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## BETWEEN NATIONAL BORDERS AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES: IRAQ WAR REFUGEES IN BRAZIL AND GENDERED PEDAGOGIES OF MIGRANT (DIS)INTEGRATION

**ABSTRACT** After crossing the borders of nations, migrants and refugees often encounter racialized and gendered institutional and social boundaries in the places where they seek refuge. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Brazil on displaced Muslim, Palestinian Iraqi War refugees, this article examines the education-migration link in the refugee selection process and formal and informal institutions of education. It considers how these structures produce and reproduce otherness and the dynamic methods refugees utilize to combat and transcend limitations imposed on them. It develops the concept of gendered pedagogies of migrant (dis)integration to analyze the gendered racialization processes that influence belonging.

**Keywords:** gendered pedagogies of migrant (dis)integration, borders, gender, culture, orientalism

In her book, *Translated Woman*, anthropologist Ruth Behar writes, “We cross borders, but we don’t erase them; we take our borders with us” (2003, 320). Behar implies that physical border crossings do not eradicate the interior and layered boundaries we carry with us. Etchings of culture, place, space, language, and experience are inscribed and nested in our mobilities. Borrowing from Behar’s analogy, I consider how borders are reified in social encounters, mechanisms of state governance, and in interactions with institutions and education regimes. I draw from a larger project where I utilized a case study of Iraq War refugees to consider how the boundaries that are erected in the contexts where migrants enter impact individuals, families, and communities. Here I will more narrowly focus on the specific

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case of one of my primary interlocutors, Amira, to elucidate specific constraints and negotiations and analyze the strategies she employed to compromise and/or overcome.

In 2008, Brazil granted asylum to over 100 Palestinian Iraq War refugees who had been languishing in a refugee camp on the borderland of Iraq and Jordan.<sup>2</sup> While conducting preliminary research on this group in São Paulo in 2009, I met Amira, who had fled Baghdad with her family, including her 3-month old infant and a 3-year old toddler, during the U.S. incursion. She emerged as a primary interlocutor in an ethnographic project that spanned several years. Having documented the resettlement of these refugees in Brazil elsewhere (Munem 2014), my aim in this article is to develop what I call *gendered pedagogies of migrant (dis)integration* by examining through a feminist intersectional analytic (Crenshaw 1991; Lorde 1984; Mohanty 2003; Moraga & Anzaldúa 2015) the manner in which gender coheres with ethnicity, class, nation, “culture”, and religion to inform and anchor racialization processes and produce exclusionary pedagogical practices in educational settings and other disciplining institutions, which ultimately engender otherness<sup>3</sup> and influence belonging. My focus on Amira and her family will provide a lens through which to illustrate a microcosm of these dynamics in the migration-education nexus and view the practices employed by the local refugee resettlement agency in São Paulo, the Cultural Center contracted for language classes for migrants, and other educational institutions. I will also show how obstacles were dealt with and creatively harnessed to effect change. In addition to field research, most recently conducted in Brazil in 2018, the data collection also consisted of virtual encounters via media such as Skype and WhatsApp. While Brazil is the center of these exchanges, they also encompass the contexts of Iraq and the United States.

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2 In March 2003, when the US declared war on Iraq, there were 34,000 mostly Sunni Muslim Palestinians living there, primarily concentrated in Baghdad. Most were part of families made into refugees decades earlier during dispossession from their ancestral lands in 1948, upon Israel's establishment. They were never able to obtain Iraqi citizenship and only had Refugee travel documents.

3 Didier Fassin frames this through a Foucauldian lens as the “biopolitics of otherness” to analyze the French immigration debates of the 1990s and early aughts in “The Biopolitics of Otherness: Undocumented Foreigners and Racial Discrimination in French Public Debate” (Fassin 2001).

After fleeing Baghdad and attempting to cross the border into Jordan, Amira and her family were denied entry. They were then relegated to a desert camp, Ruweished, administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),<sup>4</sup> for nearly five years and until Brazil's humanitarian overture. Like Amira, many arrived in Brazil in already constituted families, with minor and adult children. Some arrived with ill and elderly parents, and others were single and varied in age, from their early 20s to late 60s. They differed in levels of education, from functionally illiterate in their arterial language to having post-graduate degrees. When they arrived, the resettlement process, managed locally by the NGO *Cáritas*, included housing, a monthly stipend (family size dependent), and Portuguese language classes. The refugees were mandated to attend Portuguese classes since the resettlement agency viewed acquiring language proficiency as critical to their integration into the local community. However, while still in the camp in the desert borderlands of Iraq, education emerged as critical to offering a possibility of asylum.

