

An Ideology of Crossing Nation: From Conflict to Emergence

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ABSTRACT

The present study deeply analyses the different perspectives of the immigrants towards their country of destination which results in the categorisation of immigrants as either diaspora or transnationals. It also explores the way in which diaspora and transnationalism begin to swerve in their paths; the immigrant's roots and routes are alike but their standpoints are unlike. The act of crossing nation is shared between the two but the different perspectives of the immigrant enable them to develop distinct ideologies which streams to assorted conclusions such as diaspora or transnationals. The channel of diaspora is brimmed with thorns and speed breakers like loneliness and estrangement, that dwindles the speed of the progressive status of the migrants to authorise their identity and they wander in-between the social spaces influenced by the host community and migrated society. Whereas, the boulevard of transnationalism is suffused with restricted speed breakers like nostalgia; it is a smooth lane filled with opportunities of being in more than one place simultaneously to the migrants and ends in acquiring the global identity by overcoming all the impediments in their lives. The objective of the present study is to identify the distinctions of the two concepts and analyse the different perspectives of the immigrants through the novels Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Colm Toibin's *Brooklyn* under the light of the conventional assimilation theory and assemblage theory.

Keywords: Diaspora, differences, immigrants, perspectives, transnationalism

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INTRODUCTION

Migration is considered as one of the innate human natures from the time of human evolution. Humans started to migrate from one place to another for their survival and later for their betterment of life and to enhance their socio-economic status. Migration has taken finite transformations; along with it, the perspective of the

immigrants has also transmuted, because those migrated people exhibited certain characteristics on their non-native land. Migration is a “form of ethnic change, focusing on three boundary processes—boundary crossing, boundary blurring, and boundary shifting” (Tran, 2016). Based on the differences seen in the immigrants with the host society certain theories were formulated under the umbrella term immigration theories, such as Assimilation theory and Assemblage theory.

At present, in the age of globalisation, transcending nation has become a common factor which allows people to maintain multiple connections with numerous countries and defining their identity has become complicated; identity is blurred leading to identity crisis. Identity crisis is one of the most common issues that all immigrants encounter in their host state; some remain with identity crisis and some overcome the issues. When people remain with identity crisis they lose their relationship with the origin land, and they integrate partially with the migrated land, having their provenance only in their memories. This type of people is called as diasporic people. Michel Bruneau says that, “through migration, diaspora members have lost their material relationship to the territory of origin, but they still preserve their cultural or spiritual relationship through memory” (Baubock & Faist, 2010) When people overcome the crisis by accepting, adapting and emerging with both the identities making dual identity and

multiple connections with other nations then they are termed as transnationals or trans-border communities. As of Bruneau’s views, “Dual nationality and migratory circulation ... favour the emergence of new trans-border communities differing from the long-term diasporas” (Baubock, & Faist, 2010) There are concrete differences between diaspora and transnationalism and the present paper is framed to list out the differences between the two communities through the novels *White Teeth* and *Brooklyn*.

METHODS

The paper describes the differences between the two theories of diaspora and transnationalism and explores the distinctions in the novels *White Teeth* and *Brooklyn*. Textual analysis was employed to analyse and interpret the content of the novel.

Migration Theories – Assimilation Theory and Assemblage Theory

Migration theories expound the process of adaptation, identification and incorporation of the immigrants in the host society. The process of incorporation followed divergent pathways which can be interpreted through assimilation and assemblage theory. Assimilation theory is developed by an American sociologist Milton Myron Gordon who studies the process of Assimilation and states that the first generation was less assimilated and less exposed to host culture. Assimilation theory propounds that the immigrants navigate through the cultural

identities of their host and native land. “Assimilation may be incomplete because it is blocked outright, delayed, or merely unfinished...” (Brown & Bean, 2006).

The other immigration theory is the Assemblage theory which emphasises on the flow of migrants and the fluid identity of the trans migrants, who balance between the adapted estranged culture and the inherent culture of the provenance country. Assemblage theory is an ontological framework created by Gilles Deleuze and was presented in *A Thousand Plateaus* by Felix Guattari. This theory analyses social complexity by emphasising fluidity, exchangeability and multiple functionalities. It also states that within a body, the relationships of component parts are not stable and fixated rather they can be displaced and replaced within and among other bodies, thus approaching systems through relations of exteriority. “Assemblages are composed of heterogeneous elements or objects that enter into relations with one another” (Little, 2012). “DeLanda suggests that the social does not lose its reality, nor its materiality, through its complexity. In this way, assemblages are effective in their practicality; assemblages, though fluid, are nevertheless part of historically significant processes” (DeLanda, 2006). Manuel DeLanda states that “assemblages are made up of parts which are self-subsistent and articulated by relations of exteriority so that a part may be detached and made a component of another assemblage” (DeLanda, 2006).

