Chapter 7

Construction of Migrant Identity in the MENA Region: A Case Study of the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

Migration to the Arabian Peninsula has been ongoing for at least the past two centuries; much earlier than the establishment of the nation state of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1971. There are records of traders and sailors coming in boats of various sizes from coastal towns and villages in present-day Iran and the Indian sub-continent. The Arabian Peninsula, once called the Trucial Coast, was known for its thriving pearl trade, and merchants came to seek these in exchange for goods that were crucial for survival in the largely desert environment. With the discovery of oil, there was an acceleration in migrant inflows. Thus, many migrants chose to settle permanently in the Gulf region, seeking employment and a livelihood, and often fleeing from conflict, persecution, or poverty. This inward migrant flow has resulted in a lively and mutual exchange of cultures which can be seen in several cultural expressions. Migrant responses to the processes of acculturation range from adaptation to language, customs, social practices and family composition. This process of second culture acquisition unfolds over many years and may follow one of four models of adaptation. This study focuses on the construction of migrant identity in the United Arab Emirates. Through semi-structured interviews conducted with eight primarily second-generation individuals whose families have settled in the UAE for more than

30 years, this qualitative study aims to investigate patterns of second culture acquisition. Participants were drawn from several different countries of origin, including Afghanistan, India, Iran, Morocco, Syria, Pakistan, Palestine and Yemen. Results were analysed against Berry's Acculturation Model and LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton's Six Dimension's Bicultural Competencies Framework.

Key words: migration, UAE, migrant flows, culture, acculturation, second culture acquisition, biculturalism, Berry's acculturation model, LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton's bicultural competencies framework

Introduction

A chance encounter with a student at the campus of Abu Dhabi University in Al Ain triggered the interest of Kanji, one of the two authors of this study. The student, a young undergraduate, closely resembled another student that Kanji had in her class. During the conversation between Kanji and the student, the former discovered that the latter was indeed the sister of a student in Kanji's class, and both sisters were of Pakistani origin. Kanji had mistakenly assumed that the sister who was in her class was a local Emirati student, a deduction based on the traditional dress (*abayah* and *shayla*—the traditional long black dress and head covering) worn by the student, and the fact that the student spoke the Emirati dialect of Arabic flawlessly and conversed only with other Emirati students in the class.

Curious about this phenomenon, Kanji began paying additional attention to the cultural background of the students, specifically their ease of speaking in Emirati Arabic, paying close attention to their names and their peer groups, and found that the incident of the two sisters was by no means an isolated occurrence. This led her to become more aware of the fact that many of her students straddled at least two cultures. Thus began a delightful journey of discovery leading to a keen interest in second-culture acquisition.

Permanent or temporary voluntary migration is a common practice in our globalised world, with individuals and families migrating for work, study, or permanent settlement, as a result of which they are exposed to different cultures. While many people adapt and settle well in their adopted countries, some remain mal-adapted, and a large body of research on cross-cultural adaptation has emerged. However, very little research has been conducted on the experiences of the expatriate populations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE is a relatively small petroleum-rich nation and is one of the countries within the bloc of nations known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). With its large populations of well-settled expatriate communities, the UAE offers a fascinating case study for understanding contemporary patterns of cultural integration, assimilation and second-culture acquisition.

This exploratory study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the patterns of second-culture acquisition and the construction of migrant identity among second-generation individuals in the UAE. Eight participants, comprising 6 females and 2 males aged between 23 and 29 years, participated in this study. All but one of them belonged to the second generation, with their families having settled in the UAE for a range of 30 to 60 years. Participants were drawn from diverse countries of origin, including Afghanistan, India, Iran, Morocco, Syria, Pakistan, Palestine and Yemen. The primary data collection method used in this research was semi-structured interviews. among second-generation individuals.

The table below summarises key demographic information about the participants involved in this study:

Criterion	**Details**
Gender	6 females 2 males
Age	23 years old–29 years old

Criterion	Details
Country of origin	Afghanistan (female) India (female) Iran (female) Morocco (female) Syria (male) Pakistan (female) Palestine (male) Yemen (male)
Length of stay in UAE	All born in UAE, with exception of female from Morocco who migrated to the UAE following her marriage to an Emirati male in 2017.

