Bubble Living: Social Class and Contextual Influences on Immigrant Consumer Acculturation in a Non-western Cultural Context

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ABSTRACT

This research highlights the necessity of incorporating contextual influences in investigations of consumer acculturation. The focus is on immigrants from highly industrialized countries and their adaptation in a less developed country. In interpreting the immigrants experiences in this context, Bauman’s categories of identity construction; i.e. the stroller, vagabond and tourist are utilized to explain the immigrants’, identity projects.

Moreover the research clearly demonstrates that in this context, the adaptation processes are mitigated by “life lived in a bubble”, social class and cheap labor.

INTRODUCTION

According to the International Migration Office, there were 244 million international migrants in 2015 and 59% of these migrants lived in developed nations while the other 41% lived in developing nations. The globalization of international migration involves a wider diversity of ethnic and cultural groups than ever before. In 2015, Europe (76 million) and Asia (75 million) combined hosted nearly two-thirds of international migrants worldwide. North America, hosted the third largest number of international migrants (54 million) followed by Africa, which hosted 21 million migrants. In some countries, these international migrants are welcomed, while in others there is increasing hostility directed at the migrants.

Currently European countries are faced with an unprecedented influx of migrants arriving from Sub-Saharan Africa, Syria as well as other middle-eastern countries. These migrants face numerous hurdles as they make their seaward journey and many have perished along the way. Indeed, the migrant issue is causing divisions in the European Union due to ideological differences pertaining to immigration policy. Nonetheless, these ideological differences highlight the different receiving contexts that the migrants face. For example, many migrants want to go to Germany which is seen as more welcoming. Germany has led the push for the European Union to adopt a new system of mandatory quotas for refugees across the different EU nations. Examples of Germany’s receptivity to migrants is evidenced by Martin Patzelt (member of Parliament), who gave two Eritrean refugees a place to live in his private home and also helped the men find jobs. The migrant crisis resulted in countries such as Hungary sealing their new border fence and declaring a state of emergency along the border with Serbia. Additionally following Brexit, Hungary has issued its own referendum on migration. Clearly, the region of the world that an immigrant migrates to, will undoubtedly influence their acculturation process. A perusal of immigrant adaptation as well as varying national environments demonstrates not only vast national differences, but also regional as well as in country differences. Evidently, immigrants face favorable or unfavorable contexts of reception. In discussing the role of context, (Schwartz, 2010:240) suggested: “to understand acculturation, one must understand the interactional context in which it occurs. This context
includes the characteristics of the migrants themselves, the groups or countries from which they originate, their socioeconomic status and resources, the country and local community in which they settle and their fluency in the language of the country of settlement.” Unfavorable contexts have been shown to result in major sources of stress in the lives of immigrants (Segal & Mayadas, 2005). Perceived discrimination is among the most debilitating stressors that immigrant and minority individuals face (Berry, 2006). The perceived discrimination may also be heightened by the type of migrant. Steiner (2009) highlighted the need to be cognizant of the type of immigrant under consideration and the types of acculturation options available to the immigrant particularly given the circumstances surrounding their migration. Undoubtedly the experiences of a poor refugee will vary vastly from a highly skilled software engineer immigrating for work purposes.

Acculturation refers to the process by which individuals from one culture adapt to a new culture. Assimilation is the oldest model of immigrant acculturation (Gordon, 1964). Berry (1980) developed four strategies that an immigrant can adopt: integration, separation, marginalization and assimilation. These strategies examine whether the immigrant wants to retain his culture of origin and whether s/he desires to have positive relations with the host culture. The integration strategy in which an immigrant maintains aspects of their home culture while integrating aspects of the new culture has been shown to result in the best mental health for the immigrants (Berry and Sam 1997). Consumption is central to the acculturation experience since upon arrival, immigrants must immediately adopt and learn different consumption practices. Therefore, researchers have sought to understand the consumer acculturation of immigrants. Penaloza (1994) defined consumer acculturation as “the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country.” The majority of studies have looked at immigrants from one country and how their consumer behavior has changed upon immigration. For example, Mehta and Belk (1991) examined the adaptation processes of Indian immigrants and found that Indian immigrants adapt to U.S. culture in some ways but not in others. They suggested that these immigrants exhibit a “strategy of aggregate identity.” In her study of Mexican immigrants, Penaloza (1994) found that Mexican immigrants assimilated many products associated with U.S. culture while at the same time maintaining aspects of Mexican culture. Wamwara-Mbugua et al (2008) examined the adaptation of immigrants from Kenya to the United States and they found that Kenyan immigrants exhibited triple acculturation as they acculturated to White American culture, African American culture while maintaining a connection with their Kenyan culture. Numerous studies covering immigrants from many different regions of the world and their adaptation in highly industrialized countries have been conducted and while this research has generated some valuable information, acculturation research has been criticized for a “one size fits all” approach (Rudmin, 2003). For example, Luedicke (2011) reviewed acculturation research and highlighted the emerging need for a broader conceptualization of the acculturation phenomenon. In this work, Luedicke offered an alternative consumer acculturation framework, which presented acculturation as a complex system of recursive socio-cultural adaptive relationships. Other work by Schwartz et al. (2010) reexamined the concept of acculturation and called for studies that examine the role that “context of reception” plays in the acculturation process. Furthermore, Schwartz and colleagues cautioned against generalizing patterns of acculturation observed in the United States to other countries of settlement. Therefore, the research presented here seeks to move beyond the one size fits all model, while at the same time examining acculturation in a context outside of the United States and other highly developed nations.

