



***Intersecting Cultures: An Analysis of Acculturation Communication
Strategies Among Arab-Muslim Immigrants in Europe
“selected samples & attitudes from Czech society”***

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Abstract:

This study investigates the acculturation processes among Arab-Muslim immigrants in Czech society, tracing the historical roots of the Czech-Islam relationship and focusing particularly on the period from 1989 to 2015. It explores the evolving interactions and strategies used by Arab-Muslim immigrants for integration, while retaining their cultural and religious identity. Utilizing a qualitative research method, the study relies on indepth interviews to gather firsthand experiences and perspectives of these immigrants. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics of acculturation and the interaction between different cultures and identities within the Czech context. This research offers significant insights into the challenges faced by Arab-Muslim immigrants and their integration strategies, enhancing our comprehension of cultural interplay and societal adaptation in Czech society.

Keywords: *Acculturation, Communication, Czech Society, Arab-Muslims, Immigrant Minority, Sociocultural Dynamics, Historical Backdrop, Intergroup Relations.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Islam, representing the second-largest faith community globally, has witnessed an enduring and significant expansion across diverse geographies, including regions traditionally characterized by high levels of secularization. This ongoing growth of Islam has incited academic curiosity, stimulating scholars to investigate the underlying mechanisms propelling this increase, particularly within the context of the Western world.

Unlike its religious counterparts such as Judaism, Christianity, and various East Asian spiritual traditions, Islam extends beyond the realm of the purely religious. It encapsulates a comprehensive worldview that encompasses not only spiritual dimensions, but also provides perspectives on multifarious aspects of human existence such as morality, politics, economics, and law. Moreover, it prescribes rules governing both the social and private life of its adherents. Consequently, Islam can be aptly perceived as a holistic way of life, rather than a mere spiritual path.

The adoption of this comprehensive Islamic worldview can often pose certain challenges within the context of a secular public sphere. The principles guiding secular spaces can sometimes stand in stark contrast to Islamic precepts, generating tensions and necessitating negotiation. This predicament is particularly pronounced among first-generation Muslim immigrants originating from societies traditionally characterized as Islamic. They are thrust into the task of reconciling their deeply ingrained Islamic ethos with the realities of a secular Western environment.

Western and Central Europe constitute key regions that have been the recipients of substantial waves of Muslim immigration, particularly of Arab Muslims. This trend can be attributed to the unique geographical proximity and shared historical legacies binding these regions. However, the reception of these immigrants in their host countries has been a mixed bag, often shaped by the specific economic exigencies and the cultural context of the host societies. As such, the host countries' responses significantly determine the scale and nature of their immigrant reception.

An intriguing case study in this context is the Czech Republic, which comparatively, has witnessed a relatively modest influx of Muslim immigrants, particularly Arab Muslims, vis-à-vis its Western and Central European counterparts. The number of Arab Muslims in the Czech Republic is relatively diminutive, although exact statistics are elusive. Intriguingly, the Czech Republic, with its proud secular heritage and globally recognized status as a nation with high atheism rates, provides a fertile ground for exploring the dynamics of religious minority-majority interaction.

This context invites us to delve into understanding the strategies deployed by Arab Muslims, as a minority group, in their engagement with the secular Western societies. How do they navigate their distinct cultural-religious backgrounds within the cultural fabric of the majority culture in their host society? This forms the primary line of inquiry in our study.

1. Historical Background of Muslims in Czechia:

Muslim interactions with the geographical territory now recognized as the Czech Republic trace back to the medieval era, although these contacts were comparatively peripheral and largely restricted to sporadic encounters along medieval trade routes. The earliest documented mention of Islam in the region can be located in the Old Slavic text "The Life of Saint Cyril", wherein "Cyril", also known as "Constantine", provides the first known reference to the Prophet "Muhammad" and the Qur'an within this context. Archaeological

evidence further illuminates the presence of Muslims in ancient Bohemia, as exemplified by the discovery of Islamic coins, notably the "Iranian dirham", in Kelk in Moravia (Panýrková, 2009, p. 11)

Another significant medieval source offering insight into the social fabric of the Czech territory is the account by the Muslim traveler "Ibrahim bin Yaqub al-Tartushi", dispatched as an emissary by the Umayyad Caliph in Andalusia, "Abd al-Rahman III" (Charvát & Prosecký, 1996)

A critical inflection point in the history of Islam in the region arrived in 1878, concurrent with the launch of a military campaign by Austria-Hungary to displace the Ottomans from Bosnia. The consequent political turbulence during the period 1878-1918 instigated the emigration of "Bosnak" Muslims to various territories within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including the Czech lands.