Second-culture acquisition is a complex process, and several theories and frameworks can be found in the literature to describe how individuals negotiate the process of settling into a new cultural environment. For the purposes of this study, we utilised John Berry's Model of Acculturation (2001) which posits that individuals use one of four acculturation strategies to adjust to their new environments: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation. Additionally, we have drawn on the six dimensions of Bicultural Competencies suggested by LaFromboise, Coleman and Gerton (2013) to assess competencies which support the acculturation strategies. These include: (i) knowledge of cultural belief and values; (ii) a positive attitude towards both groups; (iii) bicultural efficacy; (iv) communication ability; (v) role repertoire; and (vi) groundedness. While second-culture acquisition and biculturalism appear to be similar, there are some nuanced differences between the two. Biculturalism focuses on the psychological and identity aspects of individuals as they navigate between two cultures. On the other hand, second-culture acquisition emphasises how individuals learn the process of adapting to a new culture and how they acquire the competencies in a second culture. Bearing this distinction in mind, we found these two frameworks useful in assessing the processes allowing our subjects to adapt to a second culture.

Historical Background

The Arabian Peninsula has been characterised by migration and movement throughout its entire inhabited history. Indeed, for the nomadic herders of the peninsula's interior as well as the maritime merchants of its coastal regions, movements and interconnections were intricately intertwined in the pursuit of livelihoods adapted to the region's harsh environments. When contemplating the recent history of the Arabian Peninsula and its inhabitants, migration in the region can be divided into three distinct historical periods.

Before oil was discovered in the late 1950's in Abu Dhabi and in 1966 in Dubai, the then Trucial States under British rule had attracted various flows of migrants, including merchants from the Indian subcontinent, Baluchi families, and seasonal workers and traders from neighbouring Persia, including the Ajamis, a class of merchants who settled primarily in Dubai in the mid-nineteenth century. The industrial revolution, the pearl trade, Hajj (the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, considered to be a central ritual for Muslims), and the need for trained employees in the ports all contributed to an influx of Indians to the Persian Gulf area around the turn of the nineteenth century. Common colonial-era workers included craftsmen, masons, technologists, clerks, and administrators who mostly served the needs of the British colonial administration (Kumar, 2016). The "coolie" labour system established by the British Empire during the colonial period allowed for the inflow of Indian migrants to the countries which later become the countries of the GCC (Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE). It would be useful to remember the prevailing influence of the British in some of these areas. Initially, the migrants worked in the pearling, mercantile and farming industries, and when oil was discovered in the 1950s in the UAE, they were hired by oil companies in large numbers.

In 1962, Abu Dhabi was the first emirate to initiate hydrocarbon exports. In the same year, it was estimated that half of its population consisted of expatriates. Large numbers

of foreign employees entered the UAE following the 1973 oil surge.

During the 1970s oil boom, many skilled and unskilled workers came to the GCC countries from India, primarily from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to help with infrastructure development, building projects and the growing oil industry. For several decades, the pattern was for single workers to work in the Gulf area for a few years and then to return home, with their place being taken by a new wave of migrants. Over time, the Indian expat community has expanded to become the largest non-Arab expat group in the GCC (Kumar, 2016). This population includes low-skilled, semi-skilled and professionals and business owners, with a wide range of jobs in both the public and private sectors. In the 1970s, when Arab Gulf countries needed more workers, India seemed like a logical option to source workers from because of its historical ties, close location and the availability of a large labour force.

This interdependence between labourers on the one hand and employment opportunities on the other has led to very warm economic and political ties between India and the GCC nations. However, the flow of Indian workers to GCC countries has changed over time due to changes in the price of oil and other factors.

A very diverse foreign population came to the UAE in the 2000s due to the country's unprecedented levels of economic growth. There are no demographic data on non-national residents in the UAE categorised by country of citizenship. The two countries with the biggest populations in the UAE, Bangladesh (700,000) and India (2.6 million), were nevertheless the top two national groupings, according to data received from diplomatic sources and published in the media in 2015. Emiratis would therefore rank third in terms of population, with 1.085 million people (Kumar, 2016).

