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The Pan-Arab Community in Hungary

A Narrative Exploration of Communication, Identity, and Value Change

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Abstract

This paper examines the Pan-Arab community in Hungary as a social space in which individuals from diverse Arab backgrounds engage in ongoing processes of interaction, negotiation, and differentiation. Rather than treating the community as a homogeneous co-ethnic network, the study focuses on the internal dynamics that emerge among its members after migration. Drawing on ten narrative and in-depth interviews with Arab residents in Hungary, the analysis explores how identity, language, and values are reshaped through everyday encounters. The findings show that shared Arabness provides a basis for initial connection, yet it does not eliminate internal boundaries. Linguistic diversity, particularly dialect differences, structures inclusion and hierarchy, while moral expectations and social norms generate both solidarity and tension. The community thus operates as a relational field in which belonging is continuously negotiated rather than given. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative narrative approach that prioritizes meaning-making over generalization. By shifting attention from host-society integration to intra-community dynamics, the paper contributes to migration and acculturation research by highlighting how diasporic life is shaped through interactions among migrants themselves.

Keywords: *Pan-Arab Community; Intra-Community Dynamics; Narrative Interviews; Identity; Language; Belonging*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Hungary has become a non-traditional destination for migration from the Middle East and North Africa, particularly for students and young professionals arriving through educational and mobility channels. Research on migration in Central and Eastern Europe has largely focused on asylum,

border regimes, and integration into host societies, typically understood as migrants' incorporation into national institutions, labour markets, and dominant cultural norms (e.g., Hernández Carretero & Carling, 2012; Scholten & Penninx, 2016). In this literature, integration is often implicitly or explicitly equated with assimilation, that is, the extent to which migrants adapt to the social, cultural, and normative expectations of the receiving society (Ager & Strang, 2008). While this focus is important, it leaves less room for examining the social worlds migrants construct among themselves after arrival.

Migration scholars have long emphasized that adaptation is not a one-dimensional process. Berry's (1997) theory of acculturation conceptualizes migration as a process of cultural and psychological negotiation in which individuals adopt strategies such as assimilation, separation, marginalization, or integration — understood as maintaining elements of one's original culture while participating in the host society. Importantly, these strategies do not unfold only in relation to the host population. They are also shaped through interaction with fellow migrants, who constitute the first and most immediate social environment for many newcomers (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Anthias, 2002).

This article argues that the Pan-Arab community in Hungary cannot be understood simply as a co-ethnic support network facilitating adaptation to Hungarian society. Instead, it constitutes a social field in its own right, in which people from different national, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds encounter one another, often for the first time, and negotiate how to live together in a shared migratory setting. Although Arabs are frequently treated as a homogeneous group in public and political discourse, diasporic communities are internally differentiated by nationality, dialect, class, and moral tradition, and these differences shape how people relate to one another in everyday life (Vertovec, 2007).

This encounter makes acculturation a collective and relational process, not only an individual adaptation to the host society. Within the Pan-Arab community, people develop new ways of speaking, new expectations of behaviour, and new moral boundaries, shaped by both their past socialization and the realities of life in Hungary. In this sense, the community becomes a key arena where identity, language, and values are renegotiated, producing new "codes of living" that cannot be reduced either to the culture of origin or to Hungarian society.

Drawing on narrative interviews with Arab community members living in Hungary, this study examines these intra-community dynamics across three dimensions: identity, language, and values. It explores how being positioned as "Arab" becomes more salient through interaction with other Arabs, how linguistic diversity and code-switching structure inclusion and hierarchy within the group, and how moral orientations and emotional attachments are reworked in diasporic life. By shifting the analytical focus from host-society assimilation to intra-diasporic negotiation, the article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of acculturation as a socially embedded and internally differentiated process.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework, drawing on scholarship on diaspora, symbolic power in language, and the politics of belonging. This is followed by a description of the qualitative methodology and data collection. The empirical sections analyse how Arab community members in Hungary navigate linguistic hierarchies, ambivalent belonging, and shifting values through their relationships with fellow migrants. The conclusion reflects on the implications of these findings for migration and acculturation research.