The trajectory of Islam within the region was further marked by Emperor Francis Joseph 1's promulgation of Law No. 159/1912 on June 15, 1912, which recognized the Islamic faith in Hungary. The year 1934 saw the establishment of the "Islamic Religious Community of Czechoslovakia" in Prague on November 8th, under the leadership of key figures such as the Egyptian Consul General Abdul Hamid Pasha, the Indian Muslim thinker Dr. Sajid Hassan Mirza Kanna, and the Czech journalist Muhammad Abdullah "Bohdan Prixios". Initial membership at its inception in Prague in early 1934-35 was estimated at approximately 700 members (Mendel, Bronislav, & Tomás, 2007, p. 356.)

This religious entity was subsequently accorded recognition as the "Islamic religious community in Bohemia and Moravia in Prague" by the Presidium of the Ministerial Council on December 18, 1941, although the recognition was not extended to all of Czechoslovakia.

Historically, the Muslim community faced challenges due to its association with the fascism propagated by Perseus, as a section of the Muslim population had aligned with the belief that

the Third Reich would liberate them from colonial oppression. The subsequent Nazi occupation did not significantly alter the size of the Muslim community in the region.

The peaceful conditions prevailing in 1968 provided a conducive environment for the Czech Muslim community to rally for the establishment of an organization known as "Yeni Ceri - The Social Organization of Muslims" in Prague. Concurrently, an application to register the "Union of Muslim Communities in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic" was submitted to the Ecclesiastical Affairs Office in the Ministry of Culture.

However, the period of normalization spanning the 1970s and 1980s heralded a phase of relative stagnation for the Muslim community in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (Mendel, Bronislav, & Tomás, 2007, pp. 362-371.)

The socio-political events of November 1989 initiated a period more amenable to the growth and development of the Czech Muslim community.

2. Categorization of the Muslim Population in the Czech Republic:

Muslims in the Czech Republic comprise a diverse demographic and can be compartmentalized into three broad categories:

- 1.2 Czech Nationals who have embraced Islam: This category, although minimal in numbers, represents the most active cohort within the Muslim population.
- 2.2 Foreign-born individuals with Czech citizenship: Predominantly arriving in the Czech

Republic during the 1970s and 1980s, this group's migration coincided with the burgeoning relationship between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and allied Arab socialist nations, fostering opportunities for study and work.

3.2 Non-Czech foreigners: Constituting individuals residing in the Czech Republic on the strength of either permanent or long-term visas, this category burgeoned post-1989, with the arrival of students and entrepreneurs.

Predominantly of Arab descent, the Muslim community in the Czech Republic is also enriched by people hailing from the Balkans, Turkey, Pakistan, Chechnya, and other former Soviet central countries, along with Asian republics. The Czech Republic's induction into the European Union and the concomitant rise in living standards have led to an influx of immigrants for whom the Czech Republic has transitioned from being merely a transit nation to a permanent destination (Mendel, Bronislav, & Tomáš, 2007, pp. 362-371).

On May 18, 1991, statutes of the Islamic religious communities of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic were ratified in Prague, drawing inspiration from the models of the First Republic. The appointment of Professor "Šilhavý" as the chair, along with the majority of committee members hailing from Brno, indicated a shift towards a Moravian orientation.

However, the subsequent dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the enforcement of Law No. 308/1991 Coll on religious freedom and the status of churches and religious associations did not extend recognition to the Muslim community. Law amendments enacted in 2002-2003, however, paved the way for the establishment of a Muslim community headquarters in 2004 (Panýrková, 2009, p. 18).

