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# The 'Local Turn' and Everyday Integration. The Pakistani Middle-Class Migrants in Dubai

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## ABSTRACT

Integration refers to socio-economic and cultural incorporation of migrants into a host society, which should adopt measures to encourage their adaptation by taking over its norms and customs. Recently, the 'local turn' has entailed studying migration and integration in cities. In this paper, I engage with the Pakistani middle-class migrants' lives in Dubai. It emerges that they feel integrated in their everyday life by sharing practices and experiences in a multicultural environment. Integration is conceptualized from a bottom-up approach meaning that it moves beyond the state intervention to focus on how people perceive and experience integration in their everyday life.



## KEYWORDS

Everyday integration;  
city; diversity; Dubai;  
Pakistani migrants;  
cosmopolitan

The focus of this Special Issue is on the integration practices of migrants in the Global South where integration is rejected as a state policy, temporariness prevails and where daily practices of citizens and migrants lead them to overcome boundaries and hierarchies reproduced by the power dynamics in the Global North where the narrative on migration and integration reproduces global inequalities as products of the colonial legacies.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE)<sup>1</sup>, migration is regulated by the sponsorship system (*kaf-āla*), which requires a local sponsor and characterized by temporariness (Errichiello & Nyhagen, 2021). In 2019, the UAE authorities, indeed, implemented a new system to grant a long-term visa to specific categories, which allows them to work, live and own the 100 percent ownership of their business insofar as some specific conditions are respected (Hvidt, 2019)<sup>2</sup>. However, temporariness is a permanent status affecting all migrants, and the 'demographic imbalance' meaning that migrants (88.5 percent) outnumber nationals (11.5 percent) (De Bel-Air, 2018) has, among other things, discouraged the authorities to implement policies to integrate migrants in the social context. Exclusion and segregation affect especially lower-class migrants who are incorporated in the UAE labor market but excluded from the social structure (Fargues, 2011), but Emiratis and migrants, in their everyday life, cross the boundaries and interact each other "in the domestic sphere, in the workplace, in the service industry, in restaurants, in malls, in mosques, on the streets" (Lori, 2019, p. 155). In order to unravel the integration practices between Emiratis and migrants, this paper focuses on the Pakistani middle-class migrants, a group that has hitherto never been studied. I conducted my field research in Dubai between October and November 2014 and October and November 2015.

Integration refers to socio-economic as well as cultural incorporation of migrants into a host society, which, in turn, should adopt measures to facilitate their adaptation by taking over its norms and customs (Saharso, 2019). This definition adopts a top-down approach that reproduces power relationships and inequalities (Errichiello, 2021). Integration relates to the presence of migrants perceived as a threat to the cultural integrity of a supposed homogenous society thus

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leading, in some cases, to the implementation of “nationalistic projects of exclusion, of racism, xenophobia and a rejection of all forms of otherness” (Wieviorka, 2014, p. 639). Integration categorizes individuals in *us* and *them* along racial lines, and the national models of integration reproduce such a categorization where migrants must adapt to the norms of the white majority population; it, however, should be contested because migrants already belong to the nation-state (Korteweg, 2017). Schinkel (2018) supported by Favell (2019), emphasizes the lack of critical approach to integration, which should be abandoned because it reproduces global inequalities. Hadj Abdou (2019), in line with Schinkel (2018), advocates the need for a critical approach to integration, which, relying on the idea of a homogenous and integrated society whereby migrants are perceived as an element of disruption, should, instead, be reconceptualized in light of the super-diversity characterizing the global cities (Vertovec, 2007) in order to grasp the complexity of the demographic and ethno-cultural characteristics of modern societies (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018). Labor migration, as an urban phenomenon, requires focusing on cities where authorities have implemented measures to deal with diversity; it is thus necessary to move beyond methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

Recently, global cities as well as small and mid-sized towns have become the focus of the integration projects because they are supposed to be more open toward migrants than the nation-state (Hadj Abdou, 2019). Indeed, the ethno-cultural differences have become a value for the neoliberal global cities where integration “ceases to be a property of a social whole, and becomes *individualized* by turning into a property of individual people, such as migrants” (Schinkel, 2018, p. 3, original emphasis). This perspective aligns with the neoliberal approach whereby international migrants are considered individuals who consciously decide to move to a new country where they can get the highest income (Castles, 2015). Integration is a “matter of ‘individual responsibility’” (Schinkel, 2018, p. 3) insofar as integration in the labor market and independence from social benefits entails emphasizing individuals’ agency (Collier et al., 2020). Recently, integration has been intertwined with the concept of *disintegration* which refers to those policies and practices aimed at discouraging the integration of migrants in society (Collier et al., 2020). The temporary migrant programs discourage the permanent settlement of migrants in a new country and their temporary status seems to inhibit their sense of belonging and participation into the host society where they are economically active but socially excluded without rights and benefits (Samuk, 2020).