2. IDENTITY, LANGUAGE AND BELONGING

2.1 Diaspora, Identity, and the Insider–Outsider Position

Identity in diasporic contexts is not simply transported from the country of origin but is actively renegotiated through processes of interaction, positioning, and difference. Migration reshapes belonging by making previously taken-for-granted categories more visible and reflexive. Rather than being fixed,

identities emerge through encounters with both host societies and co-ethnic others, a process that becomes particularly pronounced in diasporic settings.

Stuart Hall conceptualizes cultural identity as a process of becoming rather than being, emphasizing that identity is constructed relationally through representation and differentiation (Hall, 1996). In migration contexts, individuals often become more aware of dimensions such as nationality, religion, language, or moral values precisely because they are repositioned within new social constellations. This perspective is especially relevant for Arab diasporic experiences, where diverse national and linguistic backgrounds coexist under the externally imposed category of "Arab."

At the same time, diasporic subjects occupy an ambivalent insider–outsider position. Drawing on Georg Simmel's concept of the stranger, migrants can be understood as simultaneously near and distant part of the group yet never fully absorbed (Simmel, 1971). Importantly, this condition extends beyond the relationship between migrants and host societies. Within migrant communities themselves, individuals may share cultural references while experiencing tension, distance, or exclusion based on dialect, nationality, migration trajectory, or value orientations.

Belonging, therefore, should be understood as relational and situational rather than automatic or permanent (Yuval-Davis, 2011). People actively negotiate their proximity to different groups, adjusting self-presentation and interaction according to context. Within diasporic formations, "community" can thus function as an ambivalent space offering recognition and solidarity while simultaneously generating pressure, hierarchy, or differentiation.

Building on these perspectives, this study examines how members of the Pan-Arab community in Hungary negotiate identity primarily through intra-community encounters. By shifting the analytical focus from migrant–host relations to internal dynamics, the paper highlights how diasporic identity is shaped through everyday interactions among individuals who are culturally proximate yet socially diverse.

2.2 Language, Dialects, and Symbolic Power in Migration Contexts

Although language is often imagined as a shared resource that unites diasporic communities, it frequently operates as a site of symbolic power, hierarchy, and internal differentiation. Within migrant contexts, linguistic practices are deeply embedded in processes of inclusion and exclusion. Rather than functioning as a neutral medium of communication, language actively shapes social boundaries and contributes to the reproduction of unequal relations.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics. Certain linguistic forms acquire legitimacy and authority, while others are devalued or marginalized (Bourdieu, 1991). In this sense, language does not simply reflect social structures but plays an active role in sustaining them. These dynamics become particularly visible in migration settings, where diverse linguistic repertoires shaped by regional, national, and class-based histories encounter one another in new configurations (Blommaert, 2010). Some varieties come to function as unmarked or "default" forms, while others require adaptation, translation, or justification, generating asymmetries in participation and authority within migrant communities.

The Arabic language presents a particularly revealing case. It carries a strong symbolic association with unity and pan-Arab identity, yet it is characterized by significant internal dialectal diversity. The well-documented situation of diglossia where Modern Standard Arabic (fuṣḥā) coexists with numerous spoken dialects (Ferguson, 1959) means that what appears as a shared linguistic resource is internally

stratified. While fuṣḥā is associated with education, formality, and collective identity, everyday interaction is structured around dialect differences that may complicate communication and produce friction.

Research on Arabic-speaking migrants further shows that dialect variation can generate informal hierarchies, where some regional varieties are more intelligible or socially accepted than others (Albirini, 2016; Miller, 2003). In response, speakers develop flexible strategies such as code-switching between dialects, fuṣḥā, simplified or "middle" forms of Arabic, and global languages like English (Gumperz, 1982; Blommaert & Backus, 2013). These practices function not only as pragmatic solutions to communicative challenges but also as symbolic acts through which speakers negotiate authority, neutrality, or distance.

Within diasporic communities, language choice is therefore contextually shaped by space, interlocutor background, and the desire to include, exclude, or avoid hierarchy. By examining how Arabic-speaking community members navigate dialect diversity and code-switching, this study treats language not merely as a communicative tool, but as a social resource through which relationships, identities, and boundaries are actively produced.