During the period 1989-1992, Prague's Muslim community congregated in various locales - university dormitories, rented halls, and the Egyptian embassy - for Friday prayers and festive celebrations. It was only in 1992 that the Prague Muslim community leased permanent premises in Prague 4 - Krč, principally to cater to the needs of foreign Muslims, under the aegis of the General Union of Muslim Students in the Czech Republic. Subsequently, a new Islamic Center was inaugurated on May 26, 1999.

Attendance at Friday prayers is dominated by Arab-Muslims, followed by Czech converts to Islam. Given the cosmopolitan nature of the gathering, the sermon is delivered in Arabic, Czech, and English, drawing approximately 300-500 believers.

The Foundation, beyond being a religious center, also aims to be a comprehensive service provider for the Muslim community in the Czech Republic. Offering Arabic language classes at a nominal weekly fee of 65 CZK, it also facilitates the reading and interpretation of the Qur'an in Arabic and Czech, along with providing educational programs for children and lectures. Islamic marriages are conducted in the mosque as per traditional Islamic rituals, with the prerequisite of a civil marriage certificate as per Czech law. In addition, the Foundation also provides male circumcision services and traditional Islamic burial rites.

Funded by "zakat" from affluent Muslims and charitable donations, the Foundation's resources are exclusively earmarked for social aid for disadvantaged families and individuals. It monitors conditions in refugee camps with significant Muslim populations and liaises with prison administrations. Its outreach extends to providing clothing, holiday celebrations, children's education, financial aid, and assistance with integration into Czech society. Its activities are closely coordinated with other organizations, notably the Islamic

Foundation in Brno, which manages the Brno Islamic Center, the nerve center of Islamic groups and organizations, and the Muslim Student Union (Islámská nadace v Praze).

The Islamic Foundation in Brno, mirroring its counterpart in Prague, strives to provide for the spiritual needs of its believers. A unique aspect of the Brno society is its robust emphasis on public engagement. It organizes open days that offer a wide array of supplementary programs. Notably, it also arranges for discussions with university students, fostering a platform for

interfaith dialogue (Islámská nadace v Praze).

In the aftermath of 1989, several Islamic organizations emerged within the Czech Republic, including:

- The Union of Muslim Students in the Czech Republic, established in 1992.
- The Muslim Union, registered as a civic association in 2000.
- The Islamic Union, founded in 1990, officially registered with the Ministry of the Interior as a cultural and social organization.
- An internet club specifically for Czech Muslim women.
- A group identified as Liberal Muslims, which, however, ceased operations on August 16, 2020.

A study conducted by "Jiří Schneider", titled "Muslim Minorities and Czech Society," and recently published in the monograph "Islam and Policy in Central Europe" by the Open Society Institute in Budapest, identifies a broad spectrum of anti-Islam sentiment within the Czech Republic. This comprises Eurosceptics, evangelical Christian fundamentalists, secular liberal feminists, Roman-Catholic traditionalists, opponents of Turkish EU membership, and proponents of the separation of church and state who view Islam as a governance religion.

Schneider outlines the main criticisms levied against Islam as follows:

- Islamic centers could potentially serve as incubators of terrorism, facilitating its financing and logistical operations.
- Center pulpits might be abused to incite religious intolerance and violent jihad.
- Islam is often seen as endorsing the subordination of women and promoting gender inequality.
- Conceding to the comprehensive aspirations of Islam or abandoning secular jurisdiction could lead to the formation of a parallel Muslim society.
- Turkish EU membership could precipitate the "Islamization" of Europe.

The book market in recent years has seen the emergence of several Czech translations of foundational anti-Islam books (Ostřanský, 2010).

3 Acculturation:

Acculturation is the process through which individuals or groups adopt the beliefs, behaviors, and cultural attributes of another culture, particularly when two disparate cultural groups come into direct and continuous contact. Classically defined, "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Berry, 1997). In practice, one group, referred to as the "acculturating group," typically undergoes more cultural change than the other.

