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Acculturation experiences of Ethiopian migrant returnees while they were in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on the acculturation experiences of Ethiopian migrant returnees from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A qualitative research approach, phenomenology design, and snowball sampling method were used in the study. The target population of the study was returnee migrants who have acculturation experience in Saudi Arabia. The findings indicated that migrants acquired the socio-cultural practices of their host communities through interactions with institutions, friends, and employers, and that they were denied any opportunity to demonstrate their uniqueness in the host country. Migrants are given instructions on how to behave before they reach their destination, based on the socio-cultural conditions of the host country. Although migrants were trained to socialize based on the customs of the host community once they got to their destination, they did not just attach themselves to the host country's cultural qualities before and throughout migration. Thus, the host country should prohibit forced acculturation and professionals should address migrant's culture shock.

KEY TERMS: acculturation, Ethiopia, migration, returning migrants, Saudi Arabia

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INTRODUCTION

Migrants encounter emotional, physical, and social issues at both their destinations and places of origins. Human trafficking is a serious problem for Ethiopian migrants in the Gulf States. Poverty, migrants' lack of preparation, and insufficient help from agencies, embassies, and governments are all cited as contributing factors to migrants' exploitative experiences in the destination countries. Furthermore, while in the host nations, Ethiopian migrants face mental health issues and ethnic discrimination that debar expressing their cultural and religious identity. However, research did not go into great detail about the acculturation experiences of Ethiopian migrant returnees who were living in Saudi Arabia and experienced cultural differences. In contrast, this study focused on the lived experiences of migrant returnees in adopting the socio-cultural characteristics of their host communities. The explanations of acculturation experiences, agents of acculturation and self-identification of returnees when returnee migrants were at their destinations were the focus of this study. This qualitative approach used phenomenological design with the snowball sampling and employed in-depth interviews.

BACKGROUND

Ethiopia migration data from 2015-2020 estimated that 946 129 (United Nations, UN, 2020). The 200,000 regular labor migrants who traveled to the Gulf States and the Middle East in 2012 represent only 30-40% of all Ethiopians migrating to the Gulf States and the Middle East, implying that the remaining 60%-70 percent (between 300,000 and 350,000) are either trafficked or smuggled with the help of illegal brokers (Italian Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2017). Ethiopia has been one of the top sending countries in migration for decades due to a variety of socio-economic and political issues. Since the late 1990s, this has been increasingly noticeable, with an influx of both skilled and unskilled Ethiopian migrants travelling to other countries (Adugna, 2019). People rush to cross borders in search of employment, but are met with tremendous difficulties due to smugglers' inhumane and ruthless acts, which include seeking money in the transit country of Saudi Arabia which have a direct impact on Ethiopia industrial development (Tilahun et al, 2021, International Organization for Migration (IOM) & Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 2015). Food insecurity, overpopulation, drought, political instability, and ethnic conflict and unemployment are the aggravating factors of migration (Fransen & Kuschminder, 2009). Seeking Employment, Seeking better life/higher pay peer pressure, visiting relatives/friends, family pressure, illegal trafficking brokers, Pilgrimage are the major causes of migration to Saudi Arabia and 80 % of Amhara Region where this study conducted cause of migration is Seeking Employment (International Labour Migration, ILO, 2018). In, 43,000 forced returnees from Saudi Arabia are registered By IOM in 2020 which is another factor that motivated the researcher's to focused on the acculturation experiences of returnees from Saudi Arabia.

Migrants encounter emotional, physical, and social issues at both their destinations and their origins. Poverty, migrants' lack of preparation, and insufficient help from agencies, embassies, and governments are all cited as contributing factors to migrants' exploitative experiences (Minaye, & Zeleke, 2015). Furthermore, while in the host nations, Ethiopian migrants faced mental health issues and ethnic discrimination (Dessiye & Emirie, 2018). Human migration is a modern, multifaceted phenomenon whose primary goal is to improve one's situation in the face of adversity (Virupaksha, et al, 2014). With globalization, the incidence of mass migration and people moving across country, national, and continental borders has a relationship with the cultural adaptation process and outcome for migrants (Kuo, 2014). Migrants have their own distinct ways of life that differ from the host country's ways of life; this challenge has an impact on the psychosocial well-being of migrants in the host community; as a result of the shock, they developed new behaviors that may contradict their early background (Hashemi et al, 2019). Migrants influenced to adopting the cultural qualities of their destinations and accepting the cultures of others through assimilation (Weichold, 2010).