2.3 Belonging, Values, and Intra-Community Dynamics

Belonging in migration contexts is often assumed to follow naturally from shared origin or cultural similarity. However, diasporic belonging is neither automatic nor stable; it is continuously produced and negotiated through social interaction and moral evaluation. Rather than being guaranteed by common background, belonging emerges through everyday encounters in which expectations, norms, and boundaries are actively defined and contested. Yuval-Davis conceptualizes belonging as a multi-layered phenomenon encompassing emotional attachment, social location, and normative judgments about who belongs and under what conditions (Yuval-Davis, 2011). This framework is particularly useful for understanding migrant communities, where belonging is shaped not only in relation to host societies but also within groups perceived as culturally similar.

Co-ethnic relationships often constitute the first point of reference upon arrival. Migrants frequently rely on culturally proximate networks for practical support, familiarity, and emotional security (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Anthias, 2002). Yet such networks are not neutral spaces of solidarity. They simultaneously function as arenas in which behavioral expectations, moral boundaries, and social hierarchies are negotiated. Support and recognition may coexist with pressure, surveillance, or judgment, generating ambivalence within intra-community relations.

Migration can therefore be understood as a context in which moral frameworks are not simply preserved but actively reworked. Levitt (2007) emphasizes that migrant communities operate as moral spaces where values are reshaped in response to new social conditions. Disruptions caused by migration may prompt individuals to reassess notions of trust, privacy, gender roles, autonomy, and obligation. These reassessments occur relationally, often in dialogue with fellow community members whose approval or disapproval influences positioning. Value transformation in diaspora is thus rarely linear; it unfolds through interaction and situational negotiation.

Bauman's notion of liquid modernity further illuminates this dynamic. In contexts characterized by uncertainty and mobility, individuals must make reflexive choices about how to relate and belong (Bauman, 2000). Within migrant communities, this reflexivity is intensified by the coexistence of multiple moral reference points. Individuals may adopt different value orientations depending on setting,

audience, and perceived consequences. Such apparent contradictions should be interpreted not as inconsistency, but as adaptive responses to complex and shifting social environments.

Focusing on intra-community dynamics therefore shifts attention away from a sole emphasis on host-society integration. By examining how belonging and values are negotiated among fellow migrants, this study highlights the internal processes through which diasporic communities are continuously made and unmade. These relational processes shape both individual identities and the collective boundaries of the community itself, underscoring the importance of studying migrant life as a dynamic social field rather than a cohesive cultural unit.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on narrative interviews in order to explore how Arab community members in Hungary experience belonging, language, and value negotiation within the Pan-Arab social space. Narrative interviewing is particularly suited to research on migration and identity because it allows participants to construct meaning through stories rather than through predefined response categories. Instead of treating migration as a series of isolated variables, this approach captures how individuals understand their trajectories, relationships, and transformations over time.

The interviews were guided by narrative-generating questions designed to elicit extended personal accounts rather than short answers. Each interview began with an open prompt inviting participants to describe their arrival in Hungary and their first encounters with other Arabs. Follow-up questions were then used to deepen specific themes such as social relationships, language use, and moral expectations within the community. This structure allowed participants to shape the flow of the narrative while ensuring that the key analytical dimensions of the study were addressed.

3.2 Sampling and Participants

The study is based on ten in-depth interviews with Arab community members living in Hungary. Participants originated from different Arab countries, including Syria, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, among others. Despite this national diversity, the participants shared key social and migratory characteristics: all were Arabic-speaking young adults, most had arrived in Hungary through educational or legally regulated migration channels, and all were embedded to varying degrees in Arab social networks in Hungary.

The analytical focus of the study is therefore not on comparing national groups, but on examining how individuals who share a common migratory and social position navigate intra-community relations. These shared conditions make it possible to explore how belonging, language, and values are negotiated within the Pan-Arab community, despite differences in background.

Participants were recruited through social and community networks, reflecting the relational nature of the field. This recruitment strategy mirrors the way in which the Pan-Arab community itself operates, through personal connections, recommendations, and informal ties.

3.3 Data Collection

Interviews were conducted in Budapest and other Hungarian cities in locations chosen by the participants, including cafés, homes, and university spaces. Most interviews were conducted in Arabic, while one was conducted in English, depending on participants' preferences. The use of participants' preferred languages facilitated comfort and expressiveness, particularly when discussing sensitive experiences related to belonging, exclusion, or conflict.

The interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and were audio-recorded with permission. The narrative format encouraged participants to describe their social environments in detail, including whom they interacted with, whom they trusted, and whom they avoided. Through these narratives, patterns of networks, closeness, and social support emerged organically: participants spoke about friends who helped them find housing or work, people who mediated conflicts, and groups that provided emotional or practical assistance.

The data collection process was shaped not only by trust but also by participants' sense of engagement and responsibility toward the community. Some participants expressed a desire to contribute to a broader understanding of Arab life in Hungary, which influenced the openness and depth of their accounts.

3.4 Data Analysis, Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

Interviews were transcribed and analysed using a thematic narrative approach. Analysis focused on how participants constructed meanings around three central dimensions: identity, language, and values. Rather than coding isolated statements, attention was paid to how themes unfolded within narratives, including how participants positioned themselves in relation to others in the community.

Relational dynamics such as network membership, emotional closeness, and types of social support were identified through recurring narrative indicators: frequency of contact, expressions of trust or conflict, shared activities, and references to mutual assistance. This allowed the study to capture social structures without reducing them to numerical measures.

As a Tunisian researcher conducting interviews in Arabic, I occupied a position of partial insider hood within the Pan-Arab community in Hungary. Shared linguistic and cultural references facilitated access and rapport, enabling participants to speak openly about sensitive intra-community dynamics. However, Tunisian Arabic is not among the most mutually intelligible dialects across the Arab world, which often required shifting toward a more standardized or "white" Arabic in conversations with participants from different regional backgrounds. This linguistic negotiation itself became part of the interactional setting and shaped how meanings were articulated and clarified.

Cultural familiarity also influenced the research process in ambivalent ways. On the one hand, it sharpened the identification of relevant empirical themes and guided engagement with appropriate literature. On the other hand, it created the risk of over-familiarity and assumed understanding. To mitigate this, clarifying questions were deliberately posed even when meanings appeared self-evident, reinforcing the analytical framing of the interview as a research encounter rather than an informal exchange. During analysis, particular care was taken to avoid over-identification with participants' perspectives. Given that the study examines diversity within the Pan-Arab community across nationalities, dialects, migration trajectories, and value orientations maintaining analytical distance was essential to ensuring that internal differences were not obscured by shared cultural proximity.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

This study was conducted in line with the ethical guidelines of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE). All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the use of their narratives for academic purposes. Verbal informed consent was obtained prior to each interview, and participants were free to withdraw or decline to answer any question.

Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by removing or altering identifying details and securely storing recordings and transcripts. Given the small size and visibility of the Arab community in Hungary, particular care was taken to avoid information that could lead to indirect identification.

The study has several limitations. The small qualitative sample does not allow for generalization to the entire Arab population in Hungary, but it provides in-depth insight into intra-community processes. Interviews were conducted in Arabic and English, and translation may affect certain nuances. Finally, the data represent a specific moment in participants' migration trajectories, and social relations and values may change over time.

4. INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF THE PAN-ARAB COMMUNITY

4.1 Becoming "Arab" Abroad

For most participants, migration to Hungary marked a turning point in how they understood themselves collectively. Before leaving home, identity was primarily national Iraqi, Tunisian, Palestinian, Moroccan. In Hungary, these distinctions blurred under the broader and often imposed label of "Arab." "In Tunisia I was just Tunisian," said one participant, "but here they call me Arab." For many, this new identity emerged less from self-recognition than from the way they were perceived by others. Hungarians and other foreigners rarely differentiate between nationalities; the outsider's gaze produces a single category that gathers everyone from the Middle East and North Africa into one imagined community.

This external naming, though flattening, also creates unexpected forms of solidarity. "Among Arabs here, we finally meet in real life, not only on TV," explained one interviewee. For the first time, participants from different Arab countries live, study, and work side by side. Everyday interaction transforms the Pan-Arab idea long mediated through media and politics into a lived social experience. "At home I was just Iraqi, but here I feel Arab," said another. Shared language, food, and humour become small bridges between otherwise distant worlds. In this way, Arabness in Hungary appears not as an inherited identity, but as a relational and situational one, emerging from the daily practice of being together in exile.