## FRAMEWORK

To provide a foundation for the analytic framing that I deploy herein, *gendered pedagogies of migrant (dis)integration*, I utilize Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Said 1978) and feminist scholarly interventions from various disciplines to consider and challenge hegemonic constructions of the resettled refugees and the institutional practices utilized in this process. In his seminal text, Said demonstrates that Orientalism is a specific epistemological project with particular historical and political references emerging from an imperial and colonial encounter, which has worked (and continues to work) to produce knowledge about the East *in* and *for* the West. This has functioned to construct binary oppositions and establish a perceived superiority of the West over the East. Said notes, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience... European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said 1978,

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4 The UN Refugee Agency with the authority and obligation to protect refugees.

1–3). Also critical to these Orientalist ideas are representations of Muslims and Islam. Said writes,

“Islam simply intensified their [Orientalists’] feelings of superiority about European culture, even as their antipathy spread to include the entire Orient, of which Islam was considered a degraded (and usually, a virulently dangerous) representative” (ibid., 260).

These orientalist logics produce and circumscribe Arab and Muslim subjects to essences, saturated in gendered and racialized constructions of cultural backwardness and otherness. They oversimplify place and space, dehistoricize colonial and imperial legacies, and depoliticize contexts that are influenced and subjected to local, regional, and international politics and policies. While Brazil may factor outside of Euro-American constructions of East-West, in my fieldwork, government authorities, resettlement officials, direct service providers, and Brazilian members of the community referred to the country as “um país ocidental”, an occidental country, precisely in contradistinction to “o oriente médio” or the Middle East.

Feminist postcolonial scholars have foregrounded and problematized monolithic discourses of the predicament of women and their male oppressors in colonial histories of South Asia and the Middle East. Women’s status and oppression, predominantly highlighted through cases of child marriage and widow immolation in India, for instance, and veiling practices in Algeria and Egypt, were used as tropes to undergird and justify “civilizing” colonial missions and endeavors, despite the fact that colonial powers did not provide support for women in these contexts and upheld misogynistic policies at home (Ahmed 1992; Lazreg 1994; Mani 1998; Spivak 1988). Furthermore, as Lila Abu-Lughod indicates in her review essay, “Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies”, feminist scholars have underscored European colonial women’s role in producing and reinforcing depictions of the Orientalized *other* (Abu-Lughod 2001). In her book, *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed depicts the union of colonialism and feminism, or “the language of feminism”, to serve colonial endeavors as “colonial feminism” (Ahmed 1992, 151). Since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, these arguments, still with ideas of gendered and racial-

ized-religious others at their center, have been recuperated, reconfigured, and utilized in Euro-American discourses to justify war for “peace” and neo-colonialist projects for “freedom” and to “save” Muslim women, most especially with the “war on terror” (Abu-Lughod 2002, 2013; Fernandes 2005; Mahmood 2008; Maira 2009).

An August 2017 article in the *Washington Post* depicts how Donald Trump’s national security adviser, H.R. McMaster, in an effort to convince the president to significantly increase the number of US military troops in Afghanistan, showed him a black-and-white photograph from the early 1970s “of Afghan women in miniskirts walking through Kabul, to show him that Western norms had existed there before and could return” (Rucker and Costa 2017). The rehearsal of these gendered colonial scripts continues to provide the foundation on which to justify war and increase militarization. While global discourses about Orientalized others are entrenched in broad gendered, racial, religious, and cultural notions of Arabness and Islam, they are subject to distinct manifestations in the national and local settings where they emerge. As such, by utilizing *gendered pedagogies of migrant (dis)integration*, I consider the hegemonic essentialist gender conceptions about Iraq War refugees in São Paulo, Brazil more generally, and Amira’s case, in particular, to analyze and the ways these were deployed to understand and produce cultural otherness. Moreover, my use of pedagogies is not only indicative of what transpired in formal and informal structures of education for refugees but also points to broader efforts to “domesticate” migrants in order to make them “integratable” into their new social milieu.

## EDUCATION AND RESETTLEMENT

When refugees are considered for asylum by traditional resettlement countries,<sup>5</sup> having higher education is a factor. While on the one hand the selection process is enshrined in humanitarian discourses, it also operates with-

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5 In the early aughts there were 14 traditional resettlement countries. Today there are 37 nations that participate in resettling refugees. Although the number of countries offering refuge has increased, the parameters within which people are offered refuge have narrowed.

in a neoliberal framework in that there is an assessment of the refugee's education, and thus, employability and potential for self-sufficiency (Munem 2014). These determinations of "marketable talents" (Ong 2006) self-select for desirable and undesirable bodies. Having a post-secondary education and work skills establishes the capability of integrating into a host nation and diminishes the chances of someone becoming a "public charge" or reliant on the state. Refugees who do not display these market prospects can be passed over for resettlement. The prospects increase for an individual to be resettled if asylum proves mutually beneficial. A healthy, able-bodied, non-elderly formally educated individual, who is presumed to be able to learn the language quickly, find employment, and fit neatly into the citizenship discourses of the nation will fare better in the process.

