




Identity Formation and Acculturation in Smith's *White Teeth* and Adichie's *Americanah*: Critiquing the Immigrants' Generational Experiences

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between identity formation and acculturation in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* by unpacking the behaviours and experiences of the first-generation immigrant characters Samad (*White Teeth*) and Ifemelu (*Americanah*), and the second-generation immigrant characters Millat (*White Teeth*) and Dike (*Americanah*). These two generations of immigrants represent two-fold aspects of acculturation process. For the first-generation immigrants, integration serves as a vital acculturation strategy. However, the second-generation immigrants experience an in-between condition because of their weaker ties to their home country and culture, coupled with the experiences of discrimination in their new cultural environment. To analyze these themes of acculturation within the novels, this study integrates John W. Berry's and David L. Sam's concepts of acculturation, acculturation strategies, and acculturation stress. Additionally, Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity is borrowed to elucidate the notions of culture and identity within the narratives. Furthermore, Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity is employed to examine the in-between state of second-generation immigrants in the novels. By highlighting the connection between identity formation and acculturation in the novels, this study underscores the importance of understanding the complexities of identity formation and acculturation among immigrants across generations in diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: Identity formation, acculturation, immigrants, cultural root, hybridity

Introduction

In the age of globalization, moving across national borders has become a common phenomenon. People born in one country move to another whether by choice, necessity, or coercion. As people belonging to one culture encounter a new culture, their cultural identities are often challenged. In such cultural contact, the immigrants can either maintain their cultural identities or develop the contact and participation with other

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cultural groups. In most cases, the immigrants' experience is accompanied by acculturation. In its simplest sense, acculturation covers all the changes that arise following a contact between individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds. The immigrants' experience of acculturation leaves them with what John W. Berry calls the alternatives of assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (705). In addition to acculturation, identity formation is also an important issue for the immigrant people. In its simplest sense, identity is the product of a dynamic interplay between individual and context. The changes in ideals, values, and behaviors that occur during acculturation have a clear implication for how immigrant people form, revise, and maintain their identity (Schwartz et al. 2). These issues of acculturation and identity formation of the immigrants are dramatized in both Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*.

Set in a multicultural place like London, Smith's *White Teeth* narrates the stories of Samad and his family. The Bengali immigrant Samad and his son Millat belonging to Islamic culture come into a contact with British culture and society. Initially, Samad, the first-generation of immigrant, has a strong desire to maintain his own cultural identity but in his interaction with the British culture, he assimilates into British culture. Samad lives in-between two cultures: Islamic culture and British culture; he is both a Bengali Muslim and an Englishman. Samad's son Millat, the second-generation of immigrants, experiences acculturation differently in comparison to Samad. Millat, born and brought up in London, rejects his own cultural root and becomes absorbed into the British culture as evident in his language, appropriation of western clothing, love for popular culture. However, the experience of discrimination in British society makes him return to his own Islamic group as evident in his activity of joining an Islamic fundamentalist group, Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation (KEVIN), a militant anti-western organization claiming Quranic roots.

Adichie's *Americanah* narrates the story of Ifemelu, a modern young woman from Nigeria who lives in Nigeria until her late teens immigrates and afterwards moves to America hoping to complete her degrees and find an economically better life. Her life in America is not what she has expected. After experiencing depression in the initial stage, she adopts American culture dropping down her cultural identity. She becomes what the title of the novel suggests, '*Americanah*'. However, later, she maintains a balance between American culture and Nigerian culture. Dike, the cousin of Ifemelu and the representative of second-generation of immigrant experiences discrimination like Millat in America and even attempts suicide after going through depression. It is after a trip to Nigeria with aunt Ifemelu, Dike develops a familiarity with Nigerian culture, and it is also a return to his own root and culture.

Guided by a research question of whether identity is formed through acculturation, this study aims to examine the relationship between identity formation and acculturation process in Smith's *White Teeth* and Adichie's *Americanah*. To achieve that purpose, it analyzes the first-generation and second-generation immigrants from both the novels as the two generations of immigrants represent two-fold aspects of acculturation process. For first-generation immigrants, integration serves as a vital acculturation strategy. However, the second-generation immigrants experience an in-between condition because of their weaker ties to their home country and culture, coupled with experiences of discrimination in their new cultural environment. Examining the behaviours and experiences of the first-generation immigrant characters like Samad and Ifemelu and the second-generation characters like Millat and Dike, this paper aims to offer an insight into the interplay between identity formation and acculturation.