An interesting area to examine the role of context is in language acquisition. Acculturation research generally focuses on language acquisition as an important gauge of immigrant adaptation. “The adoption
of language has long been associated with advancing acculturation … language has been considered a reliable indication of acculturation” (Olmedo and Padilla, 1978). More recently, (Schwartz, 2010:239) suggested for example that when “ethnicity is held constant, migrants coming from English-speaking countries, or who are otherwise proficient in English, may encounter less stress and resistance in the United States than many migrants who are not familiar with the English language.” Most of the research examining language acquisition and perceptions of both the immigrant and the natives has been conducted in mono-lingual countries such as the United States where indeed many individuals are accustomed to hearing only one language. Yet, it might be entirely possible that this focus on language acquisition is erroneous since “language ability,” may not be as important in countries such as Kenya where there is a “sea of languages.” There are more than 42 different languages spoken in Kenya with the average educated Kenyan having a command of at least three languages: (English - the official language and the language of instruction in schools; Kiswahili – the national language and their tribal language). Therefore, it is our contention that different contexts of reception may regard language acquisition differently and therefore the lack of language may not necessarily result in discrimination as described by (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Socioeconomic status has been shown to greatly influence the acculturation process. For example, migrants who are perceived to be contributing to the local economy are received with open arms. Hence “a white business executive with a French or Italian accent may be regarded more favorably than a dark-skinned Mexican farm worker with a Spanish accent.” Conversely, “refugees and asylum seekers as well as immigrants of lower socioeconomic brackets and those who may be viewed as a drain on the receiving countries’ resources may face discrimination.” (Schwartz et al., 2010: 241). In most African countries such as Kenya, this difference in socio-economic status is tied to colonial history and is evident across different races. Colonialism shaped the historical development of the global economic system by establishing an enduring hierarchical pattern of center-periphery economic power relations (Thompson and Tambyah 1999) that continue to play out today in countries such as Kenya. In most cases, the majority of non-black immigrants to Kenya are there for work, and are generally of higher socio-economic status than the majority culture. While the issues described above may have a racial as well as a colonial history dimension, it is clear that in different regions of the world, that the treatment of immigrants differs based upon the interpretation of the immigrants’ impact on resources. For example, the state of Arizona in the United States passed one of the toughest immigration laws in the United States. On the other hand, the Maryland House of Delegates passed a bill to allow in-state tuition rates for illegal immigrants in the state’s community colleges. Currently, in the EU, there is extensive debate about whether asylum seekers should be allowed to work immediately. In Germany many big businesses and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have been mounting a vocal campaign to get migrants working rather than making them wards of the state. In the majority of cases unemployment impacts an immigrant’s social economic status.