This paper disputes the power dynamics at work in the process of integration, where gendered and sexualized hierarchies, racialization and class stratification seem to create boundaries and exclusion. Integration is a fluid and daily negotiated practice by those who are to be integrated, and consequently it requires a bottom-up approach entailing their active commitment. The paper engages with migration and integration in the cosmopolitan city of Dubai by moving beyond the state policy to emphasize the relevance of everyday practices and experiences of migrants. In turn, this also highlights the individuals’ role against the disintegration policies based on ethno-racial and gender hierarchies existing in the UAE which create boundaries and categorize individuals in ‘*us versus them*’. In the UAE, hierarchies and discrimination are evident in local and transnational companies, where payment scales are based on nationality rather than skills (Vora, 2013). This context encourages migrants to engage in ‘local turns’ where, beyond the laws and rules of the country, their engagement in everyday practices and experiences of integration is evident. This approach, however, does not erase the hierarchy and discrimination existing in the UAE that have populated migrants’ narratives, reported by scholars and human rights organizations that are mostly discussed in relation to low-income migrants and construction workers for whom spaces and modalities of integration are affected by their economic and social status vis-a-vis high and middle-class migrants who are, instead, in a privileged position.

Recent studies on cosmopolitanism in the GCC countries have underlined that low-income migrants have developed and express attachment to the social context although their temporary status and insulated in the outskirts of the Gulf cities (Elsheshtawy, 2020; Pagès-El Karoui, 2021). In line with this perspective, which emphasizes belonging (Errichiello & Nyhagen, 2021; Vora,

2013) and inclusion (Thiollet & Assaf, 2021; Vora & Koch, 2015), this paper conceptualizes integration from a bottom-up approach meaning that it moves beyond the state intervention. Rather than focusing on the integration of whom into what (Favell, 2019), this approach focuses on how people perceive and experience integration in their everyday life. Integration is thus conceived as everyday practices, discourses and experiences embedded in specific contexts (Collier et al., 2020). In this paper, the everyday is intended as those quotidian and routinely attitudes, actions and practices that people make and share each other.<sup>3</sup>

The paper contributes to the debate on integration by introducing the concept of ‘everyday integration’ and as such it addresses two main research questions:

- Does the concept of everyday integration tell us more about migrants’ social inclusion that challenges the Emirati State?
- Do the social integration experiences challenge the political sphere and what does that mean for politics or theories of integration?

Therefore, I engage with the Pakistani middle-class migrants’ lives in Dubai whereby class stratification and hierarchies are attenuated by their everyday life which entails sharing experiences, practices and spaces in a multicultural environment. Dubai is a place where integration is formally impossible but is somewhat possible at individual level, at least for middle-class migrants.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section, I discuss the ‘local turn’ meaning the tendency prevailing in the literature on migration and integration to focus on cities where diversity is daily visible because labor migration is an urban phenomenon. Diversity is an asset and cities’ authorities adopt the rhetoric of inclusion and openness in order to foster the economic growth. This is evident in Dubai that, with its cosmopolitan and global character (Ali, 2010), has become a site of ambivalence where diversity is commodified and encouraged but, at the same time, exclusion seems to prevail. In the following section, I introduce the method adopted to conduct the field research among Pakistani middle-class migrants in Dubai, and then I discuss their everyday integration. The bottom-up approach entails understanding how migrants’ practices and experiences contribute to their everyday integration despite their temporary status and the lack of any policies aimed at integrated them in the social context. The last section summarizes the main points of the paper.

## City and diversity

Recently, scholars have used terms like ‘decentralising’ (Penninx, 2009), ‘multi-level governance’ (Zapata-Barrero, 2017) and ‘local turn’ (Hackett, 2017) to emphasize that the focus of migration and integration has moved from the nation-state to the global cities as well as mid and small-sized towns. This shift is due to the recognition that labor migration is an urban phenomenon and to the implicit reductionist perspective of methodological nationalism that tends to neglect the role of labor migrants as transnational actors embedded in global markets and living their lives in urban environment (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

Cities are sites where neoliberal globalization and economic competitiveness occur (Hadj Abdou, 2019) and are characterized by super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007). Diversity is valued and serves to brand the city as inclusive and multiracial, and this entails presenting the cities’ ethnic diversity as an asset where different people coexist peacefully, and racism is not a real social problem (Almeida, 2016). Cities’ strategy to brand diversity “is seen as an opportunity to create and foster an image of the city, which makes it attractive for foreign investment, tourism, and increased consumption” (Hadj Abdou, 2019, p. 5). There is a commodification of diversity whereby race and racism are part of the branding process which, in turn, reproduces inequalities and hierarchies that the cities’ authorities cope with by adopting inclusiveness and openness rhetoric (Almeida, 2016).