Yet the meaning of "Arab" is far from stable. Participants offered multiple and sometimes conflicting definitions. Some described Arabness as ethnic, linked to ancestry and language; others as cultural, tied to shared customs, values, and ways of life. For a few, it carried a political meaning a sense of belonging to a larger cause that transcends borders. One participant, already engaged in pan-Arab activism before migration, said his commitment to Arab unity had long shaped his sense of self; in Hungary, it simply became more visible. For others, especially those from minority backgrounds, the term remains uncomfortable.

One Moroccan participant who identifies ethnically as Amazigh, for instance, said he does not consider himself Arab "by blood," yet accepts the label as cultural and political shorthand a recognition of shared experience. "My friend, the Palestinian, told me: you are Arab, don't deny it," he said, half amused, half resigned. For him, Arabness is less about ancestry than about the life he shares with other migrants — a solidarity born from similar struggles. Another participant, of Syriac heritage, faced the opposite situation: both Hungarians and Arabs insisted on calling him Arab, despite his attempts to explain his distinct identity. "They all insist I am Arab, even if I tell them I am not," he said. His story reveals how Arabness can be imposed both from outside and from within the community, functioning as a convenient label that erases internal diversity.

Confusion also surrounds the link between Arabness and Islam. Some participants used the two terms interchangeably, assuming that to be Arab is to be Muslim; others, particularly Christians, rejected this overlap. These disagreements expose how religion continues to shape the social boundaries of Arab identity, even abroad. For some, Islam provides a sense of continuity; for others, it reinforces exclusion from a category they are expected to belong to.

Across all interviews, "Arab" emerges not as a fixed identity but as a space of negotiation. It is experienced as heritage by some, as solidarity by others, and as pressure by a few. One participant captured this complexity when he said, "We became Arabs because we lost everything else." Migration

turns Arabness into both a refuge and a constraint a way to regain coherence in a fragmented world, but also a reminder of the simplifications imposed by others. Becoming Arab abroad is thus less about rediscovering an essence than about navigating a category that is constantly being defined by politics, culture, religion, and the everyday need to belong.

4.2 Shared Language, Divided Voices

If Arabness abroad is discovered through shared experience, its most visible sign the Arabic language — becomes both a bridge and a battlefield. For most participants, Arabic represents home, comfort, and recognition. Yet when Arabs from different countries speak together, the imagined unity of the language quickly fractures into dialects, accents, and hierarchies. "When North Africans speak in their dialect, others often ask them to repeat or switch to Standard Arabic," said one participant. What begins as a shared linguistic homeland turns into a negotiation of comprehension and power?

Across the interviews, the same paradox reappears: Arabic connects emotionally but divides socially. Dialects mark origin, class, and even legitimacy. Several participants from the Maghreb spoke about the discomfort of being mocked for their speech. "They laugh when I use my words," said one, explaining that he switches to English or Standard Arabic to avoid judgment. In group conversations, Egyptians and Syrians often dominate, their dialects carrying the prestige of television and popular culture. "They act like their Arabic is the normal one," another participant noted. This informal hierarchy reproduces symbolic power within the community, making some voices louder and others hesitant. Some react playfully or defiantly: "I use Egyptian words just to tease them," said one man, turning linguistic resistance into everyday performance.

Two languages emerge as refuges from these tensions — Standard Arabic (Fusha) and English but they function differently. For some, Fusha is a tool of equality and connection, a neutral code that bypasses dialect barriers. For others, it feels too formal, a reminder of school and religious discourse. One interviewee said, "When I use English, no one feels superior," contrasting it with the symbolic weight of Fusha. English thus becomes a pragmatic language of peace a way to speak without hierarchy, to escape the politics of pronunciation. Fusha, by contrast, is charged with emotion and prestige: respected, nostalgic, but also fragile.

When asked about the future of Standard Arabic, reactions diverged sharply. Some responded with indifference: "It's already dying, nobody uses it." Others felt genuine sadness: "That would be a disaster," said one, visibly disturbed. This split, reveals how Fusha functions as a moral symbol even those who rarely use it link it to collective dignity and memory. English, on the other hand, signals adaptation, cosmopolitanism, or fatigue. The choice between them often reflects personal orientation: participants with strong cultural pride tend to preserve Fusha; those seeking ease and inclusion prefer English.