Identity: By definition, immigration results in identity negotiation. Numerous studies examining identity construction have been done beginning with Gordon (1964)’s seminal work in which he suggested that identificational assimilation, refers to attitudinal and behavioral changes on the part of both host members and immigrants. Once an immigrant develops a sense of identity based solely on the host society, then identificational assimilation has occurred. It is important to note that in order for identificational assimilation to occur, the hosts must facilitate this. A study by Stayman and Deshpande (1989) found that immigrants display situational ethnicity. In this study, Chinese, Mexican and Anglo subjects had different perceptions of the appropriate food for consumption in situations where business
associates were present versus those where parents were present. There is no doubt that immigration impacts the overall identity of the immigrant and certainly identity construction is influenced by context. In other words, a black immigrant who immigrates to a predominately black country may not experience being a minority whereas the same immigrant in a white context would have their minority status heightened. Thus as suggested by Kellner (1992) ‘identity today becomes a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the self’ and that ‘when one radically shifts identity at will, one might lose control.’ Bauman (2011) suggested that one thinks of identity “whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioral styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go in each other’s presence.” For immigrants, this back and forth journey of identity negotiation is a constant process and one which is negotiated constantly. Bauman proposed that in the same way that the pilgrim was the most fitting metaphor for modern life strategy preoccupied with the daunting task of identity-building, the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player offer jointly the metaphor for the postmodern strategies. Bauman’s categories of identity negotiation and construction are particularly apt for understanding the immigrant’s experience, therefore, I review these four categories beginning with the stroller. Bauman’s view of the stroller is that for the stroller, all strands of modern life seemed to meet and tie together in the pasttime and the experience of the stroller: going for a stroll as one goes to a theatre, finding oneself among strangers and being a stranger to them (in the crowd but not of the crowd), taking in those strangers as ‘surfaces’ – so that ‘what one sees’ exhaust ‘what they are’ – and above all seeing and knowing of them episodically, psychically, strolling means rehearsing human reality as a series of episodes, that is as events without past and with no consequences. Immigrants who adopt this view may feel their strangeness heightened and they may not seek to get engaged with the culture of immigration since they are just strolling through. For Bauman ‘wherever the vagabond goes, he is a stranger, he can never be ‘the native’, the settled one one with ‘roots in the soil’ (too fresh is the memory of his arrival – that is of his being elsewhere before). Entertaining a dream of going native can only end in mutual recrimination and bitterness. It is better, therefore not to grow too accustomed to the place.” Similar to the stroller, the vagabond is disengaged with the culture of immigration since he understands that he could never be a native. As conceptualized by Bauman, the tourist is similar to the vagabond in that s/he is always on the move. Further, like the vagabond, “he is everywhere he goes in, but nowhere of the place he is in. Having a home is a part of the safety package: for the pleasure to be unclouded and truly engrossing, there must be somewhere a homely and cozy, indubitably ‘owned” place to go to when the present adventure is over, or if the voyage proves not as adventurous as expected. ‘The home” is the place to take off the armour and to unpack – the place where nothing needs to be proved and defended as everything is just there, obvious and familiar.” The Player’s approach to life is as a “game where there are no accidents and nothing is predictable and controllable but nothing is totally immutable and irrevocable either … the thing that matters most is how one plays one’s hand.” We utilize Bauman’s categories as we begin to understand how the expatriates to Kenya navigate their identity and how this identity then influences their consumption choices.

As noted elsewhere, context of reception is important when examining immigrant acculturation. Indeed, we surmise that acculturation theories designed for western cultural contexts examining mainly non-western immigrants are inadequate in explaining the acculturation experiences of immigrants living in non-western contexts. Hence we investigate the consumer acculturation of immigrants from five different regions of the world and their acculturation in a non-western developing country. Specifically we investigate the role that “bubble living” has on immigrant acculturation. “Bubble living” is defined as
the self-segregation that occurs either through choice or through the inherent systems present in the context of reception. We highlight the role that identity construction, socioeconomic status and cheap labor play in facilitating this “bubble living”. We examine how “bubble living” influences the immigrants’ choices in the following life domain activities: a) choice of neighborhood; b) grocery shopping; c) language acquisition; d) children’s school; e) transportation and f) Financial/M-Pesa transactions (M is for mobile and Pesa is Swahili for money; M-Pesa is a mobile-phone based money transfer and micro-financing service, launched in 2007. M-Pesa allows users to deposit, withdraw, transfer money and pay for goods and services easily with a mobile device.

Research Methodology: This research was conducted in Nairobi, Kenya. Kenya is located in East Africa and is an interesting country in which to examine the “context of reception” because Kenya is a non-western country that has historically received immigrants from Britain, Italy, The Netherlands, India, Uganda, among many other countries. The timing of the research project is excellent, since on October 1st, 2014, the World Bank reclassified Kenya as a low-middle income country. According to the Standard Newspapers, the jump into the new economic status was driven largely by agriculture, real estate and the Information Communications Technology (ICT) sectors. The ICT sector has seen investment from international companies such as Google, Microsoft, HP-Kenya, among others. Many of these companies have personnel working in Nairobi. Furthermore, on July 1st 2010, Kenya joined four east African countries to create one of the world’s newest common market. This common market created a regional bloc of five east African countries that freed up the movement of people, products and capital across borders. Understandably, as people migrate within the East African Community, contextual influences on adaptation and acculturation will be very important, making Kenya, an excellent location in which to investigate these contextual influences. Consistent with research practices in Kenya, a government research permit was obtained before the research commenced. Additionally, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from my home institution.

