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## DYNAMICS OF IMMIGRATION: DISPLACEMENT & IDENTITY CRISIS IN DONALD R. GALLO'S *FROM CROSSING: STORIES ABOUT TEEN IMMIGRANTS*

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### **Abstract**

*The paper examines the displaced position of immigrants portrayed in the selected stories of Donald R. Gallo's *From Crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants* and explores the variables that affect the lives of the immigrants in a multicultural setting. The article analyzes psychological and physical repercussions of displacement of teenage characters in the stories with the focus on teens' psychological status during the transition period. Teenagers undergo complexity of internal and social identities in which they face psychological complexity. They experience identity crisis in the destination country. Because of their belonging to different backgrounds, they undergo varied levels of domination and marginalization. They are not accepted and their identities are not tolerated because of being outsiders. Their movement from the homeland to the destination countries becomes a cause for being unaccepted. Their experience in the intolerant society leads them to alienation. The article has employed Stuart Hall's perspective of identity and cultural diversity to scrutinize the displacement and identity crisis of the teenagers depicted as immigrants in the selected stories. The American society imposes established notions on the immigrants who are teenagers whose psyche is complex because of their displacement. They experience mental displacements as well in a new social setting as Lacan focuses on the teenage problem of identity when they shift from one teenage state to maturity. Moreover, it problematizes when people are culturally displaced in another culture where they have to adopt different cultures.*

**Key Words:** Immigration, Displacement, Identity, Integration, Multiculturalism

### **Introduction**

This paper scrutinizes dynamics of immigration and its repercussions as reflected in the life of immigrants in the anthology of short stories *From Crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants* by Donald R. Gallo. The article analyzes the texts to explore immigrants' experiences in general and teenager immigrants' experience in the cross border of their countries in particular. The author portrays his personal experience of staying in a foreign country. In the multicultural situation of the United States of America, the writer pictures what immigrants experience there and how they respond to it. The experiences of contemporary teenage immigrants from countries like Cambodia, Haiti, Kazakhstan, Mexico, and South Korea are depicted in the collection.

The paper discusses the issues of the teens as portrayed in the stories. They have left their homelands and have moved to an alien country, which provides them opportunities to make living there. Features of the stories as reflected in which almost all teens leave own countries and settle down in the alien country. Many of the stories open with a brief description of the countries where the character was born like Korea, Mexico, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. All of them have keen interest in moving to other countries for better future. They are caught in a conflict of change, assuming responsibility while remaining in alien countries. Along with new experiences in new cultural and economic backgrounds, all youths feel awkward. Teenage is for forming social identity because adults change their attitude along with maturity. Due to the unusual experience, a teenage person often encounters unusual and unnatural experiences in life. Undergoing complexity and complication in both physical and mental level adults experience identity crisis.

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The study relates the concept of cultural identity that depends on some degree of continuity with the past – the geography, culture and location. Its history is constructed on the binary of self and other. This new definition of culture acknowledges the diversity and pluralism.

### **Analysis**

The study demonstrates psychological consequences of displacement of the major characters of young age that have been in displaced situations. They experience identity crisis in new cultural milieu. They recreate their identity through their encounter with new cultural domains. The writer reveals massive immigration from Asian and European countries to the United States—a country wherein multiculturalism is dominant. The postglobalized society deals with the issue of cultural diversity. Jason Cong Lin defines:

Cultural diversity is a debatable, open-ended term, which generally refers to a reality of coexistence of diverse knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, religions, languages, abilities and disabilities, genders, ethnicities, races, nationalities, sexual orientations, etc., of human beings. It could extend to the way people react to this reality and the way people choose to live together with this reality. (1)

