Analyzing The Contribution of Western Acculturation to The Socio-Economic Disenfranchisement of Pakistani Expatriates in the United Arab Emirates

Muhammad Murtaza Ali
SUNY Binghamton, mmurtazaali03@gmail.com

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Abstract:
The impact of acculturation on the West has primarily been explored through the favorable and adverse effects of immigration. However, the conversation surrounding the impact of western acculturation on the rest of the world is relatively undeveloped. Here, on the basis that acculturation is the adoption of cultural practices and can exist without the physical presence of a dominant culture, the impact of western acculturation will be associated with the socioeconomic disenfranchisement of an overseas population: Pakistani expatriates in the United Arab Emirates. More specifically, free education and western media are identified as mechanisms of western acculturation. Both media induced and free education induced acculturation constitute a level of agreeability that acclimates workers to the social structure of the capitalistic business model employed in the UAE. Media induced acculturation directly predisposes Pakistani expatriates in the UAE to the socioeconomic disenfranchisement that accompanies the power dynamic in the social structure of the capitalistic business model. Education models in the UAE institutionalize western acculturation, possibly leading to socioeconomic disenfranchisement and deep-rooted cultural change. Deep-rooted cultural change becomes imperative when considering the promotion of globalization in that although globalization may provide a broader cultural perspective, it can also eliminate cultures via acculturation-induced cultural dominance.

Keywords: globalization, western acculturation, socioeconomic disenfranchisement, Pakistani expatriates, western media, free education, agreeability, institutionalization, capitalism

Background

According to Katelyn Peters, author of "When did globalization start?", "After World War II, many nations looked to break down barriers of trade between nations, promote free trade, and set up global organizations" like the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Technological advancements, such as decreased transport and communications costs and changes in international economic and political policies, enabled the free flow of goods, services, and capital, resulting in greater global integration or globalization (Peters). In the 20th century, the United States became "the primary economic force in the international economy" and a leader in the process of globalization (Peters).

According to Fulong Wu, author of "Globalization, Place Promotion and Urban Development in Shanghai," the promotion of globalization has largely been a political discourse (55). However, the promotion of globalization has been highly prevalent in contemporary literature and across many disciplines, as noted by Safoura Dorri, Azar Abedi, and Nooredin Mohammadi, authors of "Nursing education in the path of globalization: Promotion or challenge?" (1). A piece of contemporary literature focused on promoting globalization is Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. Hamid points out that regardless of one's physical migration status, we are all migrating through time, and from this, he necessitates exposure to other cultures and perspectives. He juxtaposes the emotional development of the main two characters, Saeed and Nadia, to imply that broadening perspective leads to one's complacency in life (Hamid). However, could globalization and greater global integration heed negative consequences from the anthropological lens?

Introduction

The economic power the United States harnessed from WW2 and their effort to globalize, according to the Population Reference Bureau, facilitated the mass migration to the United States from Latin American and Asiatic countries post-1965 (Martin). Nathan Glazer, author of "Is Assimilation Dead?", cites that although on the decline, assimilation (an eventual outcome of acculturation) was ideal for these migratory groups in envisioning a better future in the United States (122). Nicki Lisa Cole, author of "Understanding Acculturation and Why It Happens," defines *acculturation* as the "process through which a person or group from one culture comes to adopt the practices and values of another culture, while still retaining their own distinct culture." Therefore, acculturation is a product of globalization in that globalization facilitates a global migration that subjects migratory groups to adopting different cultural practices. The

conversation surrounding acculturation has also primarily been about the impact of migrants in Western societies and not the Western world's influence on other parts of the world, according to Rodney C Hills and Paul WB Atkins, authors of "Cultural identity and convergence on western attitudes and beliefs in the United Arab Emirates" (196). Here, there will be an exploration of the latter.