Thirty-three in-depth interviews were conducted with immigrants to Kenya. The immigrants were from many different regions of the world, namely: Europe, North and South America, Asia, Australia, Middle East and Africa. With the help of colleagues from local universities and international organizations, research informants were recruited using the snowball method [I am particularly indebted to the staff at the Language Center for their invaluable assistance in identifying potential respondents]. Participants were recruited using criteria such as: age (must be over 18 years of age); gender (ensure gender balance in research study); socio-economic status (include individuals of varying social economic status), length of time in Kenya (must have lived in Kenya for at least 3 months) and other relevant criteria. Similar criteria for sample selection have been used by other researchers (cf. Kamya 1997; Schiffman, Dillion and Ngumah 1981; Wamwara-Mbugua et al 2008). All interviews were conducted in English, in Nairobi, Kenya. Kenya is a former British colony and therefore, the language of business as well as the language of instruction in schools is English. Swahili is also spoken in most offices and government services are provided in both English and Swahili.

Informants were provided with a letter explaining the research and they signed an informed consent form showing that they understood the purpose of the research as well as granting permission to audio-tape the interview. All of the informants were given a small token of appreciation for participating in the research. Interviews lasted approximately two to four hours. The vast majority of interviews were conducted in the homes of the informants. In many instances when I arrived at the home of the informants, I often had to first socialize with them by accepting offers of tea (in Kenya there is a saying that “anytime is tea-time”) before the interview could commence. On more than one occasion, the informants wanted to
introduce me to their family before I could begin the interview. Conducting the interviews in the homes of the informants gave me a rare glimpse into the lives of the informants. This socialization provided yet another opportunity for me to gauge the immigrant’s level of acculturation based on the artwork in the home, food and drinks served and their interaction with their domestic staff. The interview protocol covered a number of topics, including critical incidents (such as how they found their first home, children’s school etc) and progressive acculturation behaviors (such as how their banking needs were being served).

Consistent with (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989), triangulation across sources was sought in order to ensure trustworthiness of the data. Table 1 provides some demographics of the non-black informants. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed by means of coding patterns and the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Additionally, the data analysis procedures are consistent with the suggestions of (Spiggle, 1994) which ensures that the data is subjected to categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, iteration and refutation.

Findings: While data was collected from immigrants from many different regions of the world, this analysis focuses on the experiences of non-black immigrants. Much to their surprise, most non-black immigrants arriving in Kenya find that the locals think of them as “White” or “Mzungu,” regardless of whether they are Filipino, Swedish or Iranian and it is an identity that they must assume. Moreover, the non-black immigrants find that they are now members of a “minority group” and it is an identity which they must further assume. In most cases, the vast majority of these immigrants have lived their lives as members of a dominant group yet in this context, they find themselves members of a “visible minority”. It is important to note that while the new immigrants undoubtedly assume a minority status, this new minority status does not come with the usual disenfranchisement that they may associate with minority groups in their home countries. Instead, contrary to what ethnic minorities face in other countries, here in Kenya, being a minority and a mzungu minority does not confer a lower status, but rather it confers numerous benefits that place the migrant in a privileged class. So consistent with Bauman (2011) the immigrants find that they must think of their “mzungu” identity since this identity guides where they place themselves as well as how they relate with others in this new environment. In their research on expatriates in Singapore, Thompson and Tambyah (1999) noted “consumption is often the site of struggle where these sociocultural impediments and experiential tensions become salient in their everyday lives”. The intersection of our identity projects and our consumption patterns is well documented in the literature and therefore we examine how the mzungu identity influences marketplace choices that result in a “life lived in a bubble.”

1. Choice of Neighborhood: Because of the history of colonialism, many non-black immigrants live in “expatriate communities,” such as Karen (Karen is an affluent suburb of Nairobi and it was named for Karen Blixen whose life in Kenya is depicted in the movie “Out of Africa”) and Runda (Runda is a suburb of Nairobi that is close to the UN (United Nations) Headquarters and the United States Embassy in Gigiri). While these communities are not necessarily segregated, since some wealthy Kenyans live there too, they are inaccessible to the average local person because of cost. Frequently, other expatriates, their employer or their embassies suggest these expatriate communities as ideal places for the immigrants to live. Therefore, from the outset the immigrants are initiated into “life lived in a bubble” by others and their comments below reflect this socialization.

Filipino American (Female): “My husband’s business partner found our corporate housing the last time; and this time he actually coincidentally found our house that we are gonna move into.”
This pattern of companies arranging everything was evident regardless of the immigrant’s country of origin. As reflected in the comments of the Israeli Man that I interviewed, his company arranged everything for him.