Through language, the Pan-Arab community in Hungary re-enacts its internal diversity. Arabic remains the emotional mother tongue, yet inside it lies layers of difference, hierarchy, and negotiation. Code-switching, teasing, or silence all become strategies to manage these tensions. As one participant summarized, "We speak one language but not the same." In this fractured linguistic landscape, communication becomes both a social test and a subtle declaration of who one is and who one refuses to be.

4.3 Negotiating Values and Freedoms

The narratives reveal that migration to Hungary did not dissolve the moral frameworks that structure Arab social life; instead, it intensified reflection upon them. Living away from home seems to transform daily moral decisions into acts of negotiation, where participants constantly weigh personal autonomy against inherited expectations. What emerges is not a simple transition from traditional to modern values, but a plural moral order in which old and new norms coexist, overlap, and occasionally collide.

Family remains a central moral reference even when its physical control fades. Several participants described the family as a continuing source of guidance and emotional obligation. As one interviewee explained, his parents "still call every week to make sure I am fine and doing the right things," suggesting that distance reinforces emotional dependence rather than ending it. Yet others experienced the opposite trajectory. After a few years in Hungary, P01 felt that his family's moral authority had "lost its power" over his choices; independence, once unthinkable, became natural. In contrast, P05 represented the other extreme: he consciously silenced his own will to maintain the family's moral image, describing himself as "living for their respect," a self-effacement that evokes Kafka's metamorphosis an identity reshaped by duty and fear of shame. Between these poles, most participants occupied a middle ground, striving to maintain affection and moral loyalty while quietly testing the limits of obedience.

Religious and cultural values also shifted from collective obligation to personal interpretation. Some participants expressed frustration with being judged by their level of religious observance, arguing that "faith is between me and God." Others felt that visible religiosity remained the only way to earn respect within the Arab community. The tension between inner conviction and external judgment illustrates a broader struggle: morality continues to be a public affair even in the anonymity of migration. The shared space of the diaspora reproduces the moral gaze of home, now internalized through gossip, reputation, and mutual observation.

Across the narratives, privacy emerged as both a new right and a fragile achievement. Participants often valued Hungary's social distance "here nobody cares what you do" yet they simultaneously recreated intimate networks that reintroduced moral surveillance. Many said that "Arabs watch each other more than Hungarians do," revealing the persistence of communal control within the diasporic bubble. For women especially, visibility remained morally loaded: appearing too independent risked being read as morally lax. Yet some embraced this visibility as empowerment, suggesting that the diaspora also produces new moral subjectivities.

Taken together, these stories show that value negotiation is not about rejecting the past but about *reordering* it. The moral world of the Arab diaspora oscillates between inherited collectivism and emergent individualism, between loyalty to family and pursuit of self-definition. Freedom appears here not as a destination but as a field of tension where participants learn to live with contradiction, to reconcile care with control, and to translate moral traditions into the fragmented space of migration.

4.4 Between Familiarity and Surveillance

The Arab community in Hungary emerges in the interviews as both a shelter and a constraint a moral microcosm that offers comfort while constantly testing individual boundaries. Many participants described the first encounters with other Arabs as reassuring. "They treated me like a younger brother," recalled one, expressing how familiarity and shared language immediately generated belonging. In the early stages of migration, this intimacy served as emotional infrastructure: a way to rebuild home abroad. Yet, as the months passed, the same closeness began to feel invasive. The spaces of comfort cafés, WhatsApp groups, small gatherings became zones of observation. "It's like a small village," said one respondent, "everyone knows everything." The moral community that had first offered solidarity turned into a field of scrutiny.

This shift from warmth to control defines the rhythm of diasporic social life. Help is rarely unconditional; it circulates with hidden expectations and social monitoring. Several participants explained that "people help you, but they also watch you," revealing that support and surveillance are not opposites but parallel logics. Trust exists, but it is calculated a selective openness shaped by the risk of gossip. As one put it, "You must be careful what you tell them." Friendship and caution, care and secrecy, coexist in fragile balance.

