

Integration and assimilation as forms of acculturative adaptation in the Diasporic Lives in *Ali's Wedding*

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Abstract

*Acculturation plays a central role in understanding how diasporic individuals negotiate cultural identity and belonging in multicultural societies. As migration continues to shape contemporary social landscapes, examining how different generations respond to cultural expectations provides important insight into these adaptation processes. Although this issue has been discussed multicultural themes, limited research has examined how *Ali's Wedding* film illustrates Berry's acculturation strategies, particularly the contrast between integration and assimilation. This gap indicates the need for further analysis that connects Berry's theoretical model with the cultural experiences portrayed in the film. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze how integration and assimilation are represented through first- and second-generation characters in *Ali's Wedding*, using Berry's acculturation theory as the primary framework. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method to examine character interactions, dialogue, and cultural behaviour in the film. Data were organized through five steps: (a) watching the movie to understand its narrative and cultural nuances, (b) reading the movie script to obtain accurate dialogue, (c) identifying data related to acculturation, (d) classifying the data based on Berry's indicators of integration and assimilation, and (e) reducing the data to focus on the most relevant findings. The results show that the first-generation immigrant, demonstrates integration by maintaining Iraqi cultural tradition while adapting to life in Australia. In contrast, the second-generation immigrants, display assimilation. Mohammed adopts informal Australian speech to align with local norms, while Ali embraces Australian monochronic values and departs from traditional expectations to pursue personal goals.*

Keywords: *acculturation; Ali's Wedding; assimilation; integration*

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long served as a vital medium for reflecting social realities and human experiences, including the complexities of movement, displacement, and cross-cultural encounters in an increasingly mobile world. Among various narrative forms, film holds particular significance in representing cultural and societal issues related to global migration. Beyond functioning as a form of entertainment, film can operate as a social reference that shapes how audiences perceive migrants, mobility, and intercultural relationships. Research based on film-screening experiences by Muna et al. (2023) demonstrates that the formation of associative mental images linked to viewers' sociohistorical experiences plays a crucial role in influencing and potentially reshaping audiences' social perceptions toward important societal issues. Such mediated experiences allow audiences to engage emotionally and cognitively with narratives of human struggle, identity negotiation, and belonging that often accompany migration and other forms of social mobility.

Global migration has become one of the most significant socio-cultural processes of the twenty-first century. Migration refers to the movement of people from one place to another, usually across national borders, with the intention of settling temporarily or permanently. Human beings have been moving from place to place for social, economic, or political reasons from their earliest days (Koser, 2016 as cited in Tsegay, 2023). However, migration is not only about the physical

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movement of people from one country to another. Beyond relocation, migration also creates long-term social and cultural consequences, especially when migrants settle permanently and form communities in the host country. Over time, these communities may develop a strong collective identity that connects them to both their homeland and their new place of residence. In this context, the concept of diaspora becomes important to understand the broader impact of migration.

Diaspora refers to a group of people who live outside their ancestral homeland but still maintain emotional, cultural, or historical connections with it. According to William Safran (1991), a diaspora community usually shares a collective memory about their homeland, feels partly alienated in the host country, and maintains a desire to return, either physically or symbolically. This shows that diaspora is not only about physical movement, but also about identity and a sense of belonging.

In addition, Robin Cohen (2008) explains that modern diasporas are diverse and can be formed for different reasons, such as labor migration, trade, colonialism, or political conflict. He emphasizes that members of a diaspora often develop a dual identity, where they negotiate between the culture of their homeland and the culture of the host country. Therefore, diaspora can be understood as a social condition in which migrants and their descendants live between two cultures and continuously reshape their identity in a new environment.

This process of living between two cultures begins with migration itself. Before individuals or groups can form a diaspora community, they must first move from their homeland to another country. In other words, diaspora is closely connected to the basic patterns of human movement across borders. Understanding the types of migration helps explain how diaspora communities are formed and how they develop in the host country. There are two types of migrations, the first is emigration, which is the movement of people out of a country over a specific time period, the second is immigration, which is the number of individuals into a receiving area (Tsegay, 2023).