**Interviewer:** Where do you live?
**Israeli-2 (Male):** Lavington? (Lavington is a high income residential estate)
**Interviewer:** Do you have your own flat?
**Israeli-2 (Male):** Yes, the company arranged everything.

It is very evident that in most African countries, that there is an influx of Chinese companies who are providing a wide range of services and therefore, there are many Chinese expatriates in Kenya. What was interesting about the Chinese expatriates is that many of the temporary workers were housed in dormitory style apartments. One of the interviews with a Chinese informant was conducted in his office where they worked with other Chinese expatriates. In addition to accommodation, the company transported the employees to work in company owned buses and their employer delivered Chinese lunches to the expatriates at their job sites.

**Interviewer:** Where do you live?
**Chinese (Male):** “In Nairobi, some place around Ngong Road… the company provides accommodation.” One apartment 2 people and we have more than ten apartments in that place
**Interviewer:** In the same place?
**Respondent:** Yes, but we also have many other places because I think we are around 100 Chinese colleagues in this company. Not employed. Some are supports.

Similar findings by (Thompson and Tambyah, 1999) noted that expatriates to Singapore gravitated towards other expatriate professionals through social networks such as clubs organizations and enclaves. Many immigrants from highly industrialized countries are of higher social economic status than the majority of Kenyans and upon arrival, they are instantaneously accorded higher socio-economic status than was the case in their countries of origin. This is evident from the fact that upon arrival they can afford to hire live-in maids, personal drivers, nannies, gardeners and security guards. In most cases, the hiring of these types of domestic workers was the purview of the super wealthy in their countries of origin. Learning how to manage a domestic staff and recognizing the need for the staff is something that the immigrants have to adjust to in Kenya. As the immigrants adapt to their elevated social status, they find that their domestic workers facilitate their adaptation and moreover shield them from certain local practices thereby accentuating their “bubble living”.

2. **Grocery Shopping:** Migrants go through an intricate process of socio-cultural adaptation to the unfamiliar, economic (income, status), biological (food, health) (Luedicke, 2011) a process that creates significant psychological stress (Berry, 2006). Food is central to the construction of our identity (Oswald, 1999) with immigrants displaying multiculturalism, code switching and cultural swapping. We find that immigrants do not experience similar acculturative stressors because of several contextual factors. First and foremost, when immigrants went shopping they remained in the “bubble” and primarily shopped at Karen Provision Store (KPS) in Karen or Chandarana at Yaya Center. (All of these aforementioned stores are in the wealthy suburbs of Nairobi).

**Interviewer:** Where do you go grocery shopping?
**Danish (Male):** Obviously here in Karen. Almost 90% of my needs are being served by (KPS) Karen Provision Store. It’s convenient. I pass by it every day.
Swiss (Male): Here in Yaya and some at Westgate. Obviously we shop here (Yaya) or at Westgate (this is the Westgate mall where there was a shooting that resulted in over 65 deaths with 175 injured in September 2013).

It is interesting to note that the majority of my informants mentioned that they went to Westgate when they felt homesick and wanted to feel like they were back in Europe or in the United States.

British (Female): I only go shopping in the Yaya Centre or at Nakumatt Junction, I go to Chandarana and there is a vegetable shop next door and there is very nice meat shop run by a Belgian chap and his partner? We get very fresh meat and you can get nice European style cheeses, ham and very nice bacon and things like that, so I do my meat shopping there and vegetables not always.

For other groceries particularly for fresh fruits and vegetables, most of the immigrants utilized their domestic workers to navigate these consumption environments on their behalf. It is important to note that while supermarkets sell fresh vegetables, that the majority of fresh fruits and vegetables are sold at open air markets or by street vendors. In those markets, there are no set prices and the buyer must negotiate the price of goods. For most of the informants, haggling over prices was undesirable, therefore, they utilized their maids, drivers and other domestic workers to perform these chores for them. Hence, the presence of cheap labor mitigated the necessity of the immigrants’ learning how to shop in the local markets since their hired help could do the grocery shopping for them. Learning how to navigate a new consumption environment is one of the challenges of immigration. Evidently, in this context, the immigrants minimize these challenges by outsourcing some of the grocery shopping to their domestic workers. When asked where she goes shopping, the comments of the Russian woman illustrate the outsourcing that occurs in this context.

Russian (Female): For food, Nakumatt (Kenyan Supermarket). I send one of my domestic staff to the city market for meat. For vegetables, we have a place my girl (girl –usually used to refer to housemaid) normally goes, but sometimes at Nakumatt depending on the items. If we are talking about tomatoes, then the market is cheaper and easier. If it is something else that is not found there, then Nakumatt. We used to go to hawkers market in Parklands but it is a bit far and the traffic.