Competition appears as another subtle mechanism that limits solidarity. The interviews evoke a social world where success a better job, a car, a relationship quickly becomes public property. "When someone

buys a new car, everyone talks," said one man, half amused, half irritated. Envy and comparison mark the limits of mutual aid: people will help if someone is in crisis, but not necessarily when that person starts to thrive. This rivalry is not purely material; it is symbolic, a contest over respectability and belonging within a small moral market. Even generosity becomes performative, another way to maintain face in the group.

The intensity of familiarity also follows national lines. Several participants, such as P04 and P07, drew a clear distinction between same-national and pan-Arab relations. "The Iraqis here understand me better," one said, "but they judge more." Others echoed this paradox: closeness breeds empathy and control at once. National micro-communities recreate the emotional warmth of home while re-importing its hierarchies and gossip networks. In contrast, broader Arab spaces feel freer but colder less judgmental yet less intimate. The result is a layered belonging: national familiarity offers comfort but demands conformity; pan-Arab contact offers distance but little emotional depth.

In the face of this moral density, some choose strategic withdrawal. "Too much talk, too many rules," said one woman, who now prefers the company of Hungarian or international friends. Yet even those who distance themselves confess a sense of loss: "Without Arabs you feel lonely; with them you feel observed." This ambivalence the need for community and the fear of exposure encapsulates the emotional architecture of diaspora life. Familiarity is not a cure for displacement but another form of discipline. The Arab community provides belonging precisely through the mechanisms that restrict it.

4.5 Ambivalence of Belonging – "If You Stay Away Too Long, You Miss the Noise"

For most participants, belonging to the Arab community in Hungary is not a question of being inside or outside, but of where and how that belonging takes shape. Rather than one single collective experience, there are several ways of being "with Arabs" abroad each producing its own emotional rhythm. Some encounters happen naturally, through university life, shared flats, or daily contact. Others take place in more structured spaces student associations, political or religious organizations, cultural groups. The comfort people feel depends largely on these settings and the intentions behind them.

Participants who met other Arabs in everyday contexts described relationships as light and fluid, a practical kind of togetherness. "We hang out, but everyone is busy," said one student. This form of proximity reduces isolation without demanding deep commitment. Others found in pan-Arab student groups a more open atmosphere, "without nationalism or control." Belonging in these informal spaces feels accessible but emotionally limited it protects from loneliness but rarely creates intimacy.

Those who joined organized or purpose-driven environments especially cultural or political groups often spoke with more stability and pride. "People you meet through volunteering, you stay close there's trust," said one participant. Another, active in a political association, explained that "it's more serious, less drama." Shared purpose appears to replace gossip and moral control with a sense of solidarity. For these participants, belonging is not just social, but ideological; it's grounded in a cause, not only in origin. Here, Arabness becomes a form of collective agency rather than merely a shared label.

At the same time, some participants still navigate mixed feelings of inclusion and fatigue. A few, particularly those living in student hostels or small towns, described a more imposed kind of togetherness: "You see them every day, and it becomes too much." Others felt understood only partially: "They invite me, but they don't really understand me." This partial recognition being "inside but not of it" reflects how cultural or personal differences persist even within shared identity.

Yet even among the most critical voices, complete withdrawal is rare. The majority maintain contact, managing their participation rather than rejecting it. "I didn't want to leave, but I don't belong totally," said one man who still attends events occasionally. Only two participants described themselves as fully comfortable within the Arab community, but almost none wanted to cut ties completely. Belonging, then,

is not about total comfort or absolute detachment; it is about adjusting proximity finding the distance that allows connection without suffocation.

Ultimately, ambivalence defines rather than undermines this form of belonging. The community is simultaneously a moral shelter, a social obligation, and a fragile emotional home. As one participant admitted, *"Even if I get tired of them, I still go back they're my people."* Between closeness and fatigue, recognition and restraint, most participants find their everyday balance. They continue to participate, sometimes reluctantly, because even a complicated belonging remains better than none.

This study set out to examine how Arab community members in Hungary negotiate identity, language, and values through their everyday relationships with other Arabs. Rather than approaching integration as assimilation into Hungarian society, the analysis has focused on intra-diasporic positioning that is, how individuals situate themselves within, against, or at the margins of the Pan-Arab community after migration. The findings demonstrate that belonging is not a fixed outcome of shared origin, but a relational and negotiated process shaped by social encounters, linguistic practices, and moral expectations.