Second-Culture Acquisition

Second-culture acquisition is the adjustment of an immigrant to the new, mostly dominant culture to which they must adapt. In the new culture, immigrants must navigate through situations in which they have no experience, often without a grasp of the language. Immigrants must deal with changes such as alterations in diet, climate change, different customs and social practices, unfamiliar clothing, new employment and different family composition. Moreover, they may live in the second culture as single individuals or families while most of their extended family resides in their country of origin or in another host country. Several different models have been constructed to explain the methods immigrants use to adapt to the new culture.

As far back as 1928, Park suggested the marginal human theory, suggesting that individuals who lived at the juncture of two cultures are "marginal people". To this, Stonequist (1935) added that individuals who can identify with two cultures need to manage the complexity of dual reference points, referred to as "double-consciousness" by Goldberg (1961). Goldberg (1941) and Green (1947) proposed that this can be advantageous for people living in two cultures simultaneously, especially if they are not psychologically affected by their experiences.

It is futile for us to engage in a definition of what comprises "culture", as several adequate definitions for this term already exist. Rather, we can speak to the idea of "cultural competence", which suggests that an individual who is culturally competent needs to possess certain characteristics, such as having a strong sense of personal identity, understanding the beliefs and worldview of their culture, being able to communicate well in the language of their culture, having the know-how to navigate the culture's institutions, maintaining social contact with people in the culture group, and acting according to socially-sanctioned norms. Thus, "cultural competence" is a broad term with many levels of social skills and personality development; thus,

an individual may be able to move socially in two or more cultures with ease but may find it more difficult to negotiate diverse institutional structures. Generally, however, the more levels that one is competent at, the more easily one can move within the cultures.

Several models of second-culture acquisition have emerged over time. John Berry's Model of Acculturation is generally recognised as one of the key frameworks for understanding how an individual encounters a second culture that is different from their own. If the second culture is encountered over a prolonged period and particularly during the process of settlement, especially if it has economic and social impact, the second culture becomes the dominant culture. Berry proposes two dimensions in his model: these are Cultural Maintenance vs. Cultural Contact and Identity Integration vs. Identity Segregation. Cultural Maintenance is a reference to the degree to which an individual retains his/her original culture and its values; Cultural Contact refers to how much contact an individual has with the host or dominant culture. Identity Integration is a reference to how well an individual can integrate elements of both cultures in his/her identity; while Identity Segregation is the opposite and refers to how well an individual is able to maintain two separate cultural identities.

There are four acculturation strategies that emerge from these four dimensions: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. These describe the processes by which an individual from one culture acquires the competencies to fit into a second, sometimes more dominant, culture. Each of the strategies has its own set of emphases and assumptions, and point to different outcomes. The brief description below will be useful in understanding how the participants in the current study represent some of these models.

1. *Assimilation*: the underlying assumption of this model is that the individual will completely lose their own cultural identity as they acquire a different, new identity within the dominant culture. In his work,

Gordon (1964, 1978) outlined the various stages of assimilation that an individual passes through: cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identification assimilation, attitudinal receptional assimilation, behavioural receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation. The goal of the assimilation process is to become socially accepted by the dominant culture group (Ruiz, 1981) and outcomes may include acceptance or rejection by members of the dominant culture.

2. *Integration Model*: in this model, the individual seeks to maintain both cultures, preserving the original culture while engaging in social contact with the dominant culture, resulting in a blend of both cultures. Individuals who are adept at both cultures are referred to as "bicultural" or "multicultural" because they are comfortable with both cultures. Here, the two identities are not fused. The multicultural model has been studied at great length, and multiculturalism has been critiqued and defended in equal measure. However, creating pluralistic societies is one of the most urgent issues that several European and North American societies must confront today, in view of the large numbers of migrants escaping the effects of wars, poverty and climate change, and seeking to make Europe or North America their home.
3. *Separation Model*: individuals who fear losing their original culture may consciously adopt this model where they prioritise maintaining their original culture and resisting interaction with the dominant culture.
4. *Marginalisation Model*: individuals may choose to withdraw from both cultures, neither maintaining their original culture nor engaging with the dominant one. This strategy, considered to be extreme, can lead to detachment, isolation, and an identity crisis.