Interviewer: Do you ever go to these markets yourself?

Respondent: My help normally goes but sometimes I go around to see what people sell.

Clearly this is an example of the immigrant displaying Bauman’ s characteristic of stroller since she is physically in the market among the sellers but she is not in market as a participant but rather as an observer of the market-place. Strolling is also evidenced by the comments of Israeli man who sometimes goes with his domestic workers and shows them what he likes then he lets them (his maid and driver) engage in the act of acquisition.

Israeli (Male) 2: No, we come with the car. I am not going to choose specific things but we go with the car and I ask her what we are to buy. I show her the quality I want to buy and then she goes back with the car and the driver.

Israeli (Male) 2: I am not cooking. The house help used to live with Israelis, so she knows how to cook. Although some things I have to explain how to cook. Everyone has their own taste.

3. Non-grocery shopping: (Rudmin, 2003) suggested that the degree of similarity (actual versus perceived) between heritage versus receiving cultures determines the ease of integrating cultures. While this may be true in many instances, it is also important to look at the systems and resources, available to the immigrant. In situations where immigrants have a lot of resources, then their similarity with the receiving culture may not be as significant. Instead, the existence of adequate resources can slow down the integration process since immigrants can recreate their home country experiences by
importing food or travelling back to their countries of origin to bring back needed items. Our informants display a cosmopolitan identity which is characterized by: “individuals favoring consumption and lifestyle habits that transcend local conditions. Their values interests, and behaviors are cross-cultural, and they view themselves as ‘citizens of the world’” (Grinstein and Wathieu, 2012). In the vast majority of cases, the immigrants shop for needed items in other countries as evidenced by informants’ comments. Additionally, with purchases of non-grocery items, many of the immigrants may be characterized by Bauman’s vagabonds. Vagabond’s have no desire of becoming accustomed to one place since they understand they can never be truly native. The informant’s consumption choices exhibit this behavior since they travel back to their respective countries to buy items such as body lotions, cosmetics clothing etc. In most cases, their companies pay for annual trips back to their home countries and this further facilitates their vagabondness since they are not rooted in one place.

**Russian (Female):** When I travel I normally buy something at duty free. …….But I mostly go for duty free and when I travel it is cheaper. Also in Russia, Russian cosmetics are good and cheaper in comparison. I normally go there at least once a year, so I shop.

**Belgian (Male):** I am not that much into clothing, I’ll buy in Belgium, when I am going to Belgium.

**Israeli Man 1:** Respondent: Clothing I am not buying here because I am not ready. If you go to the big shops like Woolworths it is very expensive.

Interesting, some of the informants not only shopped in their respective home countries but they also engaged in shopping in other countries that they visited. In some cases they routed their airline tickets to stop in places like Dubai or Turkey to shop.

**Swiss (Male):** Clothing I buy anywhere, a year ago we were for a month in the States then I bought a lot of jeans and tee-shirts in the US and running shoes, but in Switzerland things like running shoes and others I don’t buy from there.

**Iranian (Male):** We haven’t found a good market here, or when you find your choice, it is very expensive. Mostly we buy in my country or when we pass through Dubai or Turkey. Mostly we buy from Iran.

In other cases, the immigrants cited limited choice and quality issues as the explanation for why they did not buy locally made products. In the comments below the Iranian displays Bauman’s tourist identity since he is continuously comparing the “here and the there” as he makes his consumption choices.

**Interviewer:** What about shampoo and do you use hair gel and all those kinds of products?

**Iranian (Male):** I cannot find my favorite, …….The variety of shampoos or cleaning materials is very tight because of the customers. They are limited. But in my country all people, if you have for example 70 million, all are customers. But in Kenya if you have 32 million only one or two people are able to buy. It is very small and they cannot bring all the products here.

**Interviewer:** So what do you do then, do you bring your shampoo here?

**Iranian (Male):** No, Dove is here, but some of the body shampoos I bring from my country.

**Interviewer:** What about lotion for your skin?

**Iranian (Male):** It is here, but for bacterial preventing, sometimes I bring creams from my country. You cannot find them here or if you do they are very expensive. In Iran many things are very cheap. It is better to bring what we need. Body lotions are there and hair conditioners.

The consumption patterns exhibited by Iranian man, Swiss man and many of the informants in this study are consistent with the findings of (Holt, 1998) as reported by (Thompson and Tambyah, 1999:217) who noted that high-cultural-capital consumers “possess a cosmopolitan habitus that is, a nexus of internalized and naturalized proclivities and predispositions toward cosmopolitan consumption practices.
that reflect a history of class-based socialization.” Therefore, since the immigrants represented here are of higher social economic status, they are accustomed to trips back home where they can source these needed items. Certainly similar consumption patterns would not be evident with immigrants such as refugees who have limited resources.