Amira was a prosthodontic dental technician in Iraq, and her husband Nasser was an accountant. The couple was among 50 refugees from Ruweished camp to be vetted and selected for resettlement in Canada. Their education profile intervened as an indicator of their prospects in the job market and overall integration into the country. However, since the Canadians did not select Nasser's parents, who were also in the camp, the young couple opted against leaving behind the elderly couple who had already undergone multiple displacements and experienced health problems. Eventually, Brazil extended asylum to all of them.

In Brazil, the connection between language and integration has a particular historical resonance. During the Getúlio Vargas regime/Estado Novo (1937–1945) – a dictatorial period in the nation's history, buttressed by nationalist ideology – there was a great deal of emphasis on preserving Brazilian identity, of which the Portuguese language was an integral part, especially in light of migration into the country. Vargas's nationalist government claimed that "many of Brazil's ills were caused by ... unassimilable immigrants", and he thus "link[ed] Brazil's economic problems to immigration and immigrants" (Klich and Lesser 1998, 45). During this period, ethnic social clubs and non-Portuguese newspapers were forbidden and shut down. Bilingualism was discouraged because it was thought to impede immigrant integration. Consequently, there was a ban on using a foreign language in public life (Seyferth 2001). Brazilian leaders considered it urgent for immigrants to disappear into the social fabric of the nation, in order to

demonstrate not just integration but assimilation. Richard Alba and Nancy Foner explain that

“the distinction between assimilation and integration hinges on social boundary changes – that is, assimilation in the fullest sense involves more than the achievement of parity in the labor market and other public institutions; it encompasses parallel cultural and social changes that bring immigrant-origin individuals closer to, or into, society’s mainstream” (Alba and Foner 2014, 280).

Similar to U.S. discourses of assimilation in which English-only was/is emphasized, speaking and writing in Portuguese (only) was/is a measure of citizenship and a measure of worthiness and belonging to the nation-state. In the case of the Palestinian Iraq War refugees resettled in São Paulo, however, the demand for Portuguese-only language use was expanded from the public sphere into the private space of a home. In an interview with several staff members from the NGO, one of the social workers complained that the refugees were not making efforts to integrate. This was directly linked to Portuguese language acquisition. She referred to what she considered the adult refugees’ lack of initiative in trying to speak the language. She asserted,

*“They do not take the initiative to speak [Portuguese] at home. They do not speak [Portuguese] at all among themselves. This is especially hindering. The children only have such contact outside of the house, when they have that opportunity.”*

When the point was made that some of the parents did not speak any Portuguese themselves, she agreed some spoke very little but still emphasized the difficulty this posed for kids.

*“If I approach the children while they are talking among themselves, everything is in Arabic. They do not speak Portuguese...And inside the home, we observed, the mothers too do not speak anything in Portuguese. Even Amira who speaks Portuguese, with the children she says everything in Arabic. And we are insisting on this, that she try to speak Portuguese because it will be good for the kids. For the child, it is very difficult if she*

*only has contact with Portuguese when she goes to school and while she is in school, but at home she has no experience [with the language]*" (Interview. 12 July 2010).

While the social worker acknowledged that Amira spoke Portuguese well she still thought the family needed to speak Portuguese in the home. When I asked Amira whether she had been asked to speak Portuguese at home with her children, she sarcastically said, "Yes. *And I asked them if they also want me to cook rice and beans at home*" – a staple in local Brazilian cuisine. Amira then noted,

*"My kids already speak Portuguese. If I don't speak Arabic to them at home, tomorrow they will forget. They speak Portuguese in school, with their friends, with the neighbors, at the store, everywhere. Everything is in Portuguese. I want them to speak Arabic too. Besides, they cannot tell me what to do inside my house."*

For her, the crucial issue was maintaining her children's knowledge of Arabic as she could see how quickly they were being integrated into the Brazilian language and society. However, the NGO seemed to be asking for more than integration. They wanted a sloughing off the "otherness" that the Arabic language represented. This was something Amira pushed back on. The private sphere was a boundary she was not willing to sacrifice and thus outside of the reach of their demands. While language surfaced as a sticking point for integrating refugees into their local community and for reformulating private interactions in the home, language education classes involved some questionable pedagogical processes and pervasive Orientalist assumptions. In the next section, I will discuss these factors.