The current population of Dubai, which is estimated at 3,411,200 and foreigners are 92% of the total population (Dubai Statistics Center, 2020), is characterized by super-diversity thus making Dubai one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world (International Organization for Migration, 2015). Dubai is one of the seven emirates of the UAE federation, and in 1833 it was established as an independent port city from Abu Dhabi but still under the British domination (Davidson, 2008). It was characterized by diversity due to its geographical position as the main trading route to East and South Asia, and Africa. For some scholars, this multicultural and cosmopolitan past has been canceled by the branding strategy and its rhetoric based on anchoring Dubai's past and history in the Arab and Islamic world (Vora, 2013, Pagès-El Karoui, 2021). However, I would rather say that the Dubai authorities, in the 1980s and 1990s, opted for cultural revival as a strategy designed to reinterpret their history and traditional way of life in light of the social, economic and cultural transformations induced by the oil economy and globalization (Khalaf, 2005). Cultural revival is the recovery of what is perceived as the 'authentic' culture. Museums, heritage villages and dress code, therefore, represent the 'authentic' cultural identity rooted profoundly in the local traditions. By reinterpreting and displaying the past, the Emirati authorities tried to cope with the detachment and sense of insecurity perceived by the UAE nationals (Khalaf, 2006). By recovering the past and encouraging the use of the traditional dress in public, Emiratis exhibit their 'authentic' culture and differentiate themselves from foreigners (Khalaf, 2005). In this process of re-interpreting the past, it is worth mentioning two important spaces of Dubai. The Sheikh Mohammed Center for Cultural Understanding, which opened in 1998 and is situated in the renamed area of Al-Fahidiyya<sup>4</sup>, displays the old traditional way of life where fishing and pearling were the main economic activities, and people embarked on their ships to trade with the African and Asian countries. If the Center displays the traditional way of life, in the Crossroads of Civilizations Museum situated in Al-Shindagha district and which opened in 2014, the variety of civilizations that have historically contributed to the growth and the diversity of the entire Gulf region and Dubai is displayed. There is, indeed, a conscious and deliberate strategy of the Dubai's authorities, which, on the one hand, they tend to reinterpret local history whereby autochthonous elements are considered important to convey a sense of belonging to the Emirati minority population (e. g. the Center), on the other hand, they tend to include in their history the multicultural and cosmopolitan past of Dubai (e. g. the Museum) whereby diversity is seen as a strategically relevant aspect of the current branding strategy.

Dubai is a metropolis embedded in the neoliberal world economy, where neoliberalism is entrenched in the system of political power, and the new middle class consists of migrants and naturalized citizens with a migration background. In Dubai, neoliberalism is constructed through the preservation and improvements of privileges and services for some Emiratis; at the same time, it tends to disempower the already marginalized and oppressed groups (Kathiravelu, 2016). Vora (2013) argues that neoliberalism in Dubai has allowed the Indian elite to become part of the structure of power and get involved in the management of migration, and they are more attached to their Indian traditions and customs and are more patriarchal in their family structures than those of middle and working-class Indians. However, the Indian middle-class (unlike the Indian elite) has suffered from the changes that have occurred in Dubai over the last decade because of neoliberalism, which has resulted in property owners and business managers who have increased rents and have recruited white Westerners who provide "companies with a better "image", and raising prices on consumer items so that it [is] practically impossible to save money" (Vora, 2013, p. 124).