Diaspora and Transnationalism

The beauty of the nature can be admired through the sunlight and moonlight, likewise, assimilation theory and assemblage theory has been manipulated in literature and conceptualised in to models of identity to study and analyse the journey of the characters in their migrated world. The non-acceptance and partial integration of the immigrants are termed as diaspora and, acceptance and adaptation of the immigrants are named as transnational. Diaspora reflects the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration and Transnationalism reflects acceptance and cultural assemblage. There are substantial differences between diaspora and transnationalism. Diaspora and transnationalism are like two lateral lines of a railway track, which provides dichotomic experience to the migrants: hostility and emergence, seclusion and exhilaration, Catch-22 and sanity, turmoil and clarity. The variations between diaspora and transnationalism start from the perspective of the migrants towards the country of their destination which leads them to grapple with the reality and remain confused as diaspora or to accept the reality and adapt themselves to their migrated community as transnationals. Diasporic people try to recreate themselves in their migrated land which leads to iteration of identity. Homi Bhabha considers ‘identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel’ (Bhabha, 1994). Ciprut (2008) argued that transnational citizenship replaced an individual’s single national loyalties with

multiple nation states which was made visible in the political, cultural, social and economic realms. Ozkul' states that, "In diaspora studies migrants' identity and belongings are fixated into one place and society, transnationalism studies reveal that migrant's attachments are flexible and that their belongings are fluid" (Ozkul, 2012). Diasporic people integrate partially with the host state but transnationals exhibit complete integration with the host state.

Diaspora is 'a primordial reflection of ethnicity' (Safran, 1991) and it points to the 'circularity, continuity, and multidirectional movements of people' "Diaspora is a space of real and imagined relations between diasporic communities and the homeland. But this space is composed of places and of localities that are both sites of settlement and nodes in a transnational network of mobility and communication" (Kokot, Khachig, & Carolin, 2004). Tololyan highlights not only of mobility but also "the political discourse of uprootedness and dispersal among diaspora elites and states, the pure diasporic identity, permanently endangered by threats of assimilation, must be contrasted with the studies of day-to-day experience of individual actors, balancing the various claims brought to them by diasporic elites, society of residence and personal situation alike" (Tololyan, 2004). These diasporas may transcend boundaries, but space, place and locality remain important points of reference, on a symbolic as well as on a physical level.

The transnational communities and diasporic cultures are far from being a new sociological phenomenon, the rise of

transnationalism today is influenced by the scale of intensity and simultaneity of current long distance, cross-border activities (Vertovec, 2009). "Transnationalism studies explore networks pertinent to individuals across borders" (Ozkul, 2012). The life and experiences of transnational communities are reflected through literature known as transnational literature. Transnational literatures are open to different social and political fields of engagement that ultimately develop into new rapports between the individual and local space (McLeod, 2000). There are depictions of individuals' awareness of de-centred attachments, of being simultaneously in home away from home, here and there, maintaining several identities that link them with more than one nation (Vertovec, 2009). This creates a loosening of the bonds between people, wealth, and territories which is concomitant with the rise of complex networks has altered the basis of many significant global interactions (Wakeman, 1988) Faist's views on the differences of the two concepts: "Moreover, while diaspora and transnationalism are sometimes used interchangeably, the two terms reflect different intellectual genealogies. The revival of the notion of diaspora and the advent of transnational approaches can be used productively to study central questions of social and political change and transformation" (Baubock & Faist, 2010) These variations of both the frameworks are handled by various writers in their novels exhibiting the distinct features of both the communities.

Diaspora and Transnationalism in the Novels

Innumerable writers have dealt with the distinct characteristics of diaspora and transnationalism in their writings. In diaspora novels, the characters pictured by the writers, experience a crisis and survive with the crisis till the end of the novel. Kogawa's (1981) novel, *Obasan*, is a semi-autobiographical novel focusing on the Japanese-Canadians, the novel focuses on issues of identity and belonging of the Japanese diasporic community in Canada. Sky Lee's novel (1990), *Disappearing Moon Café*, narrates the cultural differences faced by the diasporic community in Canada. Bapsi Sidhwa's (1993) novel, *An American Brat* focuses on the cultural shocks experienced by the immigrants in the settled society, with the sense of alienation and estrangement. The novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, by Amy Tan (2001) focuses on the cultural clash and problems that exist between first and second generations of the diasporic community. Jhumpa Lahiri's (2007) *The Namesake* focuses on the problems between first and second generations of the diasporic community, cultural clash and mainly on the identity problem faced by the diasporic community. Monica Ali's (2003) novel, *Brick Lane*, looks at the discrimination faced by the Bangladeshi community in London, cultural clash and problems between first and second generations of the diasporic community.