According to Katelyn Peters, in the 21st century, European and Asian economies have become significant economic forces in the international economy. In addition to employing the Western capitalist business model, these nations have also experienced Western acculturation (Hills and Atkins 194). This challenges previous models of acculturation, which necessitate a "local, dominant" culture towards which acculturation can exist (Hills and Atkins 193). The dominant psychological presence of the West in countries such as the UAE and Pakistan is attributed to Western media and free education (Hills and Atkins 204; Godwin 1). These mechanisms of acculturation lead to a level of agreeability in these populations. According to Adam Hayes, author of "What Are the Most Important Aspects of a Capitalist System?", in the capitalistic business model, agreeable workers get paid less and hold less power in the social structure. Business owners with the most authority earn the most, followed by positions of lower pay grade and less authority until the bottom line of workers with the lowest pay grade and least amount of authority is reached (Hayes). In other words, there is a scalable social structure in the capitalist business model that takes advantage of the agreeability of workers due to the power dynamic present in its nature. **Therefore, the consumption of Western media contributes to western acculturation, which facilitates a level of agreeability that acclimates Pakistani expatriates to the social structure of capitalistic business models in the UAE, resulting in a predisposition to socioeconomic disenfranchisement despite the provision of clear economic**

gain. Western acculturation then becomes institutionalized through models of education in the UAE, suggesting deep-rooted cultural change.

According to Hills and Atkins, western media has contributed to rapid behavioral acculturation in non-western societies like the UAE (204). Through personal identity disposition, transient cultural change, and compromised individuality, Western media leads to a level of agreeability amongst Pakistani workers, which causes them to acclimate to the scalable social structure of capitalistic business models (Hills and Atkins 202-204). An association between the acclimation to the social structure of the capitalistic business model and socioeconomic disenfranchisement will be drawn here using Ivan Szelenyi's piece, "Pakistani guest Workers in the United Arab Emirates". Socioeconomic disenfranchisement is constituted by the exploitation of social and economic rights or privileges. Furthermore, Godwin, author of "Globalization, Education and Emiratisation: A Study of the United Arab Emirates," argues that free education in the UAE is based on "Western pedagogical models" (1). According to Joel Mokyr, the original values promoted in the western model of teaching were closely related to the social structure of business in the West. Mokyr argues that these values, through social conditioning (such as that present in acculturation), led to agreeability amongst western workers and resulted in acclimation to the social structures of businesses in the West (Mokyr in Schrager). Godwin has observed a level of acculturation in the UAE resulting from the free education model and notes that it has created a more docile national population (4). Stephen Wilkins, the author of "Student Choice in Higher Education: Motivations for Choosing to Study at an International Branch Campus," highlights that most Pakistani students in the UAE are from expatriate families (423). Godwin cites that private education offered exclusively to the expatriate population mirrors the various

national curricula found in free education, translating the impact of free education-induced acculturation onto the children of Pakistani expatriates (5).

Hence, the consumption of western media first contributes to western acculturation and leads to a level of agreeability that acclimates Pakistani expatriates in the UAE to the social structures of the capitalistic business model. Education models in the UAE then contribute to the institutionalization of Western acculturation by impacting the children of Pakistani expatriates. Alongside Western acculturation, the economic necessity causing Pakistani expatriates to migrate to the UAE for work in the first place also leads to a level of agreeability (Szelenyi 40). Although this level of agreeability does necessitate an acclimation to the social structure of the capitalistic business model, it does not lead to the same socioeconomic disenfranchisement that Western acculturation yields.

Disenfranchisement and The Necessity to Migrate

Pakistani expatriates in the UAE experience a net economic gain. According to Szelenyi, Pakistani expatriates almost always migrate to the UAE "to improve financial conditions" and to provide for families back home (40). Szelenyi notes, "the single most important factor that drives people back to Gulf monarchy jobs is low income in Pakistan" (44). The mean monthly salary was around 1,500 dirhams in the UAE, three times more than the mean salary upon return to Pakistan. Nearly sixty percent of families could not survive without the remittances sent back. Data shows that eighty-five percent of workers sent back at least 8,000 dirhams (~2200 USD) which, for the majority of workers, was more than fifty percent of their yearly earnings (Szelenyi 24).

However, the necessity to provide for families has constituted a level of agreeability amongst Pakistani workers. This level of agreeability has acclimated Pakistani expatriates to the

social structure of the capitalistic business model, resulting in their socioeconomic disenfranchisement. For example, a worker was not paid for the work he did. When he protested, he was threatened to be sent back to Pakistan, but he was in heavy debt and could not afford to lose his job (Szelenyi 24). His need to retain his employment forced him to be agreeable, which conditioned him to put up with the malpractice from authorities enforced by the scalable social structure characteristic of the capitalistic business model. Tolerating malpractice resulted in his socioeconomic disenfranchisement when he attempted to transcend the barriers of the social structure and voice his concern.