In Dubai, the approach to migration and diversity has recently turned to be inclusive thus leading to the so-called 'migrant-friendly discourse' (Horinuki, 2019) which tends to include foreigners into the UAE nationalist rhetoric (see the above discussion of the Museum). This new approach, which presumably developed in the 2000s when members of the UAE government emphasized the diversity of its foreign population characterized by more than two hundred different nationalities, their peaceful coexistence and how its economic growth resulted from the presence of many different foreign workers, has created a "multicultural environment with rich

opportunities for cultural interaction and cooperation” (Dubai Strategic Plan, 2007, p. 26). As Pagès-El Karoui (2021, p. 175) states, the recent tendency among the UAE authorities is “to promote a sense of place and territorial belonging disconnected from citizenship”. This neoliberal and cosmopolitan environment has created a sense of community whereby ethnic and gender diversity are those factors that contribute to encourage everyday integration because individuals share the same spaces, experiences and challenges in their working and non-working environment (Elsheshtawy, 2020; Kanna, 2011; Khalaf & AlKobaisi, 1999). Recently, indeed, some scholars have emphasized that form of integration in the Gulf cities like Dubai have taken place where “marginalized residents, lacking the resources to access the city’s exclusive spaces, are able to claim a part of the city as their own” (Elsheshtawy, 2020, p. 814). In these areas, interactions of low-income migrants are performed thus fostering a sense of belonging and sustaining cultural patterns, although their temporary status (Elsheshtawy, 2020). There are spaces where middle and low-income migrants can feel included in their everyday life, experiences and practices (Pagès-El Karoui, 2021). Although integration policies are not part of the political agenda, in Dubai, migrants can find spaces of integration where different ethnic and religious groups coexist and strengthen their sense of community and belonging (Elsheshtawy, 2020, Pagès-El Karoui, 2021). There is, however, an ambivalent attitude, on the one hand, diversity is part of the economic and branding strategy and is valued as the strongest characteristic of the city, on the other hand, there are hierarchies, segregation and marginalization that seem to conspire against integration.

Labor migration, as an urban phenomenon, has encouraged cities’ authorities to act to cope with diversity, which is marketed in order to guarantee investments and economic growth. This is also evident in Dubai where two ambivalent attitudes prevail. On the one hand, diversity is commodified to attract investments and tourism. On the other hand, diversity is perceived as posing a threat to social cohesion and Emirati identity because of the ‘demographic imbalance’. If temporariness seems to be strategically adopted by the UAE authorities to discourage the permanent settlement of migrants, it is, however, in their everyday life that some groups of migrants feel integrated as I discuss, in the following section, in relation to the Pakistani middle-class migrants.

## Research method

This paper is based on a qualitative approach, which was chosen for an in-depth study of meanings and experiences of the Pakistani professionals who were interviewed in Dubai between 2014 and 2015. Two new interviews were recorded between March and May 2021 via video conferencing. In total, I recorded 25 unstructured interviews with 21 participants. The unstructured interviews lasted between one and six hours, and were conducted in English, in a variety of public and private settings (offices, cafes, and homes). The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed. The interviews have been anonymized, pseudonyms are used, and informed consent was given by the participants.

The focus of the study is middle-class Pakistani professionals in Dubai. The interviewees were recruited via snowball sampling, with the first contacts referenced to recruit other participants from their acquaintances, friends and family members. The participants age ranged from 20 to 70 years old. Fifteen of the interviewed migrants were men while the rest were women. The participants had varying occupations like managers and executives, doctors and teachers. The male participants were the main breadwinners of their family units who initially migrated alone and were joined a few years later by their wives and children. Many of the participants were first generation migrants, meaning they were the first of their household to migrate to the GCC countries. I also interviewed members of the second generation encompassing those who were born and/or brought up in the Gulf countries and whose parents migrated in the 1970s and 1980s. Only one participant belonged to the third generation whose grandparents migrated to Kuwait in the 1950s to work in the oil industry (Ahmed, 1984; Errichiello, 2012), and his father was born in the Gulf country.

The Pakistani community in the UAE, which is estimated at 1.2 million (De Bel-Air, 2018), and in Dubai is diverse in terms of gender, and it is also ethnically and religiously stratified. My participants described themselves as Sindhis, Punjabis, Baluchis, and a Mohajir (whose family migrated from India to Pakistan after the Partition in 1947). All the participants were born Muslim, with a majority being Sunni Muslims; one participant was an *Ismā'īli* Muslim, and one identified himself as an atheist. The diversity of the sample represents one of the strengths of the research as it allows an account of different subjectivities and stories. The unstructured interviews, and informal conversations recorded via field notes, were analyzed via thematic analysis. Themes and patterns relating to their everyday life and practices of integration emerged as central to the participants' lives as migrants in Dubai (Errichiello & Nyhagen, 2021).