From a sociological perspective, migration often involves not only economic or political factors but also cultural and psychological adaptations. According to Onyema (2024), migrants may face several challenges, such as cultural challenges. It may be challenging for refugees and migrants to maintain their cultural practices in an unfamiliar environment. They may gradually lose their own cultural identity due to pressure to fit in with the majority culture. These cultural challenges indicate that diaspora experiences involve more than physical relocation; they also require continuous negotiation of identity in a new sociocultural environment. Migrants must decide whether to retain their cultural heritage or adapt to the dominant cultural norms around them. This decision-making process is at the core of Berry's acculturation theory, which outlines how individuals who have developed in one cultural context manage to adapt to new contexts that result from migration (Berry, 1997, p.6). Through this framework, acculturation becomes a structured way to understand how diaspora communities adapt to new cultural contexts is acculturation.

The term acculturation refers to the cultural and psychological changes that occur when individuals and groups interact with other cultural communities, a process through which people manage change and whose outcomes are closely related to their level of adaptation (Sam and Berry, 2010). Berry (1997) identifies four acculturation strategies that emerge from the interaction between two fundamental considerations, whether individuals choose to maintain their cultural heritage and whether they seek interaction with the host society. The first strategy, integration, occurs when individuals maintain their original cultural identity while also actively participating in the larger society. The second strategy, assimilation, takes place when individuals do not maintain their cultural heritage and instead fully adopt the cultural norms of the dominant society. The third strategy, separation, refers to a situation in which individuals hold firmly to their original cultural practices and intentionally avoid involvement with the host culture. Lastly, marginalization arises when individuals neither preserve their cultural heritage nor engage with the host society, often resulting in feelings of cultural loss and social exclusion (Berry, 1997). Together, these four strategies illustrate the different ways migrants navigate cultural adaptation in new environments.

This research specifically focuses on integration and assimilation, as these two strategies most clearly illustrate how migrants negotiate cultural identity within a multicultural environment. These two strategies are chosen because they show two different but common ways migrants adapt to a new culture, and both can be clearly seen in the characters' interactions, choices, and cultural adjustments in *Ali's Wedding* movie. These ideas show that cultural adaptation is a complex process, and the movie *Ali's Wedding* provides a clear example of how this happens in daily life. The movie tells the story of an Iraqi Muslim immigrant family living in Australia and shows the tension between keeping their cultural traditions and meeting the expectations of the host society. Through scenes of family duties, religious practices, personal goals, and interactions with the wider community, the movie illustrates how the characters navigate their identity in a multicultural environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative methods were chosen because this research focuses on an understanding of cultural phenomena. According to Lim, qualitative research's emphasis on context, existence, experience, perspective, meaning, and subjectivity offered a unique lens through which to study and explain the intricacies of social phenomena (Lim, 2024). Through this approach, the researcher can explore the characters' cultural experiences in depth and interpret how acculturation strategies appear within their interactions and behaviours.

In organizing the data, this research used five steps, those were: a) watching the movie, b) reading the movie script, c) identifying the data, d) classifying the data, e) reducing the data. The first step in collecting the data was watching *Ali's Wedding* movie. After watching the movie for multiple times, the second step was reading the movie script of the movie to get the details of the issue. The third step was identifying the data by highlighting some of the dialogues in the movie script. The fourth step was classifying the data. It was part to selecting the data related to the issue. Last, the fifth step was reducing the data. The data that was selected is used to support and solve the problem formulation in this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ali's Wedding movie portrays the life of an Iraqi immigrant family living in Australia, highlighting the cultural dynamics and adaptation challenges they face within a multicultural society. The family consists of Mahdi and Zahra as the parents, and their two sons, Ali and Mohammed. Zahra, as a first-generation member of the diaspora, is depicted as someone who continues to uphold the cultural identity, traditions, and values rooted in her Iraqi heritage. Her attachment to her original culture is reflected in the way she fulfills family roles, maintains religious practices, and preserves customs passed down from her homeland.

In contrast, Ali and Mohammed, who have grown up in Australia, are closely shaped by their exposure to the social environment and cultural norms of the host country. Their daily interactions with Australian peers, institutions, and societal expectations lead them to internalize elements of Australian culture, resulting in noticeable shifts in identity that reflect the acculturation process typical of second-generation immigrants. Through these contrasting experiences, the film illustrates the tension between cultural preservation and cultural adaptation within immigrant families navigating life in a new society.

Integration

Integration, according to John W. Berry (1997), refers to a condition in which individuals maintain their cultural heritage while also engaging actively with the dominant society. This strategy reflects a balanced orientation, where migrants do not abandon their original identity but at the same time participate in the social, cultural, and institutional life of the host country. In *Ali's Wedding*, the

integration strategy is primarily reflected in Zahra's character, although it can also be seen within the broader family dynamics.

