

ASTUDY OF ACCULTURATION
AS APHENOMENON OF PLURAL SOCIETIES
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مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on acculturation as a phenomenon of interest from different academic fields. It tackles its different definitions, stages and strategies. Moreover, it indicates those who may be exposed to this experience and the different changes that may take place during the acculturation process.

Keywords: acculturation, plural society, refugees, society of origin, society of settlement, assimilation.

What is acculturation:

Acculturation is a phenomenon that appears remarkably in plural societies. Brooks defines such societies as, "those in which a number of different cultural or ethnic groups reside together within a shared political and social framework." (qtd. in Berry "Integration and Multiculturalism" 22). Those societies appeared as a result of different international phenomena such as colonization, slavery, refugee and immigration movements.

In those plural societies that have different nationalities, foreigners are always adrift between two different worlds and cultures. They find themselves separated from the host society and consequently face many unfamiliar aspects of life. Therefore, they try to adjust to their current life, especially when they are obliged, for a reason or another, to stay for a long time. This adjustment process is called "acculturation" which is simply defined as "the change in

individuals whose primary learning has been in one culture and who take over traits from another culture" (Marden36) .

The term "acculturation" has been studied by scholars from different fields. In 1936, Redfield, Linton and Herskovits have defined acculturation as, "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield 149). Nine years later, another definition has been proposed by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) that formulates acculturation as:

Culture change that is initiated by conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequences, and the operation of role determinants and personality factors. (qtd. in Lakey 104)

Simons, a sociologist, has studied acculturation and regarded it as a two way process of "reciprocal accommodation" (qtd in. Sam 13). Sociologists have used this concept for a better understanding of the changes that have resulted from the modernization processes that different cultural and ethnical societies underwent during the last two decades. It has been recently used for the account of the different experiences of cultural and ethnical minorities and immigrants (Trimble 5).

In this sense, it can be said that sociologists have paid attention to acculturation, especially with the increase of the number of the studies related to America, the biggest plural society in the world. In this context, sociologists have argued that the word acculturation refers to, "the process of change

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that occurs when individuals from different cultures interact and share a common geographical space following migration, political conquest, or forced relocation" (Balls 101). Hence, acculturation is an essential form of social change. Sociocultural change is therefore the progenitor of acculturation (Trimble 3).

Moreover, anthropologists paid attention to this phenomenon. For example, McGee has defined acculturation to be "the process of exchanges and mutual improvement by which societies advanced from savagery, to barbarism, to civilization, and to enlightenment" (qtd. in Sam 13).

In addition, cross cultural psychology developed an interest in such a topic. Psychological acculturation is defined by John. W. Berry as, "the process by which individuals change, both by being influenced by contact with another culture and by being participants in the general acculturative changes under way in their own culture"(qtd. in Dees 21).

Acculturation stages and strategies:

The term acculturation is also explained by several scholars in the light of different strategies and stages. In other words, in order to understand how acculturation changes take place, theorists have suggested that the process passes through several phases or that it may have different forms. For instance, Gordon has suggested that acculturation and assimilation are the same. He indicates that assimilation or acculturation involves passing through seven progressive stages. He refers to these stages as, " cultural or behavioral assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, attitudinal reciprocal assimilation, behavioral reciprocal

assimilation, civic assimilation and identificational assimilation" (qtd. in Sam 18).

In her examination of acculturation, Saadia Akram claims that during this process, immigrants go through a number of changes that can be classified into five categories, " physical, biological, cultural, social and emotional" (9). D. Hertz also elaborates upon three stages of adaptation, " pre-immigration stage (individual is excited to migrate); coping stage (feeling of fulfillment but later turning into anger and frustration and later acquiring skills for adjustment) and settlement (adjustment to new environment) " (qtd. in Akram 9). Moreover, G. Schimtz has theorized five stages of acculturation in a new society, " pre contact with host culture, initial contact, conflict, crisis and adaptation" (qtd. in Akram 10).