Even though only thirty-two percent of Pakistani expatriates got their promised salary, even though only forty-six percent were satisfied with their pay, and even though fifty-eight percent felt like they were treated like slaves, they continued to put up with this treatment. Sixty percent of these workers continued to work more than 8 hours daily, with thirty-two percent working more than 10 hours daily (Szelenyi 28). Although socioeconomic disenfranchisement resulted from necessity-induced agreeability, the overall net economic gain appeased this (Szelenyi 40). For example, upon returning to Pakistan, Pakistani expatriates earned three times the amount of money of prospective expatriates (Szelenyi 38). Pakistani expatriates also had higher social standing back home and gained much respect. One worker reported that "the people who ignored him in the past now respected him a lot" (Szelenyi 42). Another worker said that his rise in social status upon return was what managed to get him married only four years after working in the UAE (Szelenyi 21). However, some negative sentiment amongst the workers is that they felt their families treated them like objects for the monetary value they provided. One worker stated, "we are not relative of anyone, only our money is relative of all" (Szelenyi 16).

The socioeconomic benefits accompanying the necessity to migrate appear to outweigh the socioeconomic disenfranchisement. Moreover, the social disenfranchisement experienced in the UAE due to necessity-induced agreeability was less severe than the economic disenfranchisement. On the other hand, the agreeability resulting from acculturation poses a much more significant threat in terms of social disenfranchisement than economic disenfranchisement. And as will be explored later, seventy-six percent of the Pakistani expatriates found that the most significant suffering from going abroad came from the social sphere (Szelenyi 30).

Mechanism of Acculturation and Agreeability

The consumption of Western media contributes to western acculturation, which constitutes a level of agreeability. Hills and Atkins point out that what allowed many non-western migrants to better adapt to western culture compared to any other culture was the exposure to western culture prior to migration. For young Pakistani workers, Hills and Atkins point out that,

> The influence of media can explain why so many non-western migrants are sufficiently familiar with western norms that they are able to adapt quickly to western behavioral strategies in the corporate environment. This influence is consistent with Khilji's (2004) observations of changing values among younger employees in Pakistan" (Hills and Atkins 204).

Hills and Atkins also assert that "non-westerners express an aspirational value for themselves to become more like those in the West" (202). Yet these non-westerners also hold onto their cultural connection with their heritage. There is a need to belong to a certain group, and a duality between identities is created long before migration (Hills and Atkins 204). The Western cultural tendencies and values learned through the media begin to be "assumed" when in the presence of Western practice, indicating acculturation (Hills and Atkins 202). This acculturation then begins to impact agreeability when individualism comes into question. Hills

and Atkins point out "that most Gulf businesses in which they were employed formally aspired to western practice" (202). This means Western individuals in the Gulf corporate setting did not need to adjust their identity. These Westerners primarily held positions with greater authority and were quite individualistic and indifferent toward the management style. On the other hand, other cultural groups, such as Pakistanis, had more experience with multiple identities resulting from media-induced acculturation and were much more likely to admit to external pressures (Hills and Atkins 202). In effect, Pakistani expatriates' idea of self became more open to acculturation and less open to individualism, allowing Western counterparts to thrive overseas. And in doing so, they gained a level of agreeability that acclimated them to the social constructs of the capitalistic model.

Agreeability and Socioeconomic Disenfranchisement

Pakistani expatriates acclimating to the social structure of capitalistic business models in the UAE result in their socioeconomic disenfranchisement. Specifically, this acclimation leads to socioeconomic disenfranchisement in terms of working and living conditions. For example, the passports of Pakistani expatriates were usually confiscated by businesses to ensure that the migrant workers could not leave. Although this was illegal, eighty-two percent of Pakistani workers reported that their passports were seized by employers (Szelenyi 26). These employers, of course, had greater power and authority. The Pakistani expatriates were used to this power dynamic present in the social structure of the capitalistic business model and put up with its consequences. Adhering to this power dynamic meant that thirty-one percent of the Pakistani workers could only return home once a year. Another thirty-four percent could only visit home once every other year (Szelenyi 31). Thirty-one percent of respondents reported knowing of wives leaving husbands due to this extended stay in the UAE. Even with this extended stay,

seventy-seven percent had never socially interacted with an Emirati (Szelenyi 22). Business owners would also provide housing in the cheapest form: labor camps. Sixty-two percent of Pakistanis' reported living in labor camps. Forty-one percent of Pakistanis lived with more than seven people. Personal accounts of expatriates putting up with these conditions were even worse (Szelenyi 29). A Pakistani worker once shared a living space with 27 others, and temperatures in the living space went up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit (Szelenyi 30). They were conditioned to tolerate it.