## **ORIENTALIZING PEDAGOGIES OF CULTURAL OTHERS**

Language education courses at the Cultural Center were contracted by *Cáritas*, the local resettlement organization in São Paulo, whose staff provided cultural competency training about the refugees and a framework for the



way in which classrooms should be managed.<sup>6</sup> This hinged on essentialist gendered discourses about culture and familial relations. The manner in which Palestinians, and Arabs more broadly, were culturally produced served as a means to explain what refugees did and did not do both inside and outside of class and clearly elicited *gendered pedagogies of migrant (dis) integration*. These essentialist cultural constructions affected interactions in the classroom, without much consideration for the pedagogical approach utilized by the Center. For instance, instead of being divided into classes based on levels of literacy and proficiency, classes were divided by family units. Despite vast differences in competence and age, an entire nuclear family was placed in one classroom. Louisa, a language instructor and head of the Cultural Center noted that *Cáritas* had requested this system. Classes were to be divided by family units, and only women were to serve as language instructors (Hamid 2012). When asked why this request was made, Louisa answered<sup>7</sup>:

*“It was a matter of their own culture. Because of the women and Arab culture, they would be more comfortable with female teachers. Then we assessed them. We realized there were already some who could master a bit of Portuguese because they had already been here eight months. So some of them, the younger ones, had already made [social] contacts and developed some proficiency in spoken Portuguese. However, the older ones had a great deal of difficulty. They basically spoke nothing, they did not write and did not understand. So, during our first encounter with them, we determined who knew more [Portuguese] and who did not. There were difficulties at first, because within a family group, cultural attitudes would interfere”.*

This ahistorical and monolithic rendering rearticulates the need for critiques that post-colonial feminists deploy about liberal/colonial/hegemonic feminisms. That is, the latter is complicit in Western regimes of power

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6 This strategy was also used to give the local police training on how to deal with the refugees, should they need police intervention. This too resulted in a perpetuation of hegemonic ideas of Arabs and Muslims that attributed “differences” and difficulties as inherently culturally derived.

7 This interview was conducted in Portuguese by my colleague Sonia Hamid.

that use women's liberation discourses as fodder. In fact, prior to the first and second Iraq Wars, and the dozen years of sanctions in between, women in Iraq, under Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime,<sup>8</sup> had among the highest levels of education in the region (Abu-Lughod 2013; Al-Ali & Pratt 2009; Riverbend 2005) and studied in gender-integrated classrooms (students and teachers) across levels of education. Thus, the strategy to only have women teachers was incompatible with the "culture" from whence the refugees emerged. Instead, the static referent of "Arab culture" was used as an identifier, uncoupled from histories and contexts. Interestingly, despite the legacy of Brazilian nationalism in school (and social) settings that support *subtractive education* (Valenzuela 1997), which erases students' national origins, cultures, and languages from the classroom context, here there was an unsettling accumulation and projection of perceived culture inherited to the language class dynamic.

Feminist scholars have argued that invoking culture as an always ready justification for behaviors that are perceived as reprehensible recasts colonial logic of saving and civilizing (Abu-Lughod 2002; 2013; Narayan 1998). Moreover, the historical and political are elided in favor of facile explanations. In the context of Brazil, this is particularly perplexing because of the ways in which the country and its people are globally imagined as culturally laden. This is usually manifested through scenes of beaches, carnival, football, and general leisure, where women are constructed as sexually licentious seductresses and men as their hypersexual counterparts. These formulations nested in the exotic and recreation erase the geographical, regional, and social complexities of the third-largest country in the Americas, behind Canada and the United States respectively. Nonetheless, typifying Arabness and its presumed cultural singularity continued as a generalization.

*"The Arab man has an advantage, because he was the one who dominated the class. Women and children were in the background. So whatever he learned, and his wife and the children had not yet mastered, was not of importance to*

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8 My aim here is not to be dismissive of the brutality of Hussein's regime. Instead, I want to point to its complexities. For instance, Iraq became signatory to CEDAW in 1980 and Brazil more than two decades later, in 2003.