The study in its examination of the relationship between acculturation and identity formation has some limitations. The first limitation is the generational focus. As this study focuses on the experiences of the first- and second-generation immigrants, it might oversimplify the acculturation process excluding the experience of the third-generation immigrants and those who do not fit properly into the first or/and second-generation categories. Likewise, another limitation is the specific character selection. Since this study revolves around four specific characters from the novels, it has not taken other characters' experience into consideration which might offer a broader insight into the themes of acculturation and identity formation. Lastly, my own inherent subjectivity and potential preconceptions about the acculturation and identity formation may introduce a subjective bias, influencing the analysis and interpretation of the characters' experiences in the novels.

Literature Review

White Teeth and *Americanah* have received many warm critical comments after the publication. This literature review critically revisits the available literature on both the novels. An array of analyses and interpretations available reveals that *White Teeth* prominently foregrounds the postcolonial themes such as multiculturalism, hybridity, identity crisis, and cultural displacement, and *Americanah* primarily explores the themes of race, gender, and diaspora.

Much of the critical reception of *White Teeth* has attempted to position the novel within a postcolonial or multiethnic context. *White Teeth* has been interpreted as a novel dealing with the multicultural world. Examining *White Teeth* through the lens of multiculturalism, Sara Nichols views the novel as the depiction of "exciting world of racial mixing and immigrant changing" (66). Nichols talks about the cultural diffusion but fails to mention the causes behind Millat's in-between position. Why did Millat become a member of KEVIN? Is it just because it appears 'bewitchingly attractive' for the Bangladeshi boy who wants to be a gangster? In her review, Nichols fails to acknowledge the clash of eastern culture and western culture and its impact upon the characters and this missing thread is taken into consideration in this study.

The critics like Jonathan A. Sell and Mully Thompson focus on the issue of identity in *White Teeth*. According to Sell, Smith presents an identity which is "produced for us socially, which never matches our own self-presentation. Thus, social relations are informed by a dynamic of chance and instability" (27). Thompson views identity as the production of chance and instability in a new multicultural world. Departing from Sell's idea, this paper views identity as the production of a dynamic interplay between individual and context with an assertion that Samad's identity partly as a Muslim and partly as an Englishman, and Millat's in-between identity is the product of their interaction in a multicultural place like London.

Related to the theme of identity are the experiences of immigrants – disillusion, loss of their identity, disconnected links with their family back home, alienation, and racism. Isik and Tekalp shed light on the notion of hybridity, emphasizing the identity crisis of the characters in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural British society (342). Their examination centers on unpacking the cultural identity crisis precipitated by in-betweenness and hybridization. While their discussion scrutinizes the characteristics and psychological attitudes, including the ambivalence of Samad and his ill-tempered son Millat (344), this paper attempts to broaden the scope beyond hybrid identity alone. It analyses the formation of identity and impact of cultural encounters that contribute to such formation.

Adichie's *Americanah*, on the other hand, has predominantly been interpreted from the perspective of race. Emily Raboteau in the *Washington Post* writes how race entraps, beguiles, and bewilders the main character Ifemelu (8). She regards race as an imaginary construct with actual consequences. In the light of race and racism, Chikaoha Agoha writes, "Adichie's *Americanah* exposes institutionalized racism against Blacks in America and Europe, and this is evidently an indirect call on Africa to beware" (43). For him, "[i]n all of her works, Adichie battles one form of ill or another ... and we see nothing short of a real 'fight' in *Americanah* – where racism becomes the monster" (46). For Agoha, the focal theme that reverberates through the novel is racism. This discourse of racism plays out in skin colour and hair among other things. Characters like Dike and Ifemelu suffer the consequence of unfounded allegations as a result of the colour of their skin.

In Claudio Braga and Glaucia R. Gonçalves's reading, theirs based on diasporic theory, *Americanah* "[o]ffer[s] a fictional portrayal of a contemporary diaspora often made invisible by institutions, by the government, and by mainstream Americans, as it is persistently grouped with the African-American community, regardless of the specificities of each" (1). Their observation maintains that there is some sort of "fictional representation of Nigerian diaspora in the United States" (2). Likewise, Soheila Arabian and Vida Rahiminezhad provide a reading of the text done "through the lens of diaspora in order to find how diasporic displacement affects the characters' sense of belonging both toward homeland and host land... bring[s] a sense of alienation for the immigrant characters and effect their decisions of return" (536). They suggest that the only reason behind the movement of the major characters such as Ifemelu and Obinze is a kind of dissatisfaction which they wish to conquer through their prosperity in the West; they have hunger for choice and certainty.

In addition, the critics like Koskei and Orem Ochiel approach *Americanah* through the feminist perspective and argue that Ifemelu redeems power through retaining political and economic independence. While the first critic uses Ogundipe's feminist concept of "stiwanism" that "exhorts women to demolish myths and reconstruct new ideas" (63), the second places Adichie's novel within the broad narrative of feminist desolation and struggle. Likewise, Hidalgo explores the development of the protagonist's identity by analyzing her relationships with her boyfriends, Obinze, Curt, and Blaine (18). Those relationships, according to Hidalgo, define the development of the protagonist's personality through issues of race and gender that reflect the struggles of female African immigrants in the United States.