In a culturally diverse society, people can exchange their knowledge and capabilities and can contribute to the development process. The pace of progress comparatively increases although people with different backgrounds may find difficult to cope with the differences. Hence, the study of the stories presents a different experience of the immigrants in a multicultural setting. The multicultural issue is a result of global society and global phenomena. Having same experience in post-globalized world, the author carries out theme of teenagers' experience of foreign countries. One of the major concerns of the writer is to explore teenage psychology and their behavioral changes. All the stories describe at first the source country and later on deals with their experience in destination country wherein cultural differences and human experiences are uniquely presented. The characters in the stories experience identity crisis in the destination country because of the cultural diversity. Identity is something that reflects in their distinctiveness in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, class etc. Hall's idea of identity is that it has no fixed archeology but has become a "retelling of the past" (112). Hence, identity is related to the background of the subjects. The backgrounds of the immigrants are questioned in the United States. Identities are the names given to the different ways people are positioned by, and position themselves in relation to located culture and society. All characters in respective stories are teenagers. All of them have similar views about their lives and experience. There is commonality due to the age factor. Teenager faces identity problems when they shift from one stage to another. A teenage undergoes with psyche complexity. Having anxiety and fear, teenagers attempt to escape from own previous self and desire to overcome nervousness and mental stress. It is a peculiar experience for youths to form or recreate a new identity.

The paper discusses four stories including "First Crossing", "My Favorite Chaperone", "The Rose of Sharon" and "Second Culture Kids." The characters in these stories experience psychological displacement. They have similar experiences when they struggle for self and independent position aboard. They experience intolerable suffering and psychological emptiness. Their psychological crisis is reflected in "The First Crossing", "He found himself eager to hear of each exploit and began feeling oddly proud and somehow connected to this unrelated group. A strange camaraderie seemed to permeate the air, and when one man told how he was hidden in a door panel of a truck, smashed in a fetal position for one hour and thought he might suffocate" (21). Macro undergoes a different experience when he reaches the United States where he finds everything odd and strange. Unlike his expectations, he finds the reality completely different where he is alienated from the group. This feeling takes him back towards his past and his country. This new experience makes him physically and psychologically displaced. All the teenagers have left their countries because of various reasons in their respective countries. They are displaced and therefore, they are forced to engage in new lifestyle, society and culture. They feel awkward in new society when they find a different lifestyle. The teenagers when living in another society, culture, feel a sense of loss and displacement. They

come across a different sense which disengages them from being involved into the new society. It makes them feel homeless and alienated. This displacement leads them to severe psychological turmoil and vulnerability, and eventually they get to imagine their homelands and society. Kevin Bigger interprets the stories from the post modern perspective. He states:

The book adds a great more detail and backgrounds to each of the stories—both the historical backgrounds and also Kevin and Jamie’s reactions to the stories and to their attempts at recreating them. Of the ten stories, five are from the first series and five from the second. They include Whitcombe and Lauper’s first crossing of the Southern Alps; Grave and Talbot’s attempt to find a pass into Milford Sound; Fyfe and Graham’s ascent of Mt de la Beche. As well as several 19th century stories, *First Crossings* includes 20th century explorations. (5)

Bigger’s reading of the collection of stories shows that they range from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It implies that the stories deal with the issues of both centuries. The portrayal of the immigrants’ problems is incorporated in these stories. The compilation raises the cultural issue that locates problems as experienced by the teenagers in the multicultural setting of the United States. In the post-modern period, cultures are almost influenced from each other. The new cultural world is not the same as it was before, where all cultures had their life patterns. The multicultural world influences all cultural existences and questions for having a single culture. Likewise, Michael Brown views:

Some of New Zealand’s first adventurers were not only, well, adventurous, but also a little crazy. They put their lives on the line to see what was around the next corner; whether they could scale a mountain first or simply overcome personal boundaries. Some did it in the pursuit of fame and fortune but for others it was a sort of calling they couldn’t ignore and helped foster this country’s identity. Fitzgerald has illustrated just how tough some of these adventures were by taking the same routes, using the same equipment and wearing the same clothes as their forerunners. (12)

It indicates to the global impact in human life and mass movement. Due to the open world, human beings have started choosing life rather than nationality. They do not stay bound to the geographical boundary. Unlike this, Fitzgerald Jamie interprets the collection of the stories from the perspective of Diaspora. He explores the suffering of the people in Diaspora. As he states:

There is something special about the concept of adventure. There are no side-lines, goal posts, or carefully measured weights in an air-conditioned building. Instead, I imagine the mind-sets, determination and dirt under the fingernails of those that helped build New Zealand’s brand as the pioneering spirit on the edge of the South Pacific. I have learnt a lot from the stories I grew up with of century old adventures, and the unknown elements of my own campaigns. Through this story telling, we can learn a lot about pushing our known boundaries of endurance, navigation, innovation and perseverance. (17)