This model posited by Berry has been presented in a simple manner, but it is a highly instructive model about second-culture acquisition, and extremely useful for understanding the extent of second-culture acquisition by the participants in our study. However, it is important to bear in mind that these

strategies are not mutually exclusive, and an individual may utilise more than one of these strategies on a continuum. The picture is a complex one, especially if we consider that within one family unit, each family member may be experiencing something different; the literature indicates that intergroup contact, education levels, social skills competencies, time, age and life stage, gender and socioeconomic status, among other factors, play a role in determining the level of second-culture acquisition.

Findings and Analysis

This study, while small and exploratory, reveals some interesting insights about how social learning unfolds, the extent to which our subjects develop bicultural competencies and how additional factors such as age, gender, choice of schools, connections with one's home country and socio-economic backgrounds also play an important role in second-culture acquisition.

When measured against Berry's model of acculturation, we find that the male students are closer to the assimilation model, while all the females adopt a strategy that is not separation, nor integration, but something in between, and we suggest developing an additional interim strategy between these two. We surmise that the social environment plays a role in integrating subjects into the dominant culture. The integration of participants into the local community is closely linked to their absorption of the local culture and its various aspects. It has been observed that subjects who had social access to the local community from a young age were more prone to absorbing the local culture and embracing its aspects as they grew up. Our two male subjects were raised in Emirati neighborhoods where they interacted with peers, imbibing local traditions, customs and culture through frequent social interactions in schools and sports, as well as socialising with other young male Emiratis. As male students interacted with their Emirati peers, they successfully absorbed nuances of the local language, adopted local dress (a long white *kandura*

and a traditional headcovering known as a *ghutrah*), eating habits, social activities and other traditional social norms such as meeting in coffee houses. While a deeper study with more participants may yield a more convincing analysis, at this stage we can surmise, albeit tentatively, that immigrant males in the UAE tend be oriented towards Cultural Contact and Identity Integration dimensions of Berry's Acculturation Model. There also seems to be a connection with age, since prolonged cultural contacts over a long period of time (six years or longer) will extend the opportunities for social learning.

Notably, the female interviewees shared a different set of experiences. Different paths emerged among our female subjects as they integrated into Emirati culture. Across the board, all of them embraced two distinctive elements of Emirati culture: the traditional clothing (*abayah* and *shayla*) and pan-Arab cuisine. Adopting a pan-Arab cuisine is relatively easy in the UAE due to its wide availability, as well as to the fact that parts of it are like some of the cuisines of the original cultures of our subjects. Emirati food, such as *thareed*, *harees*, and other local dishes, become an integral part of the immigrants' culinary practices, further reinforcing their connection to the Emirati culture.

However, adapting to non-clothing and non-food cultural aspects was challenging. One subject faced obstacles to absorbing Arabic culture and mastering the language, leading to a separation strategy due to the language barrier. Another subject was able to balance her Iranian identity whilst adopting Emirati practices; however, further integration was hindered by her limited proficiency in Arabic, the national language of the UAE. Separation and integration were both part of her strategy. A third subject combined Emirati customs with her Indian background, learning Arabic while maintaining fluency in her native Indian language at home.

Role repertoire emerged as a key aspect of one of the subjects' acculturation strategies. As the foreign wife of an Emirati national, this individual's situation proved to be a major differentiator from the remaining subjects. As a result

of her marriage, her daily contact with her husband's family afforded her an intimate contact with Emirati culture. On the flip side, our subject was compelled to integrate to avoid being seen as an outsider, and in this regard, she admits to an excellent adjustment to Emirati ways and fitting in comfortably with their practices. Over time, she has been able to achieve a harmonious balance between her original culture and the Emirati culture, and remarks that her language skills in particular have been influenced by her interactions with people around her. In short, this subject's approach is to blend both her cultures, where she effectively adopts new customs while also maintaining some of her original culture, specifically in her attitudes towards education and openness to new experiences.