## Everyday integration of Pakistani professionals in Dubai

Based upon the recent studies on migration in the Gulf countries that rely on an inclusion-centred narrative (Vora & Koch, 2015), where nationals and migrants are both part of the societal organization and of a hierarchical system in which, however, spaces of integration are evident in some areas of the Gulf cities, I introduce the notion of everyday integration to emphasize that social integration is routinely involved and experienced by migrants in their quotidian aspects. Branding Dubai as a city formed of different nationalities whereby diversity is as an asset and tolerance has become a word used to attract tourists and foreign investments collides with the lack of laws aimed at integrating migrants. Against the nationalist rhetoric based especially upon economic interests and temporariness, and by adopting a bottom-up approach, scholars have recently emphasized that migrants have developed a sense of belonging and everyday integration occurs in the Gulf cities like Dubai.

The Indian middle-class migrants in Dubai express everyday integration in practices of consumption that contribute to make them part of the social context and integrated within and beyond their ethno-national community (Vora, 2013). The lifestyle that affluent middle-class migrants can enjoy in Dubai relates to the concept of safety, which, for some of the Pakistani participants, is important to define their idea of integration. Rahmiya (aged 49) is a Pakistani doctor who worked for the Dubai government and now she works in a nonprofit organization. She is accustomed to the lifestyle she can enjoy in Dubai and defined integration in terms of safety and the respect of the laws of the country. She said:

Safety is a huge dip ... I have family members who have been kidnapped. I have had family members whose houses have been burgled, who've been held at gunpoint, and I come from an affluent family. I can't feel safe when I travel to Pakistan, I am concerned. I genuinely remove all my jewellery, and I'll make sure that I'm dressed down ... [in Dubai] I have always felt very protected and very respected. I know that if somebody bothers me on the street and I turned around and threaten that person that I would call the cops, they would run because that's the law of the country, and that law protects me. If I ever heard about harassment at work, I knew I could call in on the law and I would be protected. I always felt very protected.

Rahmiya identified safety as one of those aspects that makes her feel integrated in the UAE, and as a woman, she felt protected by the laws of the country. Not only are the laws implemented by the state authorities aimed at protecting Emiratis but also migrants. In her everyday actions and experiences, Rahmiya defined integration in the following way:

I can move around. I can sit and have a coffee with you [the interviewer] right now and then get up and go and visit an Emirati friend and be talking in Arabic, eating Emirati food, and I would not flinch at all. It would not be: "Oh my God, what have I got to do now to adjust to that?" Not at all.

She is fluent in Arabic and can switch from Arabic to Urdu and English even changing her accent. She has lots of Emirati friends and her neighbors are mostly Emiratis. Dunya (aged 37) is a Pakistani woman who arrived on her husband's visa. She works in a bank, and she has

quotidian relationships mostly with Pakistanis, Indians and a few Emiratis. Like Rahmiya, she defined integration in terms of feeling at safe. She said:

The main thing that I like about the UAE is the security aspect, the safety. Women are very safe in this country. I can walk on the street even at 2.00 am and nobody can come and snatch my bag, or my mobile or even come and give me an attack because the system is such that women are protected. Same thing not in Pakistan, in any city women are not safe ... I have this conscious; I am always looking around, I am not talking on my mobile too much in the public area because I have no idea who comes and snatches my bag and phone. Here [Dubai] it is safe for women.

Dunya feels at safe in Dubai, and this makes her feel more protected than in her home country. The implementation of laws is a fundamental part of the integration practices; both Rahmiya and Dunya feel integrated because those rules are aimed at protecting all individuals regardless of their gender, ethnic and social status.<sup>5</sup> In her everyday life and practices, safety is important but, on a different level, Dunya complains about the lack of rights that legally limit her actions and future projects. She said:

I do not have any rights in this country. I have been to this country since 2006, and I had been to the USA before 2006, I had a green card and some kind of rights, and I have been to Canada and some rights granted. In this country, I can stay here for the next 20 years, I will never have nothing. So, I will never have any rights of my own. I will always be considered a foreigner and a foreigner with a Pakistani passport.

Temporariness and integration go hand in hand, and the lack of rights is associated with migrants' temporary status which affects all foreign workers in the UAE. If some laws contribute to make them feel at safe, other laws contribute to create boundaries and hierarchies (Wieviorka, 2014). Dunya said:

... You have to be mentally prepared to move to this country. I have seen most Pakistanis when they come here, they have no assets in Pakistan and suddenly when they lose everything [i.e., job], they say "Oh my god, we have to return to Pakistan, we do not have a house."