Institutionalization of Acculturation

Education models in the UAE also contribute to western acculturation. According to Godwin, free education in the UAE is based on "Western pedagogical models" (1). Joel Mokyr explains the original purpose of the western teaching and education model.

> Much of this education, however, was not technical in nature but social and moral. Workers who had always spent their working days in a domestic setting, had to be taught to follow orders, to respect the space and property rights of others, be punctual, docile, and sober. The early industrial capitalists spent a great deal of effort and time in the social conditioning of their labor force, especially in Sunday schools which were designed to inculcate middle-class values and attitudes, so as to make the workers more susceptible to the incentives that the factory needed (Mokyr in Schrager 2).

Mokyr points out that this education conditioned the students and workers to be more subservient and agreeable to the working order. In the UAE, curriculum reform entails "higher quality educational services and Western qualifications" (Godwin 11). Because of the values instilled in Western education, gravitation towards it is a clear sign of acculturation. Evidence of this acculturation is in the docile national citizen population of the UAE, which has "adopted a western lifestyle" (Godwin 4). Hence, free education-induced acculturation constitutes a level of agreeability that leads to acclimation to the social structure of capitalistic business models, as the

original purpose of the educational model was to appease "early industrial capitalists" by making "the workers more susceptible to the incentives that the factory needed" (Mokyr in Schrager 2).

Although free education is exclusively offered to UAE nationals, private education that caters to the expatriate population mirrors the various national curricula (Godwin 5). According to Stephen Wilkins et al., "the vast majority of Pakistani students (in the UAE) come from expatriate families" (423). The free education-induced acculturation Godwin observed in the UAE could also adversely affect the children of expatriates through its presence in private institutions. According to Lynne G. Zucker, author of "The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence," institutionalization is associated with "generational uniformity of cultural understandings, maintenance of these understandings, and resistance of these understandings to change" (726). Therefore, free education-induced agreeability could have a longstanding, multigenerational effect on the identity of Pakistanis in the UAE. Furthermore, the adverse effects could be very similar to that experienced by Pakistani expatriates in the UAE, such as socioeconomic disenfranchisement. This is because both media-induced and free education-induced acculturation constitute a level of agreeability that leads to acclimation to the social structure of capitalistic business models.

Conclusion

Prior exposure to Western media in societies like the UAE is the seed for Western acculturation. When applied in cases where there is a split cultural identity, media-induced acculturation perpetuates the individualism that allows Westerners to thrive overseas and contributes to the deconstruction of the idea of self among Pakistani expatriates, fueling their agreeability. This agreeability, in turn, acclimates expatriates to the working environment. And because this seed is sown before migration, we observe a form of acculturation that leaves Pakistani expatriates in

the UAE predisposed to socioeconomic disenfranchisement. Once in the UAE, Western acculturation becomes institutionalized through the promotion of western accreditation, which is accompanied by western values in free education. These values contribute to a level of agreeability associated with the capitalistic working environment. This indirectly impacts the children of Pakistani expatriates in that the private education most children of Pakistani expatriates receive mirrors the national curricula in the UAE, which, again, is based on the West's free education models. Free education-induced acculturation is particularly concerning because it may lead to deep-rooted cultural change for Pakistanis in the UAE. This deep-rooted cultural change will continue to dissolve Pakistanis' idea of self and perpetuate an agreeability similar to that resulting from media-induced acculturation. Thereby, future generations of Pakistanis in the Gulf region may too be subjugated to socioeconomic disenfranchisement.

However, rather than focusing on the mechanisms of acculturation, we should focus judgment on its driving force, globalization. As technology continues to advance and the promotion of globalization continues to take effect, as seen in the past, the movement of people, products, and capital will continue to accelerate, accompanied by rapid acculturation. And suppose this acculturation is, in fact, deeply rooted. In that case, the relationship between cultures will continue to evolve to the point that the consequences of acculturation, perpetuated by agreeability, will disproportionately advantage certain cultures and ultimately exclude other cultures and perspectives. This can already be seen in the UAE, where complaints filed for cultural workplace tensions are brushed under the table by the government to play into the narrative of a diverse, accepting culture meant to appease Western corporate interest in the region (Hills and Atkins 194). Therefore, the promotion of globalization and greater global integration is paradoxical in calling for a broadening of perspective.

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