to enrol in so as to attain visa for a European country.

**Implications**

Primarily, this study contributes to our understanding of those subgroup experiences- Muslim immigrant youth- that have not been previously studied in the Czech Republic in the context of migration. As such, this research has developed our understanding of the ways in which migration influences identity experiences. The findings of the study reinforce the need to conceptualise integration models in ways which recognise that migration has a multifaceted influence on youth identities (Beazley, 2015; Sirin and Fine, 2007). Situating the youth within different ecological systems has highlighted how the youth are influenced by and in turn influence the ecological systems in their host community. The youth’s community, cultural and global systems become especially relevant in explaining the link between migration and identities. Additionally, this study is the first such work to explore Muslim youth’s migration experiences in the Czech Republic, supplementing the vast repository of studies empirically exploring the links between migration and identities.

In this regard, the findings of this study suggest that the youth’s experiences of migration to the host community are marked by Reconfiguration of their gender performances, Reliance on their migrant community and Reassessment of their own value as members of the host community. Thus, as recommendation for future research, there is a need to create conceptual models that account for the plurality of youth identities and their agential influence on systems around them in the context of the Czech Republic.

Concerning stakeholder implications, it is evident that migrant-inclusive initiatives help in leading positive integration outcomes (McDaniel, 2019). This way migration can lead to positive social changes instead of adding to the “problems” in the host community. In today’s globalized world where parts of the world tackle the challenges of socio-political,

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economic and ecological crises while other parts face demographic shortages (UN News, 2015[13]), migration becomes increasingly central. In such a case, migrant-inclusive initiatives can serve as a strategic tool for the policy-makers to field the demands of supranational organisations like the European Union and the national polity.

In this study, I have provided an insight into the youth experiences of migration, at home, in school, within the migrant and host community. Albeit, given the constraints of Covid-19 pandemic, I was limited to interviews with only the young migrants. Ideally, perspectives from their home and migrant community (parents or guardians and migrant peers and their families), school (peers and teachers) and host community (Czech migration authorities, NGO workers) would have painted a more holistic picture, bringing the bilateral interactions between the youth and ecological systems into a much sharper relief.

Against this backdrop, the following couple of recommendations maybe used by practitioners in the field:

1) Influence of Family and Community in Determining Educational and Career Paths

The youth of this research were placed on pre-determined educational and career trajectories toward the well-meaning aim of elevating the youth's and by extension the family's social status in the host community. This has been substantiated with research on immigrant youth in the UK (Dale et. al., 2002). Further there were marked differences in parents' outlook toward careers and education of their daughters- made to pursue high-status careers like medical professions and sons- ushered into exploitative ethnic economies.

Recommendation: There is a need to create awareness among state agencies, schools, counsellors and families regarding possible mental stress due to forcing young immigrants into limited careers coupled with information germination regarding alternative educational and vocational pathways. Moreover, there should be provision of

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https://news.un.org/en/story/2015/10/511282-interview-refugees-are-responsibility-world-proximity-doesnt-define

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apprenticeship programs for young immigrants within mainstream labour market such that they are not pushed into unregulated ethnic economies, while additionally alerting state authorities regarding potential exploitative practices like lack of legal contracts in ethnic economies so as to safeguard the participating workers.

2) Youth as Active Stakeholders in the process of identities' formation and integration in the host community

In this study, the young participants situated within the ecological systems were engaged in negotiating their identities in relation to the structures around them- both from their countries of origin and the country of settlement. This resulted in learning a mixed repertoire of norms, diktats, values and traditions showcased selectively in response to diverse circumstances at school, in community, at workplace.

Recommendation: Given young immigrants spend a large portion of their time in school/universities, it becomes pertinent to utilise this space to constructively mobilise immigrant youth agency. Teachers can organise and moderate Open dialogue in schools and universities involving immigrant and local youth to share culturally-relevant information, relate as an age-based cohort, and to rectify any misconceptions, prejudices and stereotypes held by (largely and more significantly) the latter group.

Countries need to normalise migration as a global trend. This becomes especially relevant for countries like the Czech Republic with a relatively shorter history of non-EU immigration. The task to reconcile the UN Sustainable Development Goals for safe and regular migration and settlement with the local attitudes can be made easy through documenting of immigrant experiences, acknowledging them as equal stakeholders and facilitating social awareness of their perspectives.

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# APPENDIX A

## Informed Consent Form

Propojený obrázek nelze zobrazit. Příslušný soubor byl pravděpodobně přesunut, přejmenován nebo odstraněn. Ověřte, zda propojení odkazuje na správný soubor a umístění.



# APPENDIX B

*Semi-structured Interview Questions and Prompts for the Participants.*

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Conducted by: Shreya Bhardwaj

1. What does an average day look like for you? Right after you wake up, please tell me the things that you do- places that you go to, people whom you to talk to or see. How has covid-19 affected your life?
2. Tell me about your family- what do your parents and siblings (if you have any) do? What is your role in your family?
3. Tell me about the place where you live- your neighbourhood, your neighbors.
4. Tell me about your school- your friends, your teachers.
5. What do you do in your free time?
6. Tell me about your life in your country of origin- your family, friends and school there. What do you think is happening in your country? What does it mean to be from country?
7. Tell me about your life in the Czech Republic so far.
8. Could you make a life events timeline where you note down important life events you have experienced? These life events do not have to correspond to social milestones, for example, 18 is an important milestone from society's perspective where you can become eligible to vote but personally for you, maybe 18 was not as important, maybe when you turned 17 or 19, it was more important. So I want you to make a timeline for events that were personally important to you.
9. Tell me about your relationship with your religion; your experiences of being a Muslim in your country of origin and in the Czech Republic.
10. What do you think it means to be a woman or a girl/ a man or a boy?
11. What do you hope to be in the future? How did you choose this particular field?

Propojený obrázek nelze zobrazit. Příslušný soubor byl pravděpodobně přesunut, přejmenován nebo odstraněn. Ověřte, zda propojení odkazuje na správný soubor a umístění.