Zahra, as a first-generation immigrant, demonstrates a strong commitment to preserving Iraqi cultural traditions. However, her cultural preservation does not mean complete withdrawal from Australian society. Instead, she navigates both cultural spheres simultaneously. The quoted dialogue regarding the tea ceremony illustrates how Iraqi customs are maintained within the Australian setting. The act of organizing tea between two families is not merely a social gathering; it represents a deeply embedded cultural practice associated with family honor, respect, and community connection. In Iraqi culture, tea functions as more than a beverage—it symbolizes hospitality, relational bonding, and formal negotiation, especially in the context of marriage discussions.

Zahra is the first generation of the diaspora in Ali's family to become integrated. According to Berry (1997), integration is characterized as a desire to preserve one's own culture while interacting with other groups on a daily basis. The following passage from *Ali's Wedding* movie illustrates integration as a result of diaspora experience:

ZAHRA

No wonder we couldn't find him.

He is operating. See? These people say they don't know you.- Is this your teacher?-

ALI

Sorry. Family emergency.-

ZAHRA

Is he a good teacher?-

ALI

He's one of the greats, Mum.

ZAHRA

OK. Back up here.

Our two families are having tea.

You need to dress up.

ALI

Hello, Ayoob? Hey, bro.

With this tea ceremony, what do I do not to get married? Spoon in? spoon out?

Zahra's quotation demonstrates how Ali's family preserves their cultural identity while living in Australia through the custom of drinking tea. The tea ceremony serves as a cultural marker that reinforces identity. Even though the family resides in Australia, they continue to practice rituals that affirm their Iraqi heritage. This illustrates how diaspora communities maintain cultural memory through everyday actions. As Ferman (2022) explains, tea in Iraqi families carries symbolic meaning and has developed into a distinctive social custom that represents warmth, negotiation, and familial unity. Therefore, Zahra's practice of hosting tea is not simply habitual but represents an intentional act of cultural preservation.

At the same time, Zahra interacts with Australian society in practical ways. She communicates with Ali's teachers, navigates public spaces, and participates in broader social environments. Her presence in Australian institutions demonstrates that she is not socially separated. Instead, she

maintains engagement while preserving her cultural core. This aligns with Berry's concept of integration, which occurs when individuals or groups to preserve their original culture while simultaneously interacting with the dominant culture in their residence (Berry, 1997, p.9). The act of drinking tea is not just part of their daily routine, but also functions as a meaningful marker of cultural identity that remains preserved even in their diasporic life in Australia. This simple practice reflects their commitment to maintaining a connection with their heritage despite the cultural changes surrounding them.

Assimilation

Another form of acculturation resulting from the diaspora experience is assimilation. According to John W. Berry (1997), assimilation occurs when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural heritage and instead seek close interaction with the dominant culture. In this strategy, engagement with the host society becomes the primary orientation, while attachment to the original culture gradually weakens. In *Ali's Wedding*, assimilation tendencies are particularly visible in Ali and Mohammed as second-generation members of the Iraqi diaspora who have grown up within the Australian sociocultural environment. In the movie *Ali's Wedding* movie, Ali and Mohammed, as members of the second-generation diaspora, show tendencies toward assimilation. Berry (1997) explains that assimilation occurs when individuals choose not to preserve their cultural heritage and instead engage more closely with the dominant culture. This form of adaptation is reflected in the following quote:

MOHAMMED

Johnno, you fucking dickhead. You're cleaning that, asshole.

MAHDI

Mohammed.

MOHAMMED

This is my job, Dad. **I have to speak Australian.** Get me the fucking keys to the car you were meant to put there. Please.

In this scene, Mohammed uses inappropriate language when talking to his coworkers. As a second-generation member of the Ali family who has spent his entire life in Australia, Mohammed has adopted local speech patterns. Mahdi overhears this and attempts to correct him, but Mohammed insists that speaking like an Australian is necessary for his job. His choice of language illustrates a disregard for both his Muslim cultural values and his position as the son of an Iraqi cleric, reflecting instead his desire to align himself with Australian identity. This supports Laugesen's (2017) view that the use of coarse language, including slang and swearing, has long been associated with Australia's national identity.