Arabs are descended from Semitic tribes and all community regulations are guided by Islamic religious dogma. Saudi society's basic social links are based on blood ties within the same tribe. Marriage was restricted to possible spouses from the same tribe in the traditional family when it came to endogamy. When it comes to exogamy, the most common pattern is for first cousins to marry each other's sons and daughters, mainly the sons and daughters of the uncle/brothers. Some of these limits fluctuate depending on where you are in the country (Achoui, 2006). Ethiopia, on the other hand, is a diverse country in terms of religion, ethnicity, and culture. Ethnicity, religion, and nationality are thus the most essential determinants of Ethiopian identity. Multiculturalism is defined as the development of peaceful cohabitation among people of many ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural groups. Therefore, due to the scarcity of previous studies, the research on the acculturation experiences of Ethiopian migratory returnees from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was worthwhile.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design. The data was gathered through a face-to-face in-depth interview by using a semi-structured interview guide. Essentially, the study's goal was to determine

how migrants approached host country socio-cultural behaviors and what agents taught migrants at destinations to embrace different cultures. The sampling design was based on the researcher's judgment of who would provide the greatest information for the objectives studied. As a result, snowball sampling was employed to select participants of the study. The data was gathered in Ethiopia's Amhara regional state with five returnee migrants (2 females and 3 males) who had spent more than two years in Saudi Arabia.

The data acquired from returnees through in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. An investigation of the data's content to categorize recurring or common themes is the most fundamental sort of qualitative analysis. Peers reviewed the findings to ensure data quality, and members double-checked that they were employed. During the data collection, the peers were master's students, and the staffs were the members who checked the data. As a result, the researcher used the six steps of thematic analysis shown below.

Step One: Familiarization of the data

Four potential activities were used to familiarize with the acquired data. These: (1) listening to the raw audio data frequently; (2) transcribing the Amharic audio into a written document, (3) translating the transcribed data into English; (4) translating the English version data into Amharic by the peer to see the consistency of the data. The researcher has highlighted an idea that has the potential to create meanings, concepts, and first codes thereby immersing the full concept of the facts gathered from the in-depth interview.

Step Two: Generating initial codes

The researcher created basic codes from the acquainted data in this step, which had the potential to yield codes and themes. The initial codes identified were the most basic part of the raw data that could be evaluated in a meaningful way concerning the researched issues. The researcher did so by highlighting patterns, meanings, and concepts in the findings using various colors thereby organized intended codes for building themes by using similar highlighted hues. *Step Three: Searching for Themes*; the researcher concentrated on categorizing diverse codes into possible themes and determining the study's meaning. This step focused on how multiple codes interact to create overarching themes and compiled a list of potential themes and sub-themes.

Step Four: Reviewing themes

During the refinement phase, the researcher discovered topics that lacked sufficient evidence to support or themes that overlapped. As a result, the researcher discovered those ideas that needed to be broken down and divided into sub-themes. The researcher had a good concept of what the different themes were and how they fit together.

Step Five: Defining and naming themes

In this step, the researcher specifies and refines the themes that are presented for analysis, as well as determining the true meaning of each theme. The researcher identified characteristics of the data that each theme captures and the aspects of the data were cross-checked with the acquired data to organize into a coherent and internally consistent description.

Step Six: Producing the report

During the report writing process, the researcher focused on creating a coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and fascinating description of the themes related to the overall study topic and cross-case themes. Finally, the researcher concentrated on the substance of several topics in the study's findings.

FINDINGS

While in Saudi Arabia, migrants assimilated cultural qualities from the host country, which differed from the migrants' socio-cultural roots. Four major questions have been addressed in this section. How returnees were socialized with host communities' socio-cultural practices, how migrants reacted to destination cultures, and finally, the study addressed the agents and mechanisms of migrant socialization at their final destination. Therefore, the data are organized thematically and succinctly about the process of returnee acculturation, acculturation agents, and returnee self-identification while in Saudi Arabia.