In transnational novels, the characters created by the writers, identify their crisis and overcome their crisis to live their life. *Naomi's Tree* by Joy Kogawa (2008) explores the emotional connection in between a cherry tree and Naomi which happens in Canada. Though by birth she belongs to Japan, she leads her life in Canada by bearing her dual identity as Japanese Canadian. *Discontent and its civilizations: Dispatches from Lahore, New York and London* by Mohsin Hamid (2014) expresses the emergence of the protagonist considering UK, US and Pakistan as his homeland. *No Longer at Ease* by Chinua Achebe (1960) explores the action of leaving a country and returning to the homeland and it also gives a sense that people are changed by migration—that home is no longer the same because people are no longer the same, which denotes the fluidity of identity. *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie (2009) revolves around a Hiroshima survivor who travels across Japan, India, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan and America and spends her every stage of her life in these countries adapting their cultures. *Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds* by Selina Siak Chin (2016) looks upon a Malaysian Chinese woman who balances herself and her children to adapt both the cultures of Malaysia and china. The novels *White Teeth* and *Brooklyn* are taken to study the different features of diaspora and transnationalism in the light of two literary theories.

THE BASE LINE OF THE TWO NOVELS

Zadie Smith' *White Teeth*

The novel *White Teeth* was written by a British writer, Zadie Smith (2000) which circles around three contrasting multicultural families: Bangladeshi Muslim, Samad Iqbal; an Englishman, Archie Jones with his Jamaican wife, Clara Jones; and Jewish catholic, Marcus Chalfen; wherein all the three families reside in London. Samad Iqbal being a waiter in a restaurant tries to meet the two ends of the two cultures in the Multicultural British society and he suffers in-between the past and present, where the past refers to the ancestry culture and present refers to the estranged culture. Samad's desire is to be a genuine Muslim but he couldn't follow the rigorous principles of Islam in British society, and so he implants one of his twin sons in Bangladesh to be brought up as an authoritarian Muslim. The twin sons of Samad are trapped in-between the cultural conflicts and thus, one of the twins denies to follow his religion Islam; becomes an atheist, and the other twin pledges himself to a militant Muslim fundamentalist brotherhood known as "Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation". The turmoil of Samad and his sons regarding their culture in the new, dissimilar society and the deadlock in emerging non-British cultures in a British topology are expressed with humour and pathos with the touch of Zadie Smith's novelty. Smith has also satirised the middle class and the working-class British cultures through the characters Chalfens and Archie Jones.

Colm Toibin's *Brooklyn*

The novel *Brooklyn* was written by an Irish writer, Colm Toibin (2009). It won the Costa Novel award in the same year and it was selected as one of the top ten historical novels of the year. This novel creates a social network between two countries Ireland and America and it revolves around a young girl named Eilis Lacey, born in Ireland and gets a job in America, not only to make her future better but also to upgrade her family's economic status. She covertly marries an American man and returns to Ireland to attend her elder sister's funeral. She is cornered by certain situation to reveal her covert marriage to her mother. Later, she boldly reveals to her mother about her secret marriage and returns to America to live her life with dual identity as Irish American. Lacey has adopted a fluid identity by acquiring both the cultures, setting an example of transnationalism. It has a historical background of Irish people migrating to America to earn money and make their future better. Lacey suffers from nostalgia but she considers both Ireland and America as her 'home', which shows that she has accepted both the cultures and balances herself with dual identity; remains as an American in America.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research work done in the novels on diaspora and transnationalism emphasises the conflicts of the characters and their inner struggles to lead a life of an immigrant are enlisted.

According to Taryn Beukema, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* examines the masculine experience by reflecting on the complex effects that cultural history can have on identity. The struggles of Male characters, to assert their identities amidst the confusion of what it means to be a man in contemporary British Society is also analysed (Beukema, 2008).

Mara Maticcevic engages Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* with the ideas of postmodernism saying that "after decades of postmodernist irony and insecurity, contemporary literature is again focusing on portrayals of stable forms of subjectivity within a social community" (Maticcevic, 2015).

Katina Lynn Rogers interprets Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* as a novel of cosmopolitanism and deals with the complexity of situations of the characters in the novel and the clashes between the traditional and modern culture (Rogers, 2008).