4. **Language Acquisition:** Due to its colonial history, the official language of Kenya is English and the national language is Kiswahili. One of the most important indicators of acculturation level is language adoption (Olmedo and Padilla, 1978) yet most of the immigrants in this study had not learned Kiswahili. Researchers have contended that “a shared language is part of the fabric of national identity and that migrants who speak other languages (or cannot speak the language of the country or region in which they are settling) are considered a threat to national unity (Schwartz et al 2010). Migrants who are unable or unwilling to learn the language of the receiving country or region may be viewed as disrespectful in the eyes of many receiving-society members (see for example the “English Only” movement in the United States, Barker et al 2001). Although research has clearly demonstrated that language acquisition is central to acculturation, we demonstrate that in this context, that failure to learn Kiswahili was not detrimental to the immigrants’ experience. This is primarily due to: a) the immigrants can hire workers who understand English to serve as translators and b) in a multi-lingual country, not knowing the local language may not be as disadvantageous as in a mono-lingual country. Undoubtedly in a multi-lingual country, the locals may already be accustomed to being in the presence of individuals who do not speak their language. Therefore, an immigrant who does not have command of the language would not be an anomaly nor a threat. Interestingly, in some cases the immigrant’s recognize that the lack of language resulted in their bubble living through less interaction with the locals.

**Danish (Male):** Apart from English, I speak German, the Scandinavian languages and a little French.

**Interviewer:** Have you learnt a little bit of Swahili?

**Danish (Male):** kidogo *(a little)* but not enough. It’s a problem here. You can say it’s a positive problem. Everybody here speaks English, even the small ones do. So it’s very easy to get lazy. It’s not positive because being able to speak Swahili at a minimum would make it easy to meet the public at large and you would get a different respect. I know that I am very aware of that. But it will probably come one day we will see.

**Argentinian (Female):** I speak Spanish, Portuguese, English and a bit of French… Kiswahili I have taken some classes but I don’t go far.

**White American (Female):** English. I am very lazy about languages. I understand a bit of Swahili so I haven’t made an effort to learn again you know because of the kind of work I am in, I don’t have to. Typical American, hopeless in languages.

It is clear from the comments of the informants that not speaking the national language has not impacted their overall experience in the country primarily because of their ability to speak the official language. Nonetheless, some of the immigrants seem to recognize that the failure to speak Kiswahili impacts their overall experience in the country.

5. **Children’s school:** Life in a bubble was apparent through the immigrants’ choice of school for their children. We find per (Luedicke, 2011:1), that the immigrants “segregate” by entirely maintaining primary socialization without adopting local cultural habits since in all cases, their children attended international schools where they primarily interacted with other expatriate children. The international schools have very few local children and do not follow the Kenyan curriculum.
Filipino American (Female): He is at Braeburn which is the British school. We chose Braeburn… literally because of geography. Traffic is so bad in Nairobi that we chose the school closest to where we wanted to live, which is closest to my husband’s office.

Swiss (Male): They are at Braeburn School, they learn French and they started going for German classes once a week so they must learn German because the boy will have to go to the Swiss Army, so he must speak, know German.

Interviewer: Is he going to school?

Japanese (Female): Yes, he is in Japanese school and they learn Japanese.

Often times, the choice of school was influenced by the curriculum that was available at the schools and the fact that the immigrants wanted their children to learn their own languages such as German, Japanese or Chinese. And perhaps quite glaringly, none of these children were learning the national language of Kenya even though they live in Kenya. Obviously even though some of these children are born in Kenya, without the command of the national language they will remain in the periphery of the society, socializing in a very limited scope.

6. Transportation: In their study of expatriates, (Thompson and Tambyah, 1999) emphasized that their participants’ narratives of identity, consumption stories and their personalized uses of cosmopolitan discourses were all situated within their sociologically defined class and status positions.” In Kenya, public transportation options include taxis, buses and matatus (small minibuses). Middle class Kenyans own cars and the wealthy have personal drivers and consistent with their higher social economic status, most of the immigrants in the study had personal drivers. Hence due to their social class, the immigrants’ narrative of identity and consumption with regards to transportation, involves giving up their driving privileges and assuming the chauffeur driven role.

Israeli-1 (Male): I drive only in the evening when the driver has gone home, from here to home. Maybe from here to home or to work. They drive on the wrong side, there are no lights on the streets and the on coming vehicles don’t have lights.