*him, because he had already mastered it. So it was difficult for the teachers to work with this in the classroom. Dividing their attention. This was a problem. We stayed with this [classroom] design for about four months (emphasis mine)."*

Louisa continued her use of the specter of culture intervening in the classroom dynamic through a heteropatriarchal familial lens. She deployed explicit orientalist ideas of gender and Arab society, particularly when she claimed that cultural attitudes interfered with the learning of women and children because Arab men dominated the class and cared little about whether their wives and children mastered the language. This monolithic attribution of Arab women as always already oppressed and without agency restores reductive presumptions of women in the Global South who are presumed to live under hyper-patriarchal regimes, especially Muslim women who wear hijab (Abu-Lughod 2002; 2013; Ahmed 1992; Mohanty 2003). The irony, too, is that the *othering* was undertaken by women who are often "othered" as culturally fraught themselves and victims of a virulent *machismo*. This form of aggressive masculinity is so abhorrently imagined that it is stabilized and maintained in an untranslatable term. Outside of the context of Latin America and Latino diasporas, this term "machismo" generally refers to an exceptionally monstrous and misogynistic form of masculinity. The very use of the word to refer to or discuss sexism in Latin American and Latino "culture" somehow positions sexism in the United States or Europe, for instance, as more genteel and less violent despite statistics that indicate otherwise since violence against women is a global issue.<sup>9</sup>

Amira offered her own assessment of the situation, saying it was the most *"absurd thing I have ever seen. How could they put children with adults, with parents and think that everyone was going to learn the same way?"* As a lay observer and someone who was subjected to these dynamics, Amira offered a critique of the pedagogical style that was employed and a dilemma this posed. However, the curious pedagogical approach employed by the Center

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9 In a short article by an anthropologist Jessica Winegar, she details statistics of violence against women in the United States that are not different from statistics in other parts of the world (Winegar 2016). However, western discourses often position distant places and cultures as inherently more oppressive and violent towards women.

itself went unquestioned for *four* months until the language learners themselves expressed frustration with how classes were structured and organized to do something about it.

*“Then at the request of the Palestinians themselves, they began to separate themselves, so the [class] groups were further divided. The youth in the [collective] group became close, some family groups split up, and parents and their children<sup>10</sup> were placed in separate classes. Some men stopped attending, so in some classes, only women remained. It became easier for us to teach the Portuguese language. Until then we already knew there were illiterate and semi-literate people in the group. With the illiterate, we worked with a textbook. It was like teaching literacy to a Brazilian. We followed the same process and it had a very good effect, very, very good”* (Interview. 19 January 2010).

The insistence that culture and the gendered dynamics it produced was the primary obstacle to problems in the classroom was, at best, short-sighted. Dividing the Portuguese language classes by family units rather than proficiency elided hierarchical relations that exist in families, irrespective of “culture”. These would invariably create a challenging classroom setting un conducive for learning. Placing parents and their children in the same class, where they would be expected to equally partake in lessons and discussions, led parents, both fathers, and mothers, to feel infantilized and frustrated. *“This idea of putting adults and young children together was ridiculous,”* Amira’s husband recalled. Nasser emphasized that adults, those who were educated and those who were illiterate, had completely different needs than their children. They required what he called an “adult vocabulary”. This included words and phrases needed to maintain a household and interact in the community, such as in banks, supermarkets, pharmacies, with doctors, public transportation, etc. Luckily for the couple, Amira became proficient in Portuguese quickly, and Nasser underscored that he learned more from her than in the classroom.

Labeling the discord that occurred as a “cultural” problem rather than a pedagogical or structural one produced and reproduced accounts of cultural

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10 The age range of the “children” was wide since this included minor and adult children. Thus, children meant ages anywhere from 7 to 33.

incommensurability, perceived through gendered dynamics. This, in concert with hegemonic perceptions of “otherness”, yielded what Leti Volpp reasons as a “racialized conception of culture”, conceived as always already static and backward (2000). This was particularly apparent during Louisa’s recollection of a nuclear family with two young daughters, ages eight and eleven.

*“The girls, we perceived, were very needy of attention and affection. So that makes it difficult too. It interferes a lot in the learning process. And I think we felt, talking with the other teachers, that the greatest difficulty was that one, that the man wanted attention for himself, and so then there existed a level of separation. So, if he learned and absorbed something, then [the lesson] was to continue forward. His wife did not matter, even his daughters did not matter. He was key, the focus is on him. This was and is problematic”* (Interview. 19 January 2010).