The process of host country' cultural values acculturation

Migrants in the host country would acquire the traditions and value systems of the Arabian community in order to live in harmony with their employers. The Arabian community has its own culture and social ideals that are distinct from Ethiopian culture and morals. Migrants have had difficulty socializing with the host country's way of life. Despite the difficulty of acculturating other socio-cultural aspects, migrants have captured the cultures of the host society after some ups and downs. All distinguishing socio-cultural characteristics that would indicate Arabians have been gradually incorporated by the migrants. Migrants have built relationships with the host country's socio-cultural practices, and they were asked to engage with Arabian social and cultural habits that migrants were unfamiliar with at the time. Migrants' involvement in public spaces, whether consciously or accidentally, played a role in the acculturation process of migrants in host country different cultures. Observations and activities were becoming important factors in the assimilation of returns by other cultures in the host country. Returnees have learnt that the socio-cultural behaviors of the host country rely on "whether one is good or evil," as seen by migrants' integration with Arabian customs. Because the socio-cultural value systems found in the migrants' destinations are not of Ethiopian origin, the returnees have assimilated the employers' cultural values. Participants (returnees) employed Arabian languages to indicate certain items, such as expressing *Mashallah* (meaning good things in Arabic), and defining materials like *Jewal* (literally mean mobile phone in Arabic). An in-depth interviewee 5 said:

When I initially traveled to Saudi Arabia, it was quite difficult to socialize with the host country's socio-cultural institutions. Later, I attempted to understand their value systems and cultural customs, as well as internalize the ways of living that were expected of me within three months through observation and employer teaching. Thus, I was speaking their language, practicing their rituals, even if I didn't understand it.

Since the returnees moved officially and illegally, they had a variety of migration experiences and built relationships with the cultures of the host country. When they were in Saudi Arabia, returnees shared the value systems of Arabian culture in these instances. Returnees were accepted by all systems of Arabian civilizations and would approach cultural practices in order to get acceptability by employers. They had relationships with the host country's cultural values and had been acculturated to the key cultural values. Once they return to their homeland, they use the Arabian cultural values they learned in the host country. This claim that returnees had assimilated the host community's cultural customs was openly exploited even when they returned to their home country. As a result, migrants' migratory experiences in the host country are influenced by socio-cultural components of the host country that embraced the culture of an Arabian society. Returnees were forced to acculturate the host country's cultural behaviors due to a variety of factors and the existing socio-cultural institutions in the host community.

Agents of acculturation

Friends, employers, and institutions discovered in migrants' fates were among the agents involved in the acculturation process of migrants. Employers and institutions also exerted significant influence over migrants, causing them to adopt the host communities' socio-cultural values. The returnees used a variety of methods to absorb the host country's cultural values. Sharing ideas about the overall cultural values of the host country over the phone by asking friends before, during, and after migration, listening and observing to distinguish the names of materials and the employer's ways of expression, the employer's interest in establishing his or her value systems, and watching Arabic movies and Arabian audio-video music recordings are among the methods of acculturation. Whether they migrate to Saudi Arabia on a regular or irregular basis, most returnees believe they have gathered information about the destination country's cultural elements, such as the nature of their culture and value systems. When they wanted to travel to Saudi Arabia, they sought information from their social networks, whatever the migrants' situation was in their home country. Before arriving in Saudi Arabia, the migrants prepare their minds to deal with the host country's value systems. All individuals (groups) who surrounded the migrants played an important part in their acculturation process. Friends of migrants are informally informing migrants about Arab cultural practices, what they like and detest, and what they anticipate and do not expect from migrants throughout their voyage to Saudi Arabia, either over the phone or in person, prior to migration. The employers, the returnee's acquaintances, and the returnee's commitment to understanding the host country's value systems all played a role in the acquisition of host country cultural values in Gulf States. An in-depth interviewee 3 revealed:

After that, when I arrived in Saudi Arabia, my employers showed me how to become acquainted with the socio-cultural habits of Arabian society in KSA. When I decided to visit Saudi Arabia, I learned about

the culture through my friends, who told me what they liked and disliked. We asked our senior migrants even during my voyage.

Friends

Friends of migrants who traveled with or lived in a migrant's destination were instructed to act and react in accordance with employers' socio-cultural behaviors. Friends informed migrants to obey the rules based on the socio-cultural structures of the host community's value systems during their journey. Because the host country is dogmatic, the migrants have been instructed to obey all directions issued by the bosses. It meant that migrants' acquaintances had warned them to expect to lose their identity and be exposed to new ways of living. Some migrants are aware of the importance of quickly adapting to the socio-cultural context of their destination. However, the early information gathered by migrants prior to or during migration had a critical influence in their understanding of different cultures. After migrants arrive at their destinations, their friends advise them to accept the socio-cultural characteristics of their new home, culture and regulations. Overall, the agents of migrant socialization were friends of migrants who grew up together but now lived in various locations and had migration experiences in Saudi Arabia. An in-depth interviewee 2 uncovered that:

My pals had briefed me about the destination socially long before I arrived. My pals who were there but were deported were told to convert my faith and name and to conduct whatever actions based on the employers' wills and socio-cultural habits.