Drawing on Berry's acculturation framework, these results suggest that adaptation unfolds not only in relation to the host society but also within the migrant community itself. Participants' narratives show that encounters with other Arabs in Hungary often intensify awareness of difference, even as they create opportunities for connection. Shared "Arabness" provides an initial basis for recognition and trust, but it does not eliminate internal boundaries based on dialect, national background, political history, or values. In this sense, the Pan-Arab community functions less as a homogeneous cultural group than as a diasporic social field in which multiple acculturation strategies coexist and interact.

The analysis of language illustrates this relational character particularly clearly. Participants described how dialect differences and code-switching structure inclusion, authority, and exclusion within the community. As theorized in the literature on symbolic power and language, certain ways of speaking carry greater legitimacy, while others are marginalized. In this study, some community members were able to position themselves as linguistically authoritative, while others resisted these hierarchies by shifting to English or Modern Standard Arabic. These practices reveal how language operates not merely as a tool of communication but as a mechanism through which social boundaries are drawn and contested inside the diaspora.

Similarly, the negotiation of values shows that migration produces not only individual change but also collective moral re-calibration. Participants' stories of changing trust, independence, and emotional distance reflect attempts to adapt to new social conditions while remaining embedded in Arab networks. The Pan-Arab community thus becomes a key arena in which moral expectations are affirmed, challenged, and redefined. Rather than passively reproducing norms from the country of origin, community members actively interpret and adjust them in response to the realities of life in Hungary and their interactions with fellow migrants.

Importantly, the Pan-Arab community that emerges from these narratives is not a stable or bounded group. It resembles what network scholars describe as a dynamic constellation of ties, characterized by varying degrees of closeness, support, and conflict. Individuals move toward or away from the community depending on their needs, experiences, and emotional resources. Belonging is therefore ambivalent: participants may seek comfort and familiarity in Arab spaces while simultaneously experiencing surveillance, pressure, or fatigue. This fluidity helps explain why the same community can be described as both a source of warmth and a site of constraint.

Taken together, these findings contribute to migration scholarship by shifting attention from host-society assimilation to intra-community acculturation. They show that the social worlds migrants create among themselves are not secondary to integration but are central to how migration is lived and

understood. By highlighting the Pan-Arab community as a space of negotiation rather than cohesion, the study offers a more nuanced view of diaspora, one that recognizes both connection and difference as constitutive of belonging.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined how Arab community members in Hungary negotiate belonging, language, and values through their everyday relationships with other Arabs. Rather than approaching integration as assimilation into the host society, the analysis has focused on intra-diasporic dynamics, showing how the Pan-Arab community itself becomes a central space in which identities and forms of belonging are constructed after migration.

While all diasporic communities develop internal dynamics, the Pan-Arab case reveals a particularly complex process. Its members do not originate from a single national society, but come from different Arab countries, dialect regions, and moral traditions. Migration brings these differences into direct contact, often for the first time, as people discover one another while simultaneously navigating the Hungarian social context. In this sense, the Pan-Arab community goes beyond a co-ethnic network: it is a space of encounter, negotiation, and re-formation in which plurality is not incidental but constitutive.

The findings show that shared Arabness provides a basis for recognition and initial connection, but it does not produce a homogeneous or harmonious community. Linguistic practices, moral expectations, and emotional orientations generate both closeness and distance, making belonging fluid and ambivalent. The Pan-Arab community thus emerges as a dynamic social network in which individuals move between engagement and withdrawal, familiarity and surveillance, support and tension, depending on their experiences and relationships.

By foregrounding these intra-community processes, the study contributes to migration and acculturation research by demonstrating that adaptation is not only a matter of relations with the host society, but also unfolds through interactions among migrants themselves. Acculturation appears here as a collective and relational process, embedded in everyday encounters within the diaspora.

This article draws on the first ten interviews of a larger doctoral research project based on a planned corpus of fifty narrative interviews. Future analyses will further examine how gendered experiences, emotional labour, and network structures shape participation and belonging within the Pan-Arab community. In doing so, the project aims to deepen understanding of migration not only as movement across borders, but as the transformation of social life among those who move together.

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