This process can unfold in several ways, and Berry (1997) identifies four strategies of acculturation:

- 1.3 Integration, in which individuals strive to preserve their original culture while simultaneously aiming to participate in the larger society and its dominant culture.
- 3.2 Fusion, or assimilation, where individuals attempt to disengage from their original culture and adopt the dominant culture in its stead.
- 3.3 Separation, or segregation, where individuals value their original culture highly and reject or avoid the dominant culture.
- 4.3 Marginalization, in which individuals display little interest in preserving their original culture or in engaging with the dominant culture.

Considering the definition of acculturation and these four strategies, in conjunction with the findings from the study "Selected Attitudes of Muslims Toward Life in the Czech Republic

in the Context of Their Faith" by Jiří Čeněk, Aneta Kompérová, and Josef Smolík, we may infer that Arab-Muslim immigrants' acculturation process in Czech society primarily adopts the strategies of Integration or Separation.

The choice between these strategies will depend on a variety of factors, including the openness of the host society, the willingness and capacity of the immigrants to adapt, the extent of the cultural distance between the two groups, and the individual's personal attitudes and beliefs. Understanding these dynamics can provide valuable insights into the experiences of Arab-Muslim immigrants in Czech society and contribute to the development of more inclusive policies and practices).

II. Methods and Samples:

The methodology of this study was centered around personal interviews with Arab Muslims residing in Brno, Czech Republic. With the aid of the Brno Mosque administration, and through engagements in prominent Arab shops in the city, we sought to select a diverse sample from various age groups. However, the process wasn't devoid of challenges. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were primarily restricted to interacting with men as they were the major demographic allowed in the mosque. Additionally, a number of individuals expressed reluctance to participate in the study out of concern for potential security implications.

Ultimately, the study was able to conduct personal interviews with eight participants. In these interviews, we posed a total of 18 different questions that fell under three main categories: socio-demographic inquiries, questions about religiosity (belief and practice), and questions regarding their relationships with the rest of society, including authorities.

Our samples were Arab Muslims who migrated to the Czech Republic between 1989 and 2015. The choice of this period was deliberate in order to investigate the relationship of the Arab Muslim minority with the non-Muslim Czech majority during a time of societal openness following the fall of communism, but before the 2015 migration crisis sparked a surge of Islamophobia throughout Europe.

The socio-demographic data gathered from the study is summarized in Table No. 01. The age group of 30-39 is the most represented, making up 50% of the sample. This is followed by those aged 40-49 (37.5%), and those aged 50 and above (12.5%). The absence of the age group 18-29 is due to our study's focus on immigrants who arrived prior to 2015, making younger age at migration less likely.

Education-wise, the majority of participants had attended university, comprising 75% of the sample. A similar percentage (75%) of participants are married, indicating a degree of social stability. The reasons for immigration were predominantly economic (75%), while family reasons accounted for the remaining 25% of responses.

Table (1)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	08	100
	Female	00	00
Age group	30-39	04	50
	40-49	03	37.5

	50 and more	01	12.5
Education	High School	02	25
	University	06	75
Marital status	Single	01	12.5
	Married	01	12.5
	Married & father	06	75
	Divorced/widowed	00	00
Year of coming to CZ	1989-2000	02	25
	2001-2010	03	37.5
	2010-2015	03	37.5
Reason for coming to CZ	Economic	06	75
	Family	02	25
Region	North Africa "Maghreb Region"	03	37.5
	Middle East	05	62.5

The source: Prepared by the researcher.

III. Results and discussion :

Ultimately, In this section, we will examine and interpret the findings derived from personal interviews. We have grouped the questions into two categories: queries about Religiosity (belief and practice) and those concerning relations with others, specifically with Czech society and authorities.

a) First Category:

Question 1: On a scale from low to high, how would you describe your degree of religiosity in general?

After posing this question to the Arab-Muslim participants, we offered three options: low, medium, or high levels of religiosity. The responses were evenly split, with half of the participants identifying as moderately religious and the other half indicating a high level of religiosity. None of the participants chose the 'low' option. This suggests that the participants have a significant commitment to their religious faith and practices.

Question 2: Do you engage in religious rituals?