Herein, again, “The Arab man”, as Louisa notes, was narcissistic, domineering, and misogynistic. Conversely, Arab and Muslim women and children were invariably reduced to victims of their husbands and fathers. A more capacious reading of the circumstances might have taken into consideration the fraught circumstances of migrants in new locations, especially the inability to speak the language, which leads to vulnerability and a reactionary overcompensation. The majority of the refugees made clear that language classes had been a “disaster”, principally because they were organized by family units. Many were so displeased with the ineffectiveness of the classes, they stopped going before changes were implemented. Nevertheless, the changes that did occur, as Louisa herself remarked, were requested by “*the Palestinians themselves*”. Because Amira was already able to communicate in Portuguese, she acted as the liaison between the refugees and language staff at the Cultural Center and communicated the pressing need for change. The refugees refused to be subjected to a cultural otherness that defied pedagogical logic and insisted on being put in groups based on language proficiency, levels of literacy, and age, which Louisa admitted had a very good effect. They asserted agency to decenter the pedagogical practices that produced a constraining environment and proposed an alternative to the problematic logics deployed by *Cáritas* in the cultural competency training they offered to the language instructors.

## EDUCATION AND VALIDATION

As indicated above, the level of education is an important factor in the refugee selection process. The prospects of becoming reliant on the state for subsistence functions as a deterrent in granting asylum. In fact, an anthropologist Didier Fassin argues that the high rates of rejections in asylum cases leads to questioning whether actual protections are still offered by the 1951 Refugee Convention of the Status of Refugees, which is the principal international code that allows signatories to determine who is a refugee, establish their rights, and prescribe the standard of treatment and legal obligations the state has to refugees in its national territory. Fassin claims that often those seeking refugee status and resettlement are regarded with suspicion, and the process of granting asylum has transformed from “legal entitlement” to “selective humanitarianism” (2016). What Fassin alludes to is that the 1951 Convention and its full doctrine of rights were created during mass movement of Europeans after World War II, and as mobilities have increasingly entailed black and brown people from the Global South seeking asylum and protection, selections have diminished. In the case of the resettlement of the Palestinian Iraq War refugees, Brazilian authorities decided to provide asylum to the remaining refugees in Ruweished camp. Thus, government representatives claimed that this was a humanitarian overture, outside of their normative procedures, to save the refugees from sure death in the desert borderlands. Prior to Brazil’s gesture, Amira and her husband Nasser and their two children had been offered asylum in Canada, a traditional resettlement country. However, because Nasser’s elderly and ill parents were not selected, and their health had deteriorated, the young couple decided to decline the Canadian offer. The logic of “saving” these refugees from sure death was utilized as a counterpoint to the refugees’ seemingly lack of “gratitude” when they issued complaints about the language classes and the absence of a systematic process to validate foreign technical licenses and education diplomas. It is important to note here the distinction between humanitarianism and human rights. The latter is bounded by laws and must produce effects. Humanitarianism, on the other hand, finds its imperative in a nebulous matrix of morality, ethics, and compassion to deliver people from suffering. While each informs the other and the two are intertwined, Miriam Ticktin reminds us of the distinction in “Where Ethics and Politics Meet”:

“[I]n a broad sense, human-rights...are largely grounded in law, constructed to further legal claims, responsibility, and accountability, whereas humanitarianism is more about the ethical and moral imperative to bring relief to those suffering and to save lives...Although both are clearly universalist discourses, they are based on different forms of action and, hence, often institute and protect different ideas of humanity” (Ticktin 2006, 35).

This renders accountability more difficult on the part of state actors and concurrently leads to precarious conditions for those whose career prospects are reliant on formal educational validation.

Amira was eager to begin her life anew in Brazil. After arriving in the country, she worked in the low-wage food service industry and then retail, which facilitated her rather quick Portuguese language acquisition. Her husband, Nasser, worked in a frame factory. These minimum wage jobs made it difficult for the family to make ends meet. With significant language proficiency under her belt and as a trained and licensed prosthodontic technician (in Iraq), Amira began looking for other opportunities. Through her own networking with a Lebanese family in town, who had been in Brazil since the early 1970s, she was able to obtain a position in the lab arm of a dental clinic in the city center. Amira began working long, but much better paid, hours at the dental clinic, and was bringing in the bulk of the household income. Although she had been trained and certified in Iraq, she was not registered with nor authorized by the Board of Dentistry to work as a technician in São Paulo. During a surprise visit to the clinic by an inspector from the Department of Health, Amira was notified that she was obligated to be registered with the Board in order to be employed there.

The process to get Amira registered proved to be an entangled bureaucratic ordeal. Despite having called the Board of Dentistry ahead of time about which documents were needed for registration and having gathered all said documents, there were unexpected issues that surfaced about the paperwork upon arriving at the Board's offices. Although Amira had an officially translated diploma, she was told that it would not suffice; she also needed to have the diploma validated by an equivalent institute in Brazil. This came as a surprise to Amira since not once was this mentioned to her by *Cáritas*. Amira was instructed to go to the center that provided such val-

idation, but she was cautioned that her status as a refugee might make her ineligible for her diploma certification since this was only offered to those with permanent or provisional status in the country (Hamid 2012). However, the Board representative would forward her case to the Board of Dentistry's legal department and suggested that, in the meantime, given her work situation, she should nonetheless attempt to obtain validation.

