

# Brno's grocery cosmopolitanism: ethnically owned food stores as important places of migrants' space negotiation and belonging

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Even though before 1989 Czech Republic hasn't been a traditionally migrant destination, since the Velvet revolution the trend is changing and the number of foreigners living in Czech towns and cities is increasing annually (Czech statistical office 2010). The migrant communities, usually concentrating in greater cities, struggle to find their way of earning a living and also day to day modus operandi within the Czech society. Even though the country while being defined as the ethnic state rather than the civic one offers some inclusive and supportive policies, the biggest part of an immigrant's success in host society depends on individual factors such as initial social status, access to social and economic capital, personal features such as creativity and endurance, but also supportive networks on national and transnational level. Many migrants decide to start their own business in gastronomy and merchandise. These so called ethnic entrepreneurs, previously known predominantly from global metropolises of Western Europe and the USA, pop-out also in nowadays "globally less connected" central European cities (Glick Schiller & Caglar 2013:2).

In this paper we focus specifically on groceries owned by the migrants or new minorities in the city Brno. These are represented predominantly by Vietnamese non-stops and, more generally, Arabic specialized oriental food stores. Example of Brno is interesting because the city can't be considered global, eg. in comparison with Prague or Vienna, and therefore the processes of migrants incorporation are shaped by different processes than in other ethnically more diverse cities<sup>1</sup>. Based on the limited observation of an Arabic and a Vietnamese store and literature review the paper seeks to answer the question: **What kind of social processes and daily activities are taking place in grocery stores owned by the migrant groups in Brno? What does it mean to own or work in such a store? Does shop ownership stimulate one's involvement in transnational networks? Do the two groups of stores present in Brno differ from each other?**

We assume that these enterprises enable migrants not only to support their living, but also constitute an important space of gaining visibility and negotiating their place in the society through daily practices<sup>2</sup>. This, although sometimes conflicting encounters<sup>3</sup>, contributes to breaking of ice among groups and greater tolerance in the society. We would like to examine also the importance of such places when it comes to transnational ties and migrant communities and cultures support, therefore not only the impact of shop ownerships on in and out group is important, but also within the migrant communities.

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<sup>1</sup> The importance of exploring migrants' strategies of incorporating in the cities of all sizes is advocated by Glick Schiller and Caglar 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The author is fully aware of the limitation which is caused by the one-sidedness of the practices determined by the relationship of exchange.

<sup>3</sup> On the internet one can find a lot of harassment blogs addressing ethnically owned foodstores.

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