We asked this question because Islam doesn't distinguish between faith and practice. Given the previously stated high degree of religiosity, we wanted to assess the consistency of religious practice among our participants. The findings revealed that 25% of participants practice certain religious rituals sporadically, such as prayer, but observe Ramadan fasting and celebrate religious holidays regularly. Meanwhile, a significant majority (75%) of the participants consistently uphold daily religious practices, including praying five times a day,

attending Friday prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and celebrating religious festivals. This high level of engagement implies a deep commitment to their religious obligations.

Table 1 / Category 1 of Q1 & Q2:

On a scale from low to high, how would you describe your degree of religiosity in general?	Low level	Medium level	High level
Percent	00	50	50
Do you engage in religious rituals?	no	Some times	permanently
Percent	00	25	75

The source: Prepared by the researcher.

Question 3: Do you identify first as a Muslim and then as a citizen of your country, or the other way around?

Through this question, we sought to gain further insight into the acculturation strategy our participants employ. A mere 12.5% of participants prioritized their national identity over their religious identity. On the other hand, a significant majority, 87.5% of the participants, identified first with Islam and then their country of residence. This indicates a strong religious self-identification among the majority of our Arab-Muslim participants in the Czech Republic.

Table 2 / Category 1 of Q3:

Do you identify first as a Muslim and then as a citizen of your country, or the other way around?	Country	Islam
Percent	12.5	87.5

The source: Prepared by the researcher.

b) Second Category :

Question 1: Do you encounter any difficulties in practicing Islamic rites?

In this query, we sought to understand if our participants were able to freely practice their religious rites and whether they encountered any obstacles, particularly considering that most of these rites occur within a secularized public sphere. Interestingly, the majority of our participants, 62.5%, reported experiencing no difficulties in practicing their religious rites. A minor percentage, 12.5%, sometimes encountered difficulties, while 25% reported that they

often found it challenging. The difficulties, as explained by the participants, often related to their work schedules or the nature of their jobs, which occasionally made it impossible for them to perform certain religious duties, many of which are tied to specific times and, in some cases, specific locations.

Question 2: Has the treatment from non-Muslim Czech society changed after 2015?

This question aimed to uncover whether the attitudes of the non-Muslim Czech society towards our Arab-Muslim participants had been influenced by the wave of Islamophobia that swept across Europe in the wake of the migration crisis. From the perspective of our Arab-Muslim participants, the majority - 87.5% - reported that there was no change in the way they were treated by Czech society. Only a small portion, 12.5%, felt that their treatment had indeed changed.

Question 3: Did the treatment from Czech authorities change after 2015?

The goal of this question was to ascertain whether any pressure had been applied by the Czech authorities on the Arab-Muslim community following the migration crisis. All of the respondents - a full 100% - indicated that they had not noticed any change in the way they were treated by Czech authorities. Some participants even described the relationship as a positive one, while others considered it to be neutral.

Table 1 / Category 2 of Q1 & Q2 & Q3:

Do you encounter any difficulties in practicing Islamic rites?	yes	Some times	no
Percent	25	12.5	62.5
Has the treatment from non-Muslim Czech society changed after 2015?	yes	no	
Percent	12.5	87.5	
Did the treatment from Czech authorities change after 2015?	yes	no	
Percent	00	100	

The source: Prepared by the researcher.

Question 4: Do you believe that Czech schools should teach Islam?

The aim of this question was to gauge how closely Arab-Muslims associate with their original identity, whether they wish to pass it on to their children, and if they have the tendency to impose it on the broader society. We observed that of those who asserted that Islam should be taught in schools, which amounted to 75% of respondents, the majority suggested it should be optional for non-Muslim children and primarily aimed at Muslim children. Some respondents tied their response to the size of the Muslim population, stating that if the population was small,

the teaching of Islam was not necessary and could instead be undertaken at home. A minority, 25.5%, opposed the idea altogether, insisting that religious education should take place at home.

Question 5: Do you believe that Czech authorities should permit Muslims to freely build mosques?

This question was intended to discover if Arab-Muslims wish to openly practice their religious rites and express their cultural identity in the public sphere. A significant majority, 87.5%, answered affirmatively, justifying their stance by pointing out that their population is continually growing and mosques are essential for conducting daily and seasonal rituals. However, 12.5% responded negatively.