Upon arriving at the Center for Technical Education to validate her diploma, Amira explained her situation and was met with yet another unexpected request. She was asked for her *original* High School diploma and told that the document was necessary in order to validate her prosthodontic technician diploma. Amira told the agent that she had not brought the document with her when she came into the country. She then posited that she could not have obtained her prosthodontic technician diploma without having completed High School and that the diploma she had should clearly serve as evidence of this. The agent reiterated that a High School diploma was necessary for validation. He said that after obtaining her diploma, she should then have it translated, stamped and recognized by the Iraqi consulate or the Red Cross, and validated by the Department of Education in São Paulo. After this process, she would likely have to conduct an interview with the only technical school certified in prosthodontics, some five hours away. The school would then determine her knowledge in the area and decide whether to validate her prosthodontics diploma and license. While all of this was in motion, the inspector from the Board of Health came back to the clinic during Amira's shift and threatened to shut down the dental clinic if they continued to employ her. The owners had no other recourse, and Amira was fired from the dental clinic that same day. She nevertheless continued to sort out her documents. Her diploma certification finally occurred nearly three years after she arrived in Brazil. In the meantime, she again started working in a local restaurant to make ends meet. Realizing that food service jobs were unstable and did not lead to what she considered upward economic mobility, she began exploring the possibility of returning to school. Both Amira and Nasser felt her training as a prosthodontic technician, and language skills offered a good foundation to pursue a degree in dentistry.

Amira's issues validating her education documents and certifications were common among the other refugees resettled in São Paulo, who had



acquired higher education or professional diplomas in Iraq. There had not been systematic processing of these by the resettlement authorities. Moreover, stipends for the validation process, which were costly, were also not provided. As a consequence, Amira noted that the likelihood for the refugees to gain employment in the area of their professional training was minimal. Her trajectory provides insight into the multiple boundaries refugees face in new locations to achieve gainful employment and/or obtained higher education. The next section will elucidate a different set of obstacles Amira faced. This time within an institution of higher education.

### THE VEIL AND BOUNDARIES OF MULTICULTURAL DISCOURSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Despite the multicultural and still salient Brazilian nationalist discourses of racial democracy proffered by the resettlement authorities, where the country's multicultural character, harmonious plurality, and the successful presence of "Arabs" within its borders would allow for seamless integration of Palestinian Iraq War refugees, encounters with institutions continued to tell a different story.

In the very first semester of Amira's dentistry program, she was met by racialized social boundaries because of her Muslimness. Her hijab (veil) became a point of contention in a lab class. Thus, discourses of multiculturalism and harmonious plurality met their limit in the intersection of education, gender, and religion. In a conversation via Skype, Amira recalled her experiences with a lab professor.

*"She asked me to remove the veil in lab class because she was concerned it was a microbial contaminant. It did not feel right, but at first, I was intimidated by her, so I removed the outer scarf, but kept the headdress I wear below it on.*

*As the class went on that day, I got more and more upset. Immediately after the class, I went to the dean's office. I told him what happened – that I was asked to remove the veil because the professor thought it carried germs and would contaminate the lab... Then I told him that Brazil was not France and there were no laws banning the headscarf. Brazil was different; it is a country of many dif-*

*ferent religions and it allowed for everything. This was supposed to be a country of freedom and I was free to wear the hijab if I chose, the same way that some women I go to school with can only wear skirts and not pants because of their religion. He told me to rest assured that I could wear my headscarf and no one would say anything more to me about it. He sent out an email to that professor and to the others too.”*

Amira had become well versed in the much-touted Brazilian discourses about freedom and inclusion and was quick to reproduce them as her defense in the incident that occurred in her lab class. She fought back against the *gendered pedagogies of migrant (dis)integration*, and, in fact, demonstrated a Brazilian cultural competence to the Dean. In effect, Amira utilized national and citizenship discourses to support her rights despite her liminal citizenship status. By bringing up France and its policies about the hijab to the dean, she was able to point to Brazilian national discourses that professed something much different and held her college, professors, and classroom accountable to the same. She was able to stake a claim in the place of the university by centering her marginality as opposed to being erased or disappearing into its folds (Hall 1987). The agency with which Amira approached the situation and the reasoning with which she pursued it positioned her very differently from the common Orientalist discourses of the “the oppressed Muslim woman” employed by many direct service providers and teachers.