Belgian (Male): Of course I have a car. I drive myself when (Name) doesn’t want to drive, but it is mainly him who is driving because me, I get nervous with the matatus.

Indian (Male): We have a project car so we usually use our own car and we have a driver.

Dutchwoman-1: You see if you are an international civil servant you cannot ride the bus (provided by the UN (United Nations) for locals), I wish I could. They say you are making enough, you can buy a car. I worked for UNEP for 4 years before I moved to Habitat and I became an environmentalist.

7. Financial Transactions: In examining immigrants’ financial transactions, I was interested in whether they use local banks and in particular if they were using M-Pesa. Most people in Kenya use M-Pesa, a money transfer service by Safaricom (Telecom provider). Interestingly, even though there are many banks in Kenya, immigrants generally banked with either Standard Chartered Bank or Barclays Bank.

Interviewer: Where do you bank?

Russian (Female): Standard Chartered.

Interviewer: Do you have a bank account in Russia?

Russian (Female): Yeah

Australian (Female): Yes, we did have one with Barclays, simply because everyone opens one with Barclays when they come here because it’s an international bank, until I realized it was a complete rip off. Their charges are ridiculously high, and I changed to Diamond Trust Bank.

Interviewer: Are you still maintaining a bank account in Australia and in the UK?

Australian (Female): Yes.
In many instances immigrants said that they did not have M-Pesa because they were concerned that having M-Pesa would result in people asking them for money. Being *Mzungu* (White) connotes having a lot of money and resources.

**Mexican (Female):** No. Because if the people in Kibera (Kibera is the largest slum in Nairobi and the largest urban slum in Africa) know I have it, they will start asking me to use it. I don’t need it.

**White American (Female):** No, I don’t have any reason to, I don’t have any bills to pay with M-Pesa

**Interviewer:** Do you have a bank account here?

**White American (Female):** I don’t, I use the ATM machines for my US account

**Interviewer:** Do you have a bank account in Kenya?

**Israeli-2 (Male):** No because it’s not necessary for me. I am being financed by the company. So let’s say the company is like my bank.

**Interviewer:** Do you use M-Pesa?

**Israeli-2 (Male):** No. I don’t need it.

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**CONCLUSION**

A basic tenet of previous literature has been that successful expatriates need to adjust their lifestyle to the host country. Failure to do so has been associated with mental health issues, identity confusion, dissatisfaction and poor performance and thus high turnover for the sponsoring organization (cf. Grinstein and Wathieu 2012: pg. 337). This research examined contextual influences such as “bubble living”, socioeconomic status and cheap labor and their impact on the consumer acculturation of immigrants to Kenya. I highlight the need for research that examines immigrant acculturation in non-western contexts. By utilizing Bauman’s categories of identity construction I find that the immigrants’ market place experiences can be interpreted using three of Bauman’s categories i.e. the stroller, the vagabond and the tourist. Thus I demonstrate that in certain cases, immigrants to a developing country can self-segregate without suffering negative repercussions as has been found in other contexts such as the United States. Moreover, in this context, acculturative stressors usually associated with immigration are mitigated by the hiring of domestic workers to navigate the consumption environment for the immigrants. This is evident with regards to grocery shopping, especially the buying of fresh fruits and vegetables. Also, many immigrants do not drive themselves since they can afford a personal driver. Further, the immigrants did not learn the local languages, yet they were able to function in the society. Furthermore, self-segregation was evident in the following areas: a) they live in expatriate enclaves; b) they shop at KPS or Yaya; c) their children attend international schools; d) they buy cosmetics, clothing, shoes etc only when they are back in their country of origin and d) they maintain the bulk of their financial resources in banks outside of the host country and they do not participate in local money transfer services. Clearly, in this context, immigrant adaptation is mitigated by: a) cheap labor; b) social economic status and multi-lingualism suggesting the need for future research into the role of these mitigators. A limitation of this study is that we only examine the experiences of non-black immigrants to Kenya hence, future research should no doubt examine the differences in acculturation of blacks and non-blacks in this cultural context. The contribution of this research lies in its ability to incorporate contextual factors in examining the acculturation of immigrants from highly industrialized countries and their adaptation in a less industrialized country. Most acculturation research examines the acculturation of immigrants from less developed countries and their adaptation in highly industrialized countries. Needless to say, as noted by
the international office for migration, there is tremendous movement around the world with immigrants from the industrialized countries traveling and living in less industrialized countries. Therefore, it is obvious that our theoretical models need to reflect these new realities and theories developed in these regions might further inform acculturation work.

REFERENCES


International Migration Office, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division International Migration Report 2015.


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