Having an exit strategy seems the most reasonable way to deal with the uncertainties that characterize the status of migrants (Errichiello & Nyhagen, 2021). Like Dunya, Rahmiya expressed the acceptance of her temporary status as part of her everyday life and practices that she has to accomplish every two years when she has to renew her visa.<sup>6</sup> She said:

OK, I would have liked that feeling of permanence here, but after 46 years it's a little bit difficult to question. That is just become part of something that we live with. My husband and me have both actually grown up here. He's lived here for 45 years and it's just our way of life renewing our visa every two years. I think we've become numb to it. We've just figured out that. This is how it's going to be, and we'll take it one day at a time.

Both Dunya and Rahmiya exemplify the distinction between migrants' experience and practice in their everyday life where some laws and rules contribute to make them feel integrated (e. g. safety), and how some other laws of the country (e. g. renewing of visa) seem to conspire against integration (Korteweg, 2017). The intertwined binary categorization of integration and disintegration (Collier et al., 2020) is evident in Zia (aged 53), a Pakistani man who was born in Kuwait, and established his own company in Dubai. He said:

they will never give you any sort of rights, nationality or anything ... I have no right to claim the nationality ... you can live in this country as long as you have a job, good decent money, you can enjoy the life and then you go back to your home country. That is the reality of this country. So, you come here, you do your part, you work, you enjoy the life and then you leave.

Zia acknowledges the lack of rights, and this does not hamper, indeed, to make good money and enjoy the life in Dubai. The lack of rights and temporariness has, however, not impeded him to establish his own company, pay a mortgage and own a house. Zia also described how difficult the process of integration was especially because he never learned Arabic:



I have lived in this area for ages, but I have never tried to learn Arabic language. So, if I do not speak the language, obviously, I can make sense, but I can never go deep down integrating with them. Plus, different culture, you just can be integrated to a certain level but not maybe at a hundred percent. This is the reality.

He points out how the process of integration is an individual responsibility (Schinkel, 2018) and being deficient in language skills represents a barrier to the process of integration (Samuk, 2020). For Rahmiya, the ability to speak different languages is part of her integration process. She said:

Having grown up here, I am pretty fluent with different languages, so English and Arabic are core. I understand Farsi. I can get the gist of lot of Malayalam as well and I would never have had this experience had I grown up in Pakistan or had I grown up exclusively in the West.

Fluency in the host country's language is an aspect of primary importance "not only to survive in a new country but also to become socially integrated in it" (Shah, 2017, p. 155).

Integration in everyday practices and experiences can contribute to a change in people's mindset because of quotidian interactions and contacts with different nationalities and cultures (Vora, 2013). Hamza (aged 65), who has spent more than forty years in the Gulf countries, initially worked in a bank in Qatar and then moved to a local branch in Dubai, where he then decided to work in a Pakistani media company of the city. He said:

When I moved to Dubai I could feel the difference in the mindset of people, people are more open-minded, more welcoming. It is more for business culture in Dubai compared to Qatar ... So, for the children, the mindset is different because they want more liberty, more freedom in everything, they do not want any compromise, so it was different for them, but we learned how to adjust and make a compromise.

Hamza and his wife adapted to the lifestyle and mindset they experienced in Dubai, and this led them to look for a compromise with their children's request for freedom and expectations. For some Pakistani women I interviewed, their children had to be exposed to different cultures because this contribute to shape an open mindset. Aminah (aged 38) moved to Dubai when she was ten years old, then she studied in the United States and in Britain. When she got married, she moved to Oman, and she now lives with her daughter in Dubai. Her daughter studies in a British school with students coming from different countries. She said:

I have a new group of friends related to my daughter friends' mums and even there I feel comfortable with Indians not with Pakistanis. I went to the Pakistani mum's club in the school and their conversation was something that I realized that I cannot do this too much. It was basically like "Oh we have to bring up the school that our daughter should not wear burkini (bikini) for swimming", and they were talking of this in the Pakistani mum's club in school then I realized that this is not my kind of scene. This is not my mentality, so I stay out of there. That is why I get long more with Indians and Arabs than Pakistanis do because my thinking is becoming closer to them.

Aminah brought up in Dubai and defined herself as "very multicultural", she had lots of (non-Gulf) Arab, Indian and British friends who contributed to shape her mindset and felt more integrated in her everyday practices and experiences with individuals beyond her ethno-national community rather than with (some) Pakistanis. In 2000, upon getting married, Leila (aged 36), moved from Pakistan to Dubai. She enrolled her daughter to an international school and said:

... she is attending a British school, but it is all nationalities. I did not want to restrict her with just the Pakistani mindset ... The reason why we put her in this school was also it is because lots of different nationalities, parents who think like us also, middle level not too rich...you know...similar mindsets, I feel that she might benefit out of that.