The extract reveals that challenges facing the immigrants in the modern world. Although people are allowed to move from one corner to another, they are not duly accepted. The primary boundaries in diaspora are of endurance, navigation, innovation and perseverance, which pose challenges to the immigrants for their adaptation in the destination country. Jonathan Majewski underscores the political conflict during the globalization. All tribal, racial and cultural groups resist against possible cultural interferences. In the same line of observation, the characters in the stories are forced to undergo diverse forms of quagmire in their alien countries. The text reads:

A wide variety of topics related to immigration are presented in a sometimes humorous format, including the immigrant handling of cultural differences and misunderstandings, the customs and cuisine of a new country, and, especially valuable, the search for an identity as an immigrant in a new country, coming from a country with a distinct culture to another country with another distinct culture. The characters in the "identity-related" stories often struggle to find a balance between their birth and adopted cultures, and satisfyingly, appear to make adjustments and blend the two in unique ways. (25)

The reading of the text emphasizes the role of globalization in the lives of the immigrants. How they experience cultural shocks in the new space is the paramount aspect of the texts. Because of the multicultural setting, different groups of people have their voices and issues. Accordingly, they tackle the challenges in the new place.

The principle of globalization and multiculturalism are questioned as the differences are not overtly accepted and respected by the native people of the destination countries. Lin highlights the role of cultural identity in the diverse society. He states, "Culture links closely to identity, such as the way people see themselves and others. Diverse cultures lead to diverse identities which bring both opportunities and challenges to education and the society" (3). Identity is formed based on the culture. People assess their personalities and positions through the lens of cultural belonging. They cannot detach themselves from their culture of belonging. They associate them with the cultural tenets even if they are in a diverse society. Because of this tendency for cultural association and psychological attachment, they face challenges rather than opportunities. Lin idealizes, "People need to have a level of understanding about each other in order to live together and collaborate with each other, which require learning about other cultures and identities" (3). People hardly show readiness for learning about new cultures as they mostly relate their cultures with that of others. Primarily, the permanent residents of the destination countries are reluctant to learn cultures of the immigrants. Therefore, they fail to understand the underlying assumptions of the new cultures. The conflict arises because of this reluctance.

Anthropologists think that culture has a wider meaning than the culture of history and literature as it means a total life way of people. Stuart Hall observes the scene with the people creating their new but constructed and emergent subject. He argues, "It is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think, perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the cultural practices then represent, we should think identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation" (110). Due to the displacement of cultural position, the immigrant faces numerous challenges in the new country. She gets confused and finds herself in a dilemmatic situation. Ultimately, she wishes to get back to homeland from the United States of America as she fails to adapt to the life there. She desires to return to Korea to meet her family awaiting her. Because of her stay in the United States during youth, she has been in the indecisive phase of what she should do ahead. Similar to her bewilderment, there are other teenagers who suffer obsession and restlessness. They remain inconstant whatever thought comes to their mind. Being self-centered teenagers, they seek their identity which creates conflict between them and the American society. They lack constant mentality. They only understand the society from their perspective. The society does not understand their feeling as well. Neither side is prepared to accept differences. Their rigidity and cultural intolerance lead the teenagers to the isolation in the multicultural set-up of the United States of America.

Cultural identity depends on some degree of continuity with the past—the geography, culture and location. It has its history constructed on the binary of self and other. This definition of culture acknowledges the diversity and pluralism inherent in society. This makes the contemporary anthropologists think that culture has a wider meaning than the culture of history and literature as it indicates to the total life way of people, the social legacy the individual acquires from his group. Similarly, Raymond Williams takes culture as "the whole way of life of a social group or whole society, it is a signifying system through which necessarily a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored" (55). Identity becomes an issue when something previously assumed to be fixed and stable displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. Identity as such is a topical issue in the study of culture. Hall observes the scene with the people creating their new but constructed and emergent subject. Cultural identity exists only in the representation, He argues, "It is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think, perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the cultural practices then represent, we should think identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation" (110).