Further study with more participants promises to yield more assured conclusions; however, through our study, we propose that females demonstrate a closer affinity to the Cultural Maintenance and Cultural Separation dimensions of Berry's Acculturation Model. While they adopted some of the visible and more easily acquired practices such as food and dress, their lack of facility with the Arabic language as well as a different social environment did not allow them to adopt other nuanced social customs. Eid and wedding parties are the clearest areas where most of the subjects strongly maintain their native culture, displaying significant resistance to cultural assimilation.

To mitigate this, a common strategy emerged: preservation of their home culture. This was achieved through deliberate efforts to maintain their original culture within the home environment. This included clothing, language, practices, traditions and even food choices. While most of the female subjects are single, all of them confided that their future marriage partner will be someone from their home culture.

Thus, despite the small size of our study, we see a clear bifurcation of strategies between male and female subjects. Our data reveals that male participants exhibited a higher

inclination towards embracing the local (Emirati) culture compared to their female counterparts. This trend could be attributed to the relatively greater freedom males have in Arab societies to engage and socialise with individuals from external communities, a privilege not as readily extended to females.

When we look at the Bicultural Competencies Framework, we note that all these competencies play an important role in second culture acquisition, while two are exceptionally important. The first is knowledge of cultural belief and values. The UAE is an Arab, Muslim country and both these descriptors are rooted in the country's history and traditions. Arabic is the national language, and all residents are expected to be familiar with at least some rudimentary aspects of the language. Muslim traditions are observed very strictly and very visibly: the five-times daily obligatory prayers; observation of the fasting period during Ramadan; the midday communal prayer each Friday; gender segregation; and modest dress. All of our participants were observant Muslims themselves and most of them were Arab; both these factors play a crucial role in accepting the dominant culture. Moreover, all the participants were *Sunni* Muslim, including those from Afghanistan, India and Iran where the populations sometimes tend to embrace *Shia* Islam. This competency cannot be underestimated and indeed plays a central role in the settlement and acculturation processes.

The second competency that plays a significant role is communication ability. As we have already concluded, facility with the language is a key determinant of acculturation, and where communication abilities are strong, acculturation is more rapid and leads to acceptance in the dominant culture. Other competencies, such as positive attitudes towards both cultures, bicultural efficacy, and groundedness—the ability to develop social networks in the dominant culture—are crucial also. All participants exhibited a positive attitude towards both cultures, yet while the males seemed to show stronger bicultural efficacy and groundedness, the female subjects were less well integrated because they tended to have more friends who shared their original culture or cultures closer to

their own, which, in turn, impacted their bicultural efficacy and communication ability. The inter-relatedness of the competencies is unmistakable, with each impacting the other in a complex web.

The present study yields other important insights that go beyond the Acculturation Model and Bicultural Competencies framework. Our study shows that the first-generation settlers were motivated by better opportunities, leading fathers/grandfathers to migrate to the UAE. This migration often left mothers as home country representatives within the family. However, a significant obstacle emerged in the form of a language barrier, as not being familiar with Arabic severely hindered their ability to absorb Emirati culture. However, their children who were born in the UAE were exposed to the local dialect much earlier and had more opportunities to become fluent and practiced.

A discernible pattern also emerges concerning the influence of the education and professions of the first-generation parents. When the first-generation parents have professional roles such as doctors, accountants, or engineers, they often reside in expatriate-populated areas, sometimes predominantly among individuals of the same nationality. As a result, the second generation tends to maintain a stronger connection to their original culture and displays lesser assimilation into the local Emirati culture, unlike families engaged in non-professional occupations, such as auto mechanics, small business owners, and long-distance drivers, which encourage closer contact with the dominant culture.

Subjects' ties with their home country were explored, revealing a correlation between the frequency of visits to the home country and the strength of their cultural connection. Families who visited their home country annually exhibited greater resilience in maintaining their cultural identity compared to those with infrequent visits. The frequency of visits to their home country is noticeably influenced by the family's financial status. In two cases, the subjects could not return home because of the state of war in their home

countries, and three of the subjects also mentioned that since most of their extended family already reside in the UAE, there was no real need to visit their home countries. Two of our subjects recounted their limited visits to Yemen and Pakistan, reflecting on the challenges they faced in understanding local dialects and feeling like strangers there. Conversely, two other subjects, who consistently visited their home country, displayed robust confidence in their cultural identity and maintained strong ties with their relatives. The latters' experiences are examples of how home country visits can contribute to cultural identity preservation. In a multicultural context, this connection testifies to the continuing influence of family ties and tradition on second-generation immigrants' identities.