Both Aminah and Leila agreed on the need to expose their daughters to different cultures that contribute to make them feel part of the Dubai's multicultural environment, and such a context represents, indeed, an opportunity to emancipate their daughters from what they perceive as the patriarchal norms of their country of origin. Leila was aware of her temporary status,

and she enjoyed her life in Dubai where she was exposed to different cultures and mindset. Discussing of her working environment, she said:

In the office we have doctors from Bulgaria, Germany, Pakistan, Syria, Egyptian, Spanish. So, we have got a staff of different nationalities working in here. We have got other coming from Philippines, India, Bangladesh and Jordanian.

People experience everyday integration by sharing a space, having lunch together and working together, therefore routinely actions and practices contribute to integration; everyday integration is also evident in Leila's social life:

I have lots of friend from all different nationalities ... I do know Emiratis and my husband has a lot of Emirati friends because he was in school here also ... I tell you on a professional level you will find a handful of them who are extremely good, they are educated, they come from very good families, but they are handful ... they are helpful but you need to be close to them, they need to know you as a family. Like my husband has got good and close Emirati friends who come over and they treat us as part of a big family, they blend, they talk to us in our own language, which is quite funny, a lot of them know our language also.

Leila felt integrated in her everyday life and experiences due to her close contacts and interactions with many different nationalities. Emiratis represent a relevant part of her close friends, and they treat her and her husband as part of their family.

The UAE and Pakistan are both Islamic countries, and religion turned up as an important aspect of the participants' private life, but when it came to be articulated in the public sphere, it emerged that the common religion did not change the hierarchical social structure. Pakistani professionals articulated their relationships with Emiratis mostly on sociocultural and economic levels. However, religious affinity is one way in which some of the participants expressed their sense of belonging and integration. Ismail (aged 38) is a Muslim British-born Pakistani man, who moved to Dubai in 2011 to work in an international school. In the everyday interactions with different nationalities and religions, Ismail saw a sort of integration. He said:

... my main contact is when I go to the mosque, we see a lot of people there ... I feel comfortable because as a Muslim, for example, wherever I go, for us even a smile or to greet somebody with *as-salām*, which is peace, is an act of worship. I found myself doing that all day, so it feeds my soul a little bit ... you go in the shopping centre you find a prayer room. And generally, I feel more safe, more secure, I do not feel like a minority.

Even though he was a temporary migrant worker for whom the permanent settlement is rather impossible, Ismail considered himself as integrated in his everyday actions and practices especially from a religious point of view. Muhammad (aged 50) moved to Dubai in 1975, when he was very young, because his father was working for a local company. He felt part of the social context where he spent more than forty years, and he considered religious affinity as a strong element of integration. He said:

I mean there is a communality if you belong to the same faith that you could have more affinity and integration with people. I think here the advantage that we live with people with [different] faiths. I have friends who are Christians, I have friends who are Jews, I have friends who are Hindus ... that is the beauty of coming to Dubai that nobody is taking care and you are free to practice your faith.

Muhammad exemplifies the concept of everyday integration in his contacts with friends belonging to different religions. Religious affinity does not erase the power relationships, but it represents another way to express belonging and integration within the social context (Ahmad, 2017).

Migrants are stratified and there are members of different nationalities and class. Ethnographic accounts have underscored how South Asians feel discriminated against because of their passport, the mistreatment in comparison to Westerners, who are sometimes less educated and less experienced, visible in multinational companies, and such a discrimination becomes evident in terms of salary (Vora, 2013). These hierarchies and stratification have been contested by some of the

participants, however, some of them accepted the Emirati hierarchical social structure, they perceived themselves as guests and fully aware of their impossibility to subvert the ethno-racial hierarchies. When they migrate, they implicitly accept the rules of the country thus respecting Emirati rules and social norms means feeling part of the country and integrated (Errichiello, 2021). Abdallah (aged 49), a doctor who was born in Kuwait and spent a few years working abroad and in 2009 moved to Dubai, said:

...if you talk to the local government, to the Emiratis they would say that it is like a guest, and a host policy where we are guests, they look after us, and you have to respect the law of the land. So, if I go to someone's house, I have to respect their traditions, and their culture, and their rules, and their regulations. So, if I like it, then I will be the guest, if I do not like I am not forced to be here.

As a guest, Abdallah has to respect the 'law of the land', he made a conscious choice to migrate to the UAE. Pakistanis I interviewed in Dubai are aware that they cannot change their status within the society, but they articulate their belonging and relationships with the context on everyday practices and experiences rather than on questioning the local rules and laws. The impossibility to impact on the local social structure has also been underlined by Leila, who said:

I cannot change things here ... if I want to change something I should be able to do in Pakistan.... We are not in that kind of system to make a difference. I am not in that kind of system that I would make a difference back home in my country.