Table 2 / Category 2 of Q4 and Q5:

Do you believe that Czech schools should teach Islam?	yes	no
Percent	75	25
Do you believe that Czech authorities should permit Muslims to freely build mosques?	Yes	No
Percent	87.5	12.5

The source: Prepared by the researcher.

Questions 6 & 7: These two questions aim to gauge the participants' response to the Czech public sphere. We are interested in finding out whether the participants have previously experienced discrimination due to their religious identity, and this could potentially influence their choice of acculturation strategy. We observed that the majority, at 62.5%, had previously experienced discrimination due to their religious identity, while 37.5% had not. Interestingly, the same majority (62.5%) also reported feeling safe identifying themselves as Arab-Muslims in the public sphere. Most of them view incidents of discrimination as isolated and not reflective of the general societal attitude, citing their positive interactions within the public space. However, 25% responded that they didn't feel safe, due to past experiences of discrimination from public service workers in hospitals and immigration offices, as well as from property renters. Meanwhile, 12.5% of participants were uncertain.

Table 3 / Category 2 of Q6 and Q7:

Have you previously experienced discrimination due to your religious identity?	yes	no	
Percent	62.5	37.5	
Is it safe to identify yourself as an Arab-Muslim in the public sphere?	Yes	No	I don't know
Percent	62.5	25	12.5

The source: Prepared by the researcher.

IV. Conclusion:

The primary objective of this study was to understand the interaction and integration process of Arab-Muslim immigrants within Czech society. Our results showed that the Arab-Muslim participants demonstrated a profound commitment to their religious and cultural identities. This finding was supported by the participants' high levels of religiosity, which were consistently maintained even within a secular public sphere. This devotion was particularly significant given that the participants are residing in a society known to have some of the world's highest rates of atheism.

In terms of religious practices, most of the participants adhered to their daily rituals without significant difficulties. Despite the societal context they are in, their strong dedication towards their religious duties, be it daily prayers or celebrating religious festivals, remains unaltered. This adherence not only illustrates their strong attachment to their faith but also their ability to maintain their religious obligations within a secular society.

Notably, a majority of participants reported having experienced some form of discrimination in the past due to their religious background. However, this unfortunate experience did not define their overall perspective of Czech society. Instead of allowing these negative experiences to shape their outlook, most of the participants reported having good relationships with non-Muslim Czech citizens, indicating a considerable level of resilience and openness to intercultural interaction.

Based on these observations, we can infer that the acculturation strategy employed by Arab-Muslim participants can be categorized as a blend of integration and separation. On one hand, they strive to maintain their original culture, viewing it as a valuable asset to be inherited by their children. On the other hand, they are capable of distinguishing between their cultural values and those of the host society. They place their religious identity above patriotism, yet do not seek to impose their beliefs onto others.

Simultaneously, these participants perceive their relationships with the wider non-Muslim Czech society, as well as the Czech authorities, to be generally positive. This observation underlines their ability to build and maintain harmonious relationships with others, despite the potential cultural and religious differences. Their relationships are constructed based on shared commonalities, reflecting their ability to balance their cultural preservation with societal integration.

In summary, this study provides valuable insights into the complex process of acculturation among Arab-Muslim immigrants in Czech society. The findings highlight the intricate balance these individuals achieve in preserving their original cultural and religious identity while effectively participating in and contributing to their new societal context.

interview questions:

socio-demographic data:

Sex

Age group

Education

Marital status

Year of coming to CZ

Reason for coming to CZ

Region

First Category:

Q1: On a scale from low to high, how would you describe your degree of religiosity in general?

Q2 : Do you engage in religious rituals?

Q3: Do you identify first as a Muslim and then as a citizen of your country, or the other way around?

Second Category:

Q1: Do you encounter any difficulties in practicing Islamic rites?

Q2: Has the treatment from non-Muslim Czech society changed after 2015?

Q3: Did the treatment from Czech authorities change after 2015?

Q4: Do you believe that Czech schools should teach Islam?

Q5: Do you believe that Czech authorities should permit Muslims to freely build mosques?

Q6: Have you previously experienced discrimination due to your religious identity?

Q7: Is it safe to identify yourself as an Arab-Muslim in the public sphere?

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