Dilek Inan analyses Colm Toibin's *Brooklyn* as a portrayal of inner struggle and loneliness of the protagonist in an unfamiliar city where she is caught in between home and exile. The article also explores the immigrant's relationship with people and place, dislocation, melancholy and depression, and the struggle in understanding the distance between inner and the outer selves (Inan, 2012).

Marisol Morales Ladron compares Colm Toibin's *Brooklyn* and O'Brien's *The Light of the Evening* and advocates the experiences of post-famine female emigrants to the U.S, in their unsuccessful

attempts to find better living conditions either in their promised land or in their homeland. Considering the bond to the land as a metaphor of the bond to the mother the article portrays the conflictive mother figures that mirror their own motherland (Ladrón, 2013).

Stephanie Bunbury deals with the film adaptation of Colm Toibin's *Brooklyn* as a Irish diaspora in America as nomads. The film *Brooklyn* tells the quintessential Irish diasporic story expressing the immigrant experiences through the female character Ellis Lacey where she is pushed to choose either home or the world. In the interview of Colm Toibin, he says that "we're not nomadic! but then, once we become nomadic, that becomes really interesting, because things happen then that are really strange." The article also emphasises on the characteristics of the Irish people, their behaviour and tradition (Bunbury, 2016).

The present study varies from other works and aims to make a difference between the two concepts diaspora and transnationalism through the analysis of the two novels of Zadie Smith and Colm Toibin.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS: THE CONTRAST FEATURES OF DIASPORA AND TRANSNATIONALISM

The Conflict and the Clarity

Every diasporic individual undergoes a basic dilemma within himself whether to assimilate with the host society or to stick to the kin culture. When an individual is caught in between these two, the conflict

arises in his inner mind which makes him to feel inferior with the host society which is considered as one of the features of assimilation theory and the same can be seen in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*. Samad is a waiter in a restaurant which makes him to feel inferior than other characters which made him to get corrupted, losing his moral codes of his religion and this can be evidently seen when Samad says,

“I am not a waiter. I have been a student, a scientist, a soldier, my wife is called Al Sana we live in east London but we would like to move north ... I'm not sure. I have a friend Archie and others. I am forty-nine but women still turn in the street. Sometimes” (Smith, 2000).

The inner struggle of Samad can be experienced through these lines and he sees himself through the eyes of the society which makes him to feel inferior in the British society, thinking that his identity as a Bangladeshi muslim is a complex one. Samad's horror feeling of losing this identity can be experienced when Samad says, “And then you begin to give up the very idea of belonging. Suddenly this thing, this belonging, it seems like some long, dirty lie” (Smith, 2000). Through these lines it is evident that he tries to imitate the British culture and tries to transform into an Englishman. The hatred in Samad's perspective towards his migrated British society and the sense of lost in the in-between spaces is evident when he says,

“You hand over your passport at the check-in, you get stamped, you want to make a little money, get yourself started...but you mean to go back! Who would want to stay? Cold, wet, miserable; terrible food, dreadful newspapers. In a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. Just tolerated. Like you are an animal finally house-trained...it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable, you belong nowhere” (Smith, 2000).

Through the above lines Smith exhibits the doomed reality of an immigrant which he has to undergo in his non-native state. The perspective of the migrants keeps fluctuating according to the circumstances that they experience in the host state which makes their life more complicated. Samad's feeling of losing his identity and torn apart from the dominating community shows that he is just surviving and not living his life.

When a migrant has a clear idea of ones identity and future in the host society like crystal-clear water, then the migrant can be called as a transnational and this clarity of ideology can be considered as one of the key factor of transnationalism and assemblage theory. This clarity of ideology can be seen in Colm Toibin's novel *Brooklyn*. Ellis Lacey had an idea of completing her night classes on bookkeeping and accountancy and pass her exams, and once she is done with the exams, she can get a job in the same shop floor.

“She thought, she could talk about her mother and maybe even discuss the possibility of moving into the office at Bartocci’s were a vacancy to arise after she passed her bookkeeping exams” (Toibin, 2009).

Georgiana, one of the boarders in the boat, shared her views about traveling to Ireland and America, and the way she accepts the horrible journey to visit her loved ones.

“I go home once a year to see my mam. It’s a lot of suffering for a week. By the time I’ve recovered I have to go back. But I love seeing them all. We’re not getting any younger, any of us, so it’s nice to spend a week together” (Toibin, 2009).