This paper portrays the society to be larger social institution formed under certain traditional and established rules. Nevertheless, an individual cannot change societal norms and values because an individual follows all rules and regulations under societal provisions. It is a rule of society and a home that primarily orients people to the societal norms and values. Jacques Lacan asserts, "We have existed imaginary order the world in which we are entering a world of loss and lack and we had the issues on of fulfillment and control" (30). In Lacan's perspective, they have difficult existence with society and they seek for their selves and personal life against society that cannot be acceptable to the society. It creates conflict between the protagonist of the text and the society. Their contradictory thought of seeking their personal freedom being under the same society but the society does not know her separately. They keep changing her desires and choices. Due to having inconstant thoughts and desire they cannot find out her identity. This is the problem in which they cannot find their goal and ultimate destination. Owing to their changeable thoughts creates conflict against society where rules are predetermined. In Jean Davies Okimoto's "My Favorite Chaperone", an immigrant from Kazakhstan describes her relationship with her conservative parents who still limit her freedom. In Pam Munoz Ryan's "First Crossing," a boy experiences the risks of being smuggled across the Mexican border. The story presents an experience of a boy who is from Mexico where he works as a smuggler. His experience as a smuggler causes leaving his own country. He accompanies other boys who are involved in smuggling. His bitter experience in the United States is portrayed in the text.

At the beginning, teenagers experience egocentric world that is limited within individuality. It is their unexpected and stressful experience which deeply creates complicated emotion in them. However, it becomes an unusual experience when teenagers become adults. Their search for better existence struggles with life disorders. Forming new identity and better existence is their primary objective. However, they fail to achieve this objective as portrayed in "My Favorite Chaperone":

We came to America through an international dating magazine. I do not mean that our whole family was in the magazine looking for dates, just Madina Zhamejakova, my aunt. Aunt Madina came after Kazakhstan broke away from Soviet Union and things got very hard. Everyone's pay was cut and the tinged, our money was worth less and less. Then my grandmother died. That was the worst part. She was the head of our family, and without her everything fell apart. (45)

The teenagers intend to explore a new world for their better life. The extract deals with the in-depth exploration of human psychic functioning and its impact on the mode of living through analysis and interpretation. Freud opines, "The driving force of human life is not the knowledge and social code of conduct, but is the hidden and almost unknown aspect of psyche, which he calls, the unconscious, the self subjectivity" (111). Freud presents two types of mental processes along with the censorship of consciousness. Condensation and displacement are two mental processes of disguising wishes in mind. Teenagers are guided by personal desires. Its meanings have provided a basis for life span development of the psychology of the subjectivity. All major characters from these stories cannot find situation and own identity. Having cultural duality and multicultural identity, they are confused to find their situation. Sarah feels:

I needed to know where I came from, even if it was from them. I mean it would be like if you were some white adoptee and found out your parents lived in some white adoptee and found out your parents lived in some dirty trailer home somewhere at least now you know. If anything, it made me appreciate my mom and dad. Here these people gave everything. (174)

It shows Sarah's feeling and experience in the United States where she recalls her memories of the homeland. Because of psychological displaced mentality, she cannot sustain in the States. Dislocation can be extended resulting from cultural denigration as well as voluntarily chosen status. Withstanding the instability of the identities, the dislocation and the displacement can be created with the social structure. Stuart Hall states, "'cultural identity' can be thought in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially

imposed 'selves' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (234). Culture, being an inalienable element of human society, achieves a pertinent position in literary criticism. Identity has been the central question for human beings in their endeavors to make sense of the world. Among various types of identities, the cultural identity is the most crucial one. The identity achieved on the basis of culture or ethnicity is known as cultural identity. The search for this cultural identity in a multicultural societal framework becomes the paramount aspect as raised in the paper.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has explored multiple problems as experienced by the teenagers presented as the main characters in the stories, who are the immigrants in the United States from different countries. Their wish for better life and sustainable existence in the new country turns to be opposite. They fail to achieve the goal of leading a better life because of the cultural conflict in the multicultural situation. As the principle of multiculturalism is to accept, recognize and respect the differences, these values and assumptions are violated as portrayed in the collection of stories. I have investigated into the lives of the immigrants and have come up with the conclusion that cultural intolerance and lack of openness to the new cultures become the barriers to the immigrants to adapt to the new life. The people of the destination country have failed to see the tremendous potentials in the immigrants who can contribute to the development process of their country. On the other hand, the immigrants have failed to detach themselves from the memories of their cultures of belonging in a new place. Besides, they are reluctant to move for changes by adopting new norms and values of the host society. This unwillingness on the part of both the host country and immigrants intensifies the conflict and eventually forces the immigrants to get back to their homelands.

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