The mindset of the first generation significantly shapes the cultural dynamics within the household. Instances were shared where families held a strict stance against incorporating any cultural practices beyond their own. One subject's family, for instance, prohibited the use of henna and other dialects apart from Syrian at home. Similarly, a Palestinian participant recounted her family's challenge to partake in a traditional folk dance, highlighting the influence of family attitudes on cultural integration.

Thus, we may conclude that as part of second-culture acquisition, several sub-processes take place either explicitly or implicitly, including understanding and adapting to the nuances of the host culture, acquiring language proficiency, which is crucial for cultural identity formation and leading to second culture acquisition (Morosini et al., 1998; Su & Ma, 2021).

Table 1: A summary of our findings

Criterion: Gender	**Characteristics**
Males	Closer to Berry's model of assimilation, Cultural Contact and Identity Integration facilitated by: Absorption into social environment—through schools and friendship networks. Language fluency is key and is result of acceptance in a social environment. Familiarity with local culture—visible aspects (dress, food, practice of faith) and invisible aspects (attitudes towards gender segregation, gender roles, etc.) Familiarity with the religious background of the host culture—in the UAE, this is a critical aspect of local culture. Age is also an important determinant—the longer they have been exposed through the social environment, the easier it is to assimilate or integrate.
Females	Picture is much more nuanced, and most females fall between Cultural Maintenance and Cultural Separation dimensions of Berry's Acculturation Model, not embracing either category fully. This was the result of: Familiarity with local culture—visible aspects (dress, food, practice of faith) and invisible aspects (attitudes towards gender segregation, gender roles, etc.) Familiarity with the religious background of the host culture—in the UAE, this is a critical aspect of local culture. Limited language proficiency influenced how they absorbed local culture. Friendship circle was drawn primarily from native culture. Preservation of native culture in the home environment. Limited opportunities for social interaction.

The efficacy of Berry's model can be evaluated in other contexts, for example, in North America. Indeed, studies have shown that John Berry's acculturation strategies greatly influenced migrants' lives in Europe and North America (Philimore, 2010; Klok et al., 2017; Chen & Wu, 2021). Philimore (2010) applies Berry's acculturation strategies to refugees, assessing how this group can integrate into their new host cultures, and he provides evidence of the influence of these strategies on migrants' experiences. Similarly, in 2017, Klok et al. examined the sense of belonging of older Turkish and Moroccan migrants living in the Netherlands. Researchers identified clusters of national belonging through latent class analysis. These clusters were further analysed against Berry's acculturation strategies and the studies' findings highlight the relevance of Berry's acculturation strategies in shaping the experiences of those migrants, emphasising their impact on the sense of belonging and inclusion in the host country. Using Berry's acculturation model, Chen & Wu (2021) examined the acculturative strategies used by Chinese international students in Western universities. The study provides valuable insights into how international students, for example, navigate the acculturation process through an analysis of Berry's acculturation strategies. It points out how certain methods used by Chinese international students can influence their adjustment to Western academic environments. The latter viewpoint is borne out by a study conducted by Tahseen and Cheah (2012) showing that frequent exposure to, and interaction with, the host culture in higher education institutions facilitates greater integration and assimilation.

While the current study has not addressed how second-culture acquisition affects the mental wellbeing of immigrants, studies such as the one conducted by Ward & Rana-Deuba show that individuals who embraced an integrated approach to acculturation tended to do better psychologically than others. Moreover, their study revealed that assimilationists were less likely to encounter social difficulties. These findings suggest that adopting an integrated acculturation style positively influences psychological well-being, while an assimilationist

viewpoint may result in fewer social difficulties. These results underscore the significance of acculturation strategies in shaping individuals' experiences, well-being and adjustment to new cultural environments.