When I asked Amira whether there were other women who wore hijab in her dentistry program, she said she was the only one. I inquired about whether she experienced any stereotypes during her interactions with peers, and she said she had not experienced anything negative at all. However, she went on to say,

*“Of course they ask about the veil all the time: things like, do you feel hot? Does it feel uncomfortable? And many want to see my hair; they want to throw a party for me to take off the veil. I tell them ‘fica sonhando’ [keep dreaming]”.*

While Amira in no uncertain terms claimed she did not experience negative backlash because of the veil from her peers, she conveyed a sense of

annoyance by the banal everyday questions about her headscarf. These everyday racist-inflected manifestations capture what critical race theorists call microaggressions in ordinary, daily encounters, where there might be intentional (conscious) or unintentional (unconscious) racism *and* sexism in small acts and social exchanges, which get produced and reproduced in multiple areas of social and public life. The multi-faceted manifestations of microaggressions at the intersection of racism and sexism accumulate over time and can have a debilitating effect (cf. Davis 1988–1989; Williams 1987). Despite having to negotiate these social boundaries, Amira went on to complete her degree. During my fieldwork in Summer 2018 in Brazil, she was working as a licensed dentist in two clinics on the outskirts of greater São Paulo.

## CONCLUSION

Amira's case offers insight into the microcosm of the fraught gendered borders and boundaries that people who are displaced by war cross, carry, and negotiate. Once resettled and emplaced, migrants are confronted by problematic constructions of cultural and racial otherness that have enduring implications (Fassin 2001; Ong 2003). The resettlement process in São Paulo, Portuguese language classes, interfacing with authorities for education validation, and negotiating for personal rights in higher education as Amira's experience elucidates, functioned to discipline the refugees into proper Brazilian subjects but also yielded openings to assert agency and combat hegemonic ideologies. Amira's refusal to being constructed a cultural other in need of domestication upends the monolithic scripts deployed by the resettlement agency under the guise of cultural competence and brings to bear the dangers of immigration/resettlement regimes in compounding problems for new arrivals. She recuperated the nation-state's rights discourses to confront the gendered racism to which she was subjected in the classroom and refutes the *gendered pedagogies of migrant (dis)integration*. Consequential here is Amira's ability to negotiate multiple dynamics and sites. Her Portuguese language acquisition and general savvy were attributes that many of the other resettled refugees could not mobilize on their own behalf. Often, Amira served as an advocate for others, not just the members of

her immediate family. She was able to intervene with medical practitioners and in communications with direct service providers from the local resettlement agency. Some of the challenges she encountered would have yielded different outcomes if, for instance, it had been one of the infirm elders in the group, who did not have a comparable skillset. Nevertheless, Amira's and the other refugees' experiences with formal and informal education institutions point to the necessity of disrupting hegemonic scripts that are often framed as cultural competence within these institutions and begs for interventions that consider multi-dimensionality of people and places. In other words, populations in flux across place, space, and time cannot be reduced to essentialist framings that reinscribe estrangement and dangerous stereotypes. Instead, there must be an explicit investment in socially just practices that produce critical consciousness in educators and other service providers who, in turn, will refute singularities and dangerous dehistoricized and de-politicized constructions.

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## Između nacionalnih granica i društvenih ograničenja: iračke ratne izbeglice u Brazilu i rodne pedagogije (dez)integracije migrantkinja

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**Sažetak:** Po prelasku nacionalnih i državnih granica, migranti/migrantkinje i izbeglice se često suočavaju sa institucionalnim i društvenim granicama i ograničenjima zasnovanim na rodu i „rasi” upravo tamo gde traže zaštitu i utočište. Zasnovan na etnografskom terenskom radu i istraživanju u Brazilu sa raseljenim izbeglicama rata u Iraku muslimanima/muslimankama, Palestincima/Palestinkama, ovaj rad ispituje vezu obrazovanje–migracije u procesu selekcije izbeglica i u formalnim i neformalnim obrazovnim ustanovama. Tekst razmatra kako ove strukture produkuju i reprodukuju drugost, ali i dinamične metode koje izbeglice koriste da bi se borile i prevazišle ograničenja koja su im nametnuta. Ovaj rad razvija pojam rodnih pedagogija (dez)integracije migranata/migrantkinja da bi se analizirali procesi rodne rasijalizacije koji utiču na pripadanje.

**Ključne reči:** rod, pedagogija, migrantkinje, rodne pedagogije (dez)integracije migrantkinja, granice, kultura, orijentalizam