Employers and institutions

Employers and their institutions were the ones who taught migrants how to adapt to their culture. Employers explicitly encourage migrants to learn their language, religious traditions, and overall social and cultural characteristics of their organizations. In the same piece, the ideals of institutions were tacitly used to slander migrants' identities. Because employers have dogmatic and strict beliefs, migrants would not have been able to stay in their cultural backgrounds at the destinations. Migrants were socialized informally by employers, families, religion, and other institutions while in the host country. Finally, those parties were aiming to persuade returnees to affirm the host country's social and cultural norms, whether subtly or overtly. They are influenced from all sides to embrace all of the destination's socio-cultural norms and rules. Interviewee 1 depicted that:

I immediately changed my religion from Christian to Muslim after arriving in Saudi Arabia. My bosses insisted that I learn their language, religion and its norms, social and cultural customs. Nonetheless, I was well-known before I went to Saudi Arabia to familiarize myself with the social ideals of the host country. My employers, on the other hand, made significant contributions to teaching me about their cultures. The socio-cultural system that surrounded me frequently taught me how to act in the same way that others did.

Self-identifications of migrant returnees in host countries

Migrants have their own ways of defining their cultural selves, which they can use to demonstrate who they are. While in the host country, the returnees did not engage in their socio-cultural habits. Whatever the nature of migrants' labor, they have not been given an opportunity in the host country to recognize their socio-cultural heritage. The compounds in which the returnees lived did not contribute to the recognition of migrants' cultural roots, and not all of their settings, including their working circumstances, inspired them to express their cultural identity. Before most of the returnees had gone through screening, they were employed to whatever job that was available. Returnees' acculturations led to identity defamation at the time, whether forced or by other means migrants learned how to behave in the host cultures and facilities. Of course, limited availability to clothing, returnees' spoken language, and the prohibition on listening to Ethiopian music were all continual hurdles in returnees' integration into host society's social structures. Migrants were, however, required to follow all cultural and social values at their destination. The presence of reality in the host nation has a greater impact on migrants' adoption of other socio-cultural habits. Migrants have assimilated the socio-cultural traits of the host country in order to receive social benefits from employers. Interviewee 3 revealed the following:

I had no place to express and practice my religious beliefs, listen to Ethiopian music, or to share my thoughts with others. I lived and worked in Saudi Arabia for 11 years before returning to Ethiopia. I had no opportunity to wear Ethiopian clothing during festivities in Saudi Arabia, including the ceremony. My name and religious practice was changed. Even though I am an orthodox Christian, I followed all of the Muslim religious traditions.

It was advised that migrants in the host country alter their faith, especially if they come from a non-Muslim background, and forget about their customs. The primary criterion for hiring migrants is their religion. Religion is not compromised issue in the culture and Muslim Arab to hire employees. As a result, returnees have adopted all of the mannerisms that one would anticipate from a Muslim. They have to pray according to the Muslim religious practice by praying five times a day and doing 'oddu'(literally, cleaning body organs to praying). Therefore, the returnees were denied the right to choose their preferences in all elements of their lives and to participate in all aspects of work. Employers had complete control over returnees' difficulties and relationships with their social institutions till they were living with them. The situations in the host country defame migrants' self-identity and harass migrants to keep their emphasis on their ways of identifying themselves. After migrants arrived in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and began contract employment with companies, their features that might have identified them from their home country were reorganized. Arabian culture has its own clothing styles that men and women must follow, which are distinct from Ethiopian attire. In the host country, no returnees dress in their ethnic or conventional attire and they are forced to wear a fabric based on the Arabian community's gender conventions.

DISCUSSION

Migrants have learned the social values of the host country through integration and dialogue with friends, employers, and institutions. Berry's acculturation methods framework claims that there are situations under which migrants integrate with new culture, keep remnants of their home cultures, and lose their native cultures in host nations. In addition, the current study found that migrants in the host country have assimilated and integrated into the host country's norms and values prior to or after arrival. Additionally, Seble, & Belay (2015) depicted that migrants are subjected to exploitations, cultural isolation, and cultural identity erosion in their host nations. Hanna (2014) discovered that migrant returns are in a hard place in terms of continuing their lives in their native country. Returnees admired the host countries' laws, values, and cultures, according to the current study. In this sense, the cultural identity model claims that migration to another country degrades migrants' identities. As a result of behavioral and social adjustments to the host country, identity alterations occur (Sussman, 2002). Migrants also shared Arabic dressing, languages, feeding, acting, and reacting, according to the current study. Aung et al (2019) found that when migrants move to another nation, they develop dangerous habits that might lead to sadness and the adoption of other people's styles.