He exhibits assimilative behaviour by gravitating toward Australian cultural norms while disregarding his identity as a cleric's son. This reflects Berry's concept of the assimilation strategy, which occurs when individuals choose not to preserve their original cultural identity and instead pursue regular engagement with the dominant culture (Berry, 1997). Another assimilation behaviour also experienced by Ali. This can be found in the following quote:

ALI

It's my degree. **How can I be a proper husband when I'm studying?**

ZAHRA

You father fought in a war, studied for two decades, and fathered four children all at once.

ALI

Mom, I'm not as good as Dad. **I need to focus.**

MAHDI

Maybe he is right. After all, this is Australia. People only do one thing at a time. Perhaps I could convince Haj Karim and the other witnesses to hold off the announcement. Maybe the end of your first year.

The quotation shows that Ali believes marriage and academic pursuits cannot be managed simultaneously. He admits that, unlike his father who can handle multiple roles at once, he must devote his full attention to his studies. This illustrates Ali's perspective, which aligns more closely with Australian values that emphasize education and individual focus. Mahdi's remark "After all, this is Australia. People only do one thing at a time"—further reinforces this adaptation to local norms. This statement reflects what Hall (1959), as cited in Goonetilleke and Luximon (2009), describes as a monochronic cultural orientation, in which tasks are performed sequentially rather than simultaneously. Ali's acceptance of this perspective indicates that he has internalized the temporal and structural logic of Australian society. His prioritization of education over early marriage demonstrates a shift away from traditional expectations toward dominant cultural patterns. This shift supports Berry's (1997) explanation that assimilation involves reducing commitment to heritage practices in favor of alignment with the host culture.

In addition, as a second-generation diaspora who has grown up in Australia, Ali shows a preference for adjusting to the cultural rhythm of Australian society rather than fulfilling his mother's expectations regarding traditional marriage and the ability to manage multiple roles simultaneously. His decision to set aside certain family traditions and prioritize his education reflects a tendency toward assimilation. This aligns with Berry's explanation that assimilation occurs when individuals no longer wish to maintain their original cultural identity and instead seek regular interaction with the dominant culture (Berry, 1997). Ali also shows assimilation behaviour in the following quote:

ALI

I found a way we can be together. Temporary marriage.

DIANNE

Temporary marriage? You came here just to say that? Come on. That's just a loophole for horny Arabs.

ALI

Yeah, but it's written law. "A man who desireth temporary marriage, must first set a reasonable time limit, reasonable dowry, treat the woman with dignity..." I'm all about that.

DIANNE

It's not in the Koran. It's not in the text.

ALI

Yeah, but it's here. It means we can have a proper relationship. **But, you know? Temporary. Like Australians.**

In this scene, Ali proposes the idea of a temporary marriage as a way to maintain a relationship with Dianne without fully violating the religious and cultural expectations of his family. On one hand, he still draws from Iraqi cultural principles through the concept of *mut'ab* marriage, which traditionally involves a specific contract duration and dowry requirements (Al Safar, 2025). However, at the same time, Ali attempts to reinterpret this concept to suit the social context of Australia. His statement, "Temporary. Like Australians," shows his effort to reshape an Iraqi cultural practice so that it appears compatible with contemporary Western relationship norms. This action reflects a form of assimilation, which occurs when a non-dominant group adopts the cultural patterns of the dominant

society or when multiple cultural groups blend into a new, unified social identity, as described in the “melting pot” model (Berry, 1992).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Ali's Wedding* illustrates the varied acculturation strategies adopted by members of a single immigrant family, highlighting the contrast between first-generation and second-generation experiences. Zahra, as a first-generation diasporic figure, embodies the strategy of integration by maintaining her Iraqi cultural identity while still functioning within Australian society. This is evident in her commitment to cultural practices such as the traditional tea ceremony, which serves as a symbolic link to her heritage and demonstrates her ability to preserve cultural continuity without rejecting the social context of the host country. Meanwhile, Ali and Mohammed, as second-generation immigrants raised in Australia, exhibit a stronger inclination toward assimilation. Mohammed adopts informal and impolite speech patterns commonly associated with Australian identity in an effort to fit in with his surroundings, indicating a departure from the cultural expectations tied to his background as the son of an Iraqi cleric. Similarly, Ali demonstrates assimilative tendencies through his preference for the monochronic style typical of Australians—focusing on one task at a time—and through his willingness to deviate from traditional cultural norms in pursuit of personal goals, including his desire to marry the woman he loves. Together, these character portrayals reveal the complexity of acculturation within diasporic communities, showing how cultural identity, social expectations, and personal aspirations influence the paths individuals take as they navigate life in a multicultural society.

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