Farver et al.'s 2002 study, conducted among several immigrant groups in North America, shows that integration is the most psychologically adaptive method of acculturation, so that immigrants are able to both maintain their cultural identity and at the same time felt connected to their new host culture. The study concludes that immigrants who follow the strategy of integration tend to achieve better psychological adjustment. This conclusion, that immigrants who adopt the strategy of integration and assimilation are more likely to have positive psychological well-being than those who adopt separation and marginalisation strategies, is also substantiated by Li et. al. (2021).

Acquisition of the host language, as well as the level of similarity between the immigrant culture and the host culture, are key factors, and several studies bear out this connection, including the current study. Haansen et al.'s 2008 study, which explored how Russian and Iranian immigrants coped with their settlement in Germany, shows that among other factors, distance from German culture and unfamiliarity with the German language both had a negative impact on the mental wellbeing of immigrants. The link between language, and depth of acculturation and time taken to acculturate, was shown by Joshi et al. (2017) who demonstrated that when non-English speaking immigrants settled in Australia, being proficient in English was an intermediary factor between how long they have settled and their health outcomes.

Suggestions for Further Research

The UAE, as well as the entire GCC, is an under-researched region, and is ripe for further studies investigating a multitude of aspects of second-culture acquisition and biculturalism. One key aspect that the current study did not look at is the impact of immigrant culture on the UAE. The UAE has

absorbed several aspects of immigrant culture, including the ubiquitous national drink *karak shay* (heavily spiced brewed tea of Indian origin) and *paratha* (a savoury Indian flatbread); many words from Hindi and English have been absorbed into the Emirati dialect, as well as international fast food, Bollywood movies, and most recently, Korean music and drama and Japanese anime. Since cultural relationships are bilinear, one fascinating study could be the reflexive impact of bilinear exchanges, understanding how childhood friendships contribute to pluralistic attitudes. Other studies could also investigate specific groups such as non-Emirati spouses or the children of marriages between Emiratis and non-Emiratis, who, by the very nature of such unions are exposed to two cultures. Future researchers should also look at older settlers who are less inclined towards Cultural Contact and Integration, and who instead favour a Separation Strategy.

This study yields a more intimate understanding of how second-generation settlers are forging a composite, international identity, leading to a new cultural category, syncretic culture—which needs to be investigated further.

Conclusion

Embracing a diversity of cultures, the UAE is a vibrant tapestry of cultures shaped by the cultural interaction of Emirati and immigrant communities. Immigrant communities have long been a part of the UAE, which has absorbed several waves of settlement. Within this multicultural landscape, second-generation immigrants hold a distinctive position, blending their heritage culture with Emirati culture to shape their identities. Our two male subjects and one female subject who married Emiratis can be categorised under the acculturation strategy of "Integration". Their experiences indicate a strong inclination towards embracing and integrating into the local Emirati culture. While the males grew up in Emirati neighborhoods, they interacted closely with their peers, thereby absorbing local traditions, customs and culture. Their openness to the local community allowed them to comfortably

integrate Emirati elements into their lives. As a wife to a local man, the female study has intimate, daily contact with the culture which she has embraced over time. Additionally, their limited visits to their home countries emphasise their stronger connection to the UAE culture and society. This commitment to engaging with the local culture and embracing its practices aligns with the integration strategy, where they successfully blend their heritage culture with the host culture.

The remaining five subjects, all female, can be said to fall under the acculturation dimension of **"Maintenance with Integration".** While three of them pay regular visits to their home countries, preserving their native cultural ties, they also exhibit a willingness to integrate with the local Emirati culture. This integration is evident through their interactions with the host culture, participation in local activities, and even their residence in the UAE. However, through their consistent connections with their home countries, by preserving their original culture in their home environments, and by maintaining close friendship circles within their own cultures, they demonstrate consistent efforts to maintain their own cultures. This demonstration of a balanced approach is a blend of their original culture and the Emirati culture. This approach aligns with the maintenance strategy, whilst simultaneously incorporating elements of integration.

Interestingly, a new cultural identity seems to have emerged among some individuals—a category where they are neither fully Emirati nor completely akin to their parents' culture. This is an unusual blend of cultural elements that sets them apart as a distinct group within the country.

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