Migrants in host nations have interacted with other people's socio-cultural beliefs, and working conditions have influenced migrants' acculturation and adoption rates (Tonder and Soontiens, 2014). Similarly, this study found that rather than maintaining their cultural identity while in the host country, migrants accepted the socio-cultural characteristics of the host country. According to Lakey (2003), there is communication in the process of acculturation with multiple agents, which could make it easier for immigrants in the host to adapt to others' norms and values. However, Individual, organizational, and national variables, according to Hartel et al (2008), has hampered migrants' reintegration and acculturation in the host country. In the process of acculturation, migrants in the host country have assimilated different cultures over a long period of time through assimilation.

Migrants were not culturally identified with their cultural qualities when they arrived at their destination. Immigrants' cultural identifications are influenced by their socioeconomic background (Liu, 2015). However, as a result of globalization, migrants from all over the world are undergoing cross-cultural transformations. Migrants, on the other hand, encounter difficulties, stress, and well-being as a result of acculturation tactics and cultural adoptions (Kuo, 2014). In contrast, the current study found that when returnees were in their host countries, they were familiar with and absorbed the host country's cultural elements. The process of re-socialization forces returnee migrants to re-adapt and adopt the community's cultural and behavioral traditions (Cassarino, 2004). In this situation, Gullahorn and Gullahorn reverse culture shock theory (1963) argued that returnees with socio-cultural behaviors had re-adjustment issues. Furthermore, Abraham (2017) and Saggat et al (2012) investigated that migrants have substantially integrated into host cultures, that social reintegration with the home community is challenging, and that the degree of acculturation affects returnees' social cohesion.

IMPLICATIONS

The importance of social workers in migrant integration and reintegration is recognized. As a result, Social Workers are required to address the needs of migrant reintegration in both the sending and host countries. It draws Social Workers' attention to the importance of encouraging integration in the host country while respecting migrants' dignity and culture. Because the path to integration runs through the practical arena of welfare provision, it is critical for Social Workers to observe the acculturation process of migrants. Therefore, the acculturation process is an interactive and continuous process that unfolds in and through an immigrant's communication with the new socio-cultural environment, which is critical for Social Workers to see and operate in accordance with

migrants' needs. Additionally, this finding suggested that migrants in Saudi Arabia are compelled to adapt their cultural identities, and that employers are keen to have their domestic employees act in Muslim and Arab cultures, implying that migrants' dignity is not respected. As a result, Ethiopian and African countries will be more aware of the forced cultural assimilation of its nationals in the host country, which may prompt these countries to engage host countries in discussions about migrants' rights and dignity in their future regulations. Furthermore, returnee migrants were forced to acculturate and immerse themselves in the host country's culture, either directly or indirectly. Thus, migration workers, social workers, and sociologists should work to change employers' influence on migrant acculturation. Migrants in Saudi Arabia should be treated with dignity, cultural identity, and respect while they are looking for work. Finally, the finding served as a springboard for doing nationwide quantitative research on migrant acculturation in the host country, resulting in policy briefs and information distribution. Knowing the many processes of acculturation that require intervention by social workers, sociologists, and other relevant specialists is another contribution of this research result to social development.

CONCLUSION

There were various paths migrants took in their migration history to become acculturated to the host country's socio-cultural characteristics. Migrants gathered information about the local community's social and cultural issues before traveling to Saudi Arabia and sought instruction on how to behave in different situations of their destinations. Not only are migrants seeking information and building relationships with host countries culture, but employers and other institutions have also been shown to press migrants to adopt their cultures when they arrive. Migrants actively reacted to the acculturation process in order to get approval from employers. There were also agents who influenced migrants to acculturate to foreign cultures, either overtly or implicitly. If the migrants do not quickly adapt to the culture and language, they will be forced to be unemployed. In a nutshell, migrants acquired the destination's socio-cultural behaviors while in the host country, which are unique from migrants' socio-cultural roots, they adapted to their new environment's lifestyles, languages, and other social and cultural aspects. Migrants were also not allowed the ability to express their social and cultural identities in the host country, necessitating the deployment of embassy employees to safeguard migrants' rights in the host country, forced acculturation and denial of democratic and human rights.

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