In this way, the spectrum of the available reviews shows that both the novels have been reviewed from different but interconnected perspectives. As discussed already, *White Teeth* has been interpreted as a postcolonial novel and the critics are concerned with the postcolonial issues such as multiculturalism, hybridity, identity-crisis, cultural displacement, etc. On the other hand, the critics are interested in the issue of race, gender, and diaspora in *Americanah*. However, the available literature does not touch upon the issue of acculturation and identity formation in the novels. The migration of the characters from one cultural location to another, the characters' experience in new cultural locations, the common experience of racial discrimination experienced by immigrants and the impact of cultural context upon the formation of the identity in both the novels, demand an investigation in terms of the issues such as acculturation and identity formation. Hence, this research attempts to study these two novels observing the issues of acculturation and identity.

The Concepts of Acculturation and Identity: A Theoretical Perspective

To analyze the issues of identity formation and acculturation, this paper borrows some of the key theoretical ideas from the theory of acculturation as developed by John W. Berry, David L. Sam, and others. The four acculturation strategies of Berry: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization are used to analyze the identity formation of the immigrants from both the novels. In addition to this, this study also incorporates Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity and Homi K Bhabha's concept of hybridity.

Berry defines acculturation as the “dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (698). At the group level, acculturation includes changes in social structures, institutions, and cultural practices, while at the individual level, it involves changes in a person's behaviors and actions. Berry suggests that these cultural and psychological changes occur over a long-term process, often spanning years, generations, or even centuries. In tune with Berry, Sam defines acculturation as the changes “that arise following “contact” between individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds” (11). Together, Berry and Sam's definitions highlight the complex, multi-dimensional nature of acculturation, emphasizing that it is an ongoing process of both cultural exchange and psychological adaptation resulting from the prolonged intercultural contact.

From the perspective of non-dominant groups, Berry proposes four acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. When individuals do not want to keep their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, they follow the assimilation strategy (Berry 705). This means they prefer to abandon their heritage culture and blend into the dominant society. On the other hand, when individuals value maintaining their original culture and wish to avoid interacting with others, they adopt the separation strategy, turning inward to their heritage culture and away from other cultural groups (Berry 705). If individuals are interested in both preserving their heritage culture and engaging daily with other groups, Berry calls it the integration strategy, which helps them maintain their cultural identity while participating in the broader social network. Lastly, Berry states that marginalization occurs when individuals have little interest or possibility in maintaining their heritage culture, often due to enforced cultural loss, and also have little interest in interacting with others, often due to exclusion or discrimination.

Apart from acculturation, this study integrates the theoretical perspectives of cultural identity and hybridity. Stuart Hall in his seminal essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” defines identity “as a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process” (222). He conceptualizes two notions of cultural identity. Firstly, cultural identity is defined in terms of “one shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’ . . . which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (223). The second definition of cultural identity emphasizes the differences “which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather - since history has intervened - ‘what we have become’” (225). Hall states that we cannot speak only about ‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging its other side - the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute the cultural identity. In this second definition, cultural identity is a matter of “‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’” (225). Cultural identity belongs to the future as much as to the past. It means that cultural identity is not only about the current state of who we are but also about the ongoing process of change and development influenced by our past and future experiences.

In addition, this study employs Bhabha's notion of hybridity to examine the

in-between state of second-generation immigrants in the novels. In his book *The Location of Culture*, he views hybridity as a type of "Third Space." According to him, the concept occurs as the ambiguity of identity that brings a person in a position of 'in-between.' When he gives his broader definition on hybridity, he refers to the in-between stage where immigrants are. This in-between stage, in its most basic sense, is what is meant by the term liminality – immigrants live in between two cultures, and their identities are in the middle of a forming process (5). He writes, "The stairwell as a liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower black and white" (5). Using the analogy of a stairwell, he describes the liminal space as an 'in-between' area where identities interact symbolically. The stairwell represents the transitional zone that bridges different identities (such as upper and lower, black and white) and prevents them from becoming fixed and oppositional. This movement and passage within the stairwell create an opportunity for cultural hybridity, allowing for the coexistence of differences without enforcing a rigid hierarchy.

Smith's *White Teeth* and Adichie's *Americanah*: Critical Analysis

To examine a connection between acculturation and identity formation, this study focuses on the experience of the first-generation and the second-generation of immigrants in the novels. The characters of Samad and Millat from *White Teeth* and Ifemelu and Dike from *Americanah* are examined in detail.

The First-Generation Immigrants: Cultural Identity under