When Ellis feels nostalgic, Father Flood, the priest convinces her by giving her suggestions of keeping herself busy always. “You’re homesick, that’s all. Everybody gets it. But it passes. In some it passes more quickly than in others. There’s nothing harder than it. And the rule is to have someone to talk to and too keep busy” (Toibin, 2009). “she was looking forward to thinking about home, letting images of home roam freely in her mind, but it came to her now with a jolt that, no, the feeling she had was only about Friday night and being collected from the house by a man she had met and going to the dance with

him in the hall, knowing that he would be walking her back to Mrs. Kehoe’s afterwards” (Toibin, 2009). Through these lines it is clear that Ellis has learned the American culture and she lives the life of an American without avoiding her native Irish Culture, where an assemblage takes place. Since assemblage occurs trans migrants have clarity of ideology about their future in the host country which makes them more comfortable even if they are away from their country.

The Fixed and Flexible Identities

The major characteristic feature of diaspora is that the kin state identity is glued with the migrant’s mind which remains as a hurdle to accept the reality and assimilate with the culture of the host state. When Archie Jones asks Samad about his future in Britain, Samad states about his religion and his beliefs and replies that, he would continue to survive with the same ideologies, “I will survive the last days” (Smith, 2000). This shows that diasporic migrants are hooked with their provenance culture. Samad’s bitter words on his sons’ assimilation and transformations,

“The one I send home comes out a pukka Englishman, white suited, silly wig lawyer. The one I keep here is fully paid-up green bow-tie-wearing fundamentalist terrorist. I sometimes wonder why I bother,” said Samad bitterly, betraying the English inflections of twenty years in the country” (Smith, 2000).

Samad, being a Bangladeshi Muslim, wishes to follow the strict codes of his religion, but he is unable to do so in the new host country. Samad also expresses his attachment to his tradition and the importance of his tradition in British society. He desires his twin sons to be a traditionalist but the second-generation immigrants have assimilated with the host society which Samad calls it as corruption.

“All their children are nothing but trouble. They don’t pray, they speak strangely, they dress strangely, they eat all kinds of rubbish. No respect for tradition. People call it assimilation when it is nothing but corruption.” (Smith, 2000).

Samad’s twin sons, the second-generation immigrants have completely lost their tradition, customs and culture and integrate themselves with the British society. To be precise, the migrants have begun to adapt the culture of the host country by letting to slip the native culture of their country from their memory, which sets an example for the difference of the two concepts and also for assimilation theory.

In transnationalism, the migrants adapt themselves to the culture of host state when they are in host state and kin state when they are in kin state, and this is the key factor of assemblage theory. This is evident when Jack, Lacey’s brother says about his experience in his country of destination.

“In the first few months I couldn’t find my way around at all and I was desperate to go home. I would have

done anything to go home. But now I’m used to it and I like my wage packet and my independence” (Toibin, 2009).

Through the above lines, Jack has expressed his acceptance and emergence with the host society which makes him happy and comfortable. Ellis Lacey changes her attitude to overcome her nostalgic feeling by making herself busy all the time.

“She had been keeping the thought of home out of her mind, letting it come to her only when she wrote or received letters or when she woke from a dream in which her mother or father or Rose or the rooms of the house on Friary Street or the street of the town had appeared” (Toibin, 2009).

Thus, through the above lines Ellis Lacey has a control over her nostalgic feeling and tries to overcome her problems by finding a solution of engaging herself with a job and keeps herself busy all the time. Ellis after moving to Brooklyn had learnt to eat a spaghetti with a fork like Americans and this denotes that Ellis is emerging herself with the migrated land. “Ellis had received instructions from Diana about how to eat spaghetti properly using a fork only, but what was served was not as thin and slippery as the spaghetti Diana had made for her” (Toibin, 2009). Ellis’s perspective towards her migrated land is more optimistic when compared to Samad’s views. Through these illustrations

it is understood that people of diaspora and transnationalism have different perspectives in accepting, adapting and emerging with the other society.

CONCLUSION

The contradictions of Diaspora and Transnationalism show the way in which both the frameworks remain detached from each other and the distinct perspective of the migrants enables them to develop distinct ideologies which streams to assorted conclusions such as diaspora or transnationals. It also distinguishes the distinct sufferings, acceptance, adaptations, emergences and transformations of the immigrants in their migrant state. Diasporas have fixed identity to native culture and not the host culture like Samad sticking to his native identity and religion as Bangladeshi Muslim. But whereas, transnationals have fluid identity and they are open to all cultures like Ellis Lacey because she also learns to behave like an American when she is in America. They adapt themselves to all cultures to become global citizens. Diasporas are struck in-between two cultures and survive in chaos like Samad's character. Whereas transnationals have a clearer idea about their host culture and their transformed identity, like the character of Ellis Lacey. Through the differences in perspective of the migrants, which is illustrated from the novels, it is clear that there are differences between diaspora and transnationalism.

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