As Leila acknowledged, Pakistanis cannot subvert the ethno-racial hierarchies, but they feel that they belong to the Emirati context and integrated in their everyday life by sharing spaces and experiences with Emiratis and other migrant groups. Sharing the rules and norms that regulate Emirati social life seems to represent a way in which Pakistani professionals feel that they belong to the social context (Hadj Abdou, 2019). Everyday compliance with normative and non-normative prescriptions is a way to experience integration.

Pakistani middle-class migrants are aware that they cannot change the local rules, laws and norms. Against this impossibility, they routinely engage in practices, actions and behaviors that can help them to feel integrated in a hierarchical society characterized by temporariness (Errichiello & Nyhagen, 2021). Unlike the Indians studied by Vora (2013), where the fracture within the community is evident and where Indian middle-class migrants blame the Indian low-wage migrants for the racism they experience, the Pakistani middle-class migrants feel involved in the Dubai's branding strategy and proud of their diversity and they do not blame the low-skilled Pakistani migrants<sup>7</sup>; their everyday integration does not entail renouncing their identity but it is reinforced and they feel to belong and integrated in light of their Pakistani background (Errichiello, 2023).

## Conclusion

This paper has contributed to this Special Issue on migration and integration in the Global South by shedding light on how Pakistani professionals articulate their experience of integration in a hierarchical and racialized context where their temporary status, marginalization and exclusion seem to drive their migration experience. Integration is not in the UAE political agenda; in their everyday practices and experiences, however, migrants and Emiratis interact and share spaces thus contributing to inclusion, and this is evident in Dubai. The global and cosmopolitan cities have become sites where it is possible to observe diversity, they have become places where labor migrants find spaces of belonging and integration. In Dubai, diversity has become strategically relevant in order to attract tourists and foreign investments. However, the commodification of diversity, on the one hand, is part of its branding strategy which not only allures upper and middle-class migrants but also lower-class migrants, its cosmopolitan and multicultural environment is marketed as a strength. On the other hand, temporariness continues to characterize

Dubai's approach to diversity whereby permanent settlement is not possible, and especially low-income migrants are segregated in the outskirts of the city.

Recent studies on cosmopolitanism in the Gulf cities have, however, emphasized their inclusive and openness character in which some groups of migrants feel integrated. In line with this approach, the focus on everyday integration of the Pakistani professionals in Dubai is of primary importance to better understand their integration practices. I have therefore adopted a bottom-up approach in which individual's agency rather than the state intervention with a specific political agenda can greatly contribute to encourage and perform different modalities and perceptions of integration. Everyday integration means understating how migrants construct their routinely and quotidian social relationships and, for the Pakistani middle-class migrants, everyday integration is an individual attitude and is experienced in terms of feeling at safe, having an open mindset, religious affinity and respect for the laws and customs of the country. Although the uncertainties characterizing their presence in the country cannot contribute to their integration, it is, however, against these uncertainties that lower, middle- and upper-class migrants can pursue everyday integration because they are fully aware of their temporary status, but they enjoy their lifestyle of the neoliberal and global Dubai, and privileges associated with their class and social status. The contribution of this paper to the debate and theories of integration does not necessarily rely on disputing the laws and rules of the country, but on the need to focus on people's everyday experiences and practices. If integration is a state policy, everyday integration is an individual practice that can greatly contribute to better understand migration and diversity.

## Notes

1. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
2. The Golden Visa was implemented via the Cabinet Resolution No. 56 of 2018. See <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/visa-and-emirates-id/residence-visa/long-term-residence-visas-in-the-uae>
3. Everyday integration is a project that involves the University of Bristol and the local community. See: <https://everydayintegration.org.uk/>
4. Previously known as Bastakiyya, it was renamed due to the process of Arabisation. Bastak is the region of Iran from where many migrants arrived at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and established in the area donated by the then ruler of Dubai, Said bin Maktum, who ruled from 1912 to 1958.
5. One of my participants had contacts with the police forces and Emirati courts, and she reported that she had been equally treated and satisfied on how the cases in court ended up.
6. At the time of the interview, Rahmiya applied for the Golden visa that she has recently obtained.
7. The Pakistani middle-class migrants do not marginalise the low-skilled migrants, who are, indeed, part of the whole Pakistani community of Dubai.

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