John W. Berry has tackled the stages of acculturation from a psychological perspective stating that acculturation is " a process that involves learning, development and competence in adjusting to the new culture and facing new challenges" ("A Psychology of Immigration" 615). He suggests a model of acculturation that involves four strategies:

- Integration (when someone maintains close relation with the original culture but simultaneously adopts the host culture).
- Assimilation (when someone rejects one's original culture but adopts the host culture).
- Separation (when someone maintains close connection with one's original culture but rejects any connection with the host culture)
- Marginalization (when someone rejects both the original and the host culture). (" A Psychology of Immigration" 619)

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However, it is indicated that any attempts and efforts to keep the immigrants with different culture isolated from their host culture may undoubtedly result in many problems, especially with the difficulty or the shock of the first confrontation. In this sense, Joanna Diane Cayatas explains," contrary to the propositions of advocates of ethnic plurality, confrontations between old and new cultures are more likely to produce irresolvable conflicts than a peaceful coexistence of both models does " (46).

People exposed to acculturation process:

It has been noted that acculturation processes, can be observed among different groups such as immigrants, refugees forced to leave their home countries and people living abroad as foreign students or as employees. Jan Pieter Van Oudenhoven has identified immigrants as the first and the biggest group. He explains:

Immigrants settle down in a new country for long periods or- in most cases -permanently. Another characteristic of immigrants is that they (or their parents) had strong motives to move to their new country. They may have been pulled to the new country by personal, political or religious reasons, but most often they went there to find a better economic position, or to be reunited with family members. (163)

Another group who are subject to acculturation are sojourners. Stephen Buchner has indicated that the basic sojourner groups include tourists, international students, expatriate workers, international civil servants and military personnel (183). In brief, those groups always have purposes to travel and a specific time frame. Buchner points out:

The term sojourner refers to individuals who travel abroad to attain a particular goal within a specified period of time. The expectation is that these culture travelers will return to their country of origin after completing their assignment. Unlike permanent settlers, such as immigrants or refugees, sojourners have a finite perspective and this influences how they acculturate to their host society. (181)

Refugees and asylum seekers in societies are also exposed to experience acculturation:

Refugees leave their homeland to escape significant human rights violations (HRVs). These HRVs include exposure to torture, imprisonment, imminent threat of harm, or otherwise dangerous or significantly adverse environments. In addition to the involuntary nature of refugee acculturation processes, refugees must typically simultaneously cope with the consequences of trauma associated with HRVs while undergoing acculturation. (Allen 198)

Changes that may take place during acculturation:

Whether immigrants, refugees or sojourners, they all encounter challenges, stresses and situations that lead to changes in their lives and well-being, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. The ways in which the processes of change occur differ widely depending on one's original culture and the new cultural context. John W. Berry has distinguished between two kinds of change that occur during acculturation processes:

- The first are those cultural and psychological changes that take place easily in a relatively

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straightforward way through a process of culture learning and shedding.

- The second are those changes that generate stress for the group and individual. In the latter case, culture can clash, especially when the purpose of the contact is hostile; and individuals can conflict, especially when there are scarce resources. Moreover, the process of culture learning and shedding may involve psychological conflict, where, for example, there are incompatible values held by members of the dominant and non-dominant groups. (qtd. in Sam 43)

Moreover, Berry has pointed out that there is a distinction between group level and individual level changes. Berry argues:

At the group level, the changes might be in either the social structure of the group, the economic base or the group's political organization. At the individual level, the kinds of changes taking place might be in identity, values, attitudes and behavior. (qtd. in Sam 44)

In an attempt to understand the reasons and the intense of the problematic aspect of acculturation, there should be comprehensive understanding of two societal contexts, that of origin and that of settlement. Berry explains:

In the society of origin, the cultural characteristics that accompany individuals into the acculturation process need description, in part to understand (literally) where the person is coming from, and in part to establish cultural features for comparison with the society of settlement as a basis for estimating cultural distance between the two

groups in contact. ("Marginality, Stress and Ethnic Identification in an Acculturated Aboriginal Community" 244)

It is also important to understand the nature of the society of settlement to appreciate the degree of acculturation problems. Berry indicates:

Some societies seek to encourage cultural communities to maintain and share their heritage, culture and identities; they are accepting of the resulting cultural pluralism, taking steps to support the continuation of cultural diversity as a shared communal resource. ("Marginality, Stress and Ethnic Identification in an Acculturated Aboriginal Community" 245)

To acculturate themselves to the new culture, expatriates suffer acquiring new different patterns and values and face many problems. These problems happen because many people, most of the time, seem to know who they are and who the others in their lives are. People think that they know well their identity. There are many situations, however, when identity becomes an issue. Leaving one's country to another country for any reason is an important occasion when identity notion is shaken. According to John Rummens, identity is " the distinctive character belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or a group" (157). In other words identity is:

The human capacity _ rooted in language _ to know ' who's who ' (and hence ' what's what '). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on: a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the

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human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectivities. (Jenkins 5)

David Buckingham also explains the term "identity" saying:

From the Latin root idem, meaning " the same," the term nevertheless implies both similarity and difference. On the one hand, identity is something unique to each of us that we assume is more or less consistent (and hence the same) over timeyet on the other hand, identity also implies a relationship with a broader collective or social group of some kind. When we talk about national identity, cultural identity, or gender identity, for example, we imply that our identity is partly a matter of what we share with other people. Here, identity is about identification with others whom we assume are similar to us (if not exactly the same), at least in some significant ways. (2)

In this sense, Seth J. Schwartz and others have concluded that conceptions of identity varied from Ericson's attitude that identity is a normative process and a necessary prerequisite to being able to make one's way in the world, to Gergen's postmodern arguments that the concept of identity means almost nothing at all, because the essence of who one is, is constantly in flux and cannot be defined as anything in particular. Indeed, concerning acculturation, Ericson's concept of identity is more appropriate as it results from a dynamic interplay between the individual and the context (5 - 6).

In addition, Ericson proceeds to clarify the multi - dimensionality of identity. He distinguishes between

personal and social aspects of identity while others added a cultural aspect to Ericson's aspects. This cultural aspect is drawn from parts of one's social identity. In this context, Schwartz marks that " identity is a synthesis of personal, social, and cultural self-conceptions ". He proceeds to clarify what each aspect refers to saying:

Personal identity refers to the goals, values, and beliefs that an individual adopts and holds. Social identity refers both to(a) the group with which one identifies, including its self-identified ideals, mores, labels, and conventions, and(b) the context to which this identification leads one to favor the 'ingroup'(i.e.,the group to which one perceives oneself as belonging) and to distance oneself from 'outgroups'(i.e.,groups other than the ingroup). Cultural identity is a special case of social identity and is defined as the interface between the person and the cultural context. Cultural identity refers to a sense of solidarity with the ideals of a given cultural group and to the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors manifested towards one's own (and other) cultural groups as a result of this solidarity. (6)

It is recently argued that identity is in real crisis as it is exposed to the most fundamental and sometimes fatal changes during the acculturation process. So, it can be said that identity problems are evident aspects of acculturation difficulties. In this respect, Berry, who assumes four strategies of acculturation, argues that " an ethnic and cultural identity is related to a preference for separation, a national identity predicts assimilation, a combination of both identities predicts integration, and no clear identity predicts marginalization " (qtd. in Belanger 143).

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Conclusion:

It can be concluded that acculturation is a phenomenon that has been studied from different fields. There is a common factor among different definitions that acculturation, in most cases, is an attempt of adaptation. Not only do immigrants experience acculturation, but it can be said also that any foreigner can be exposed to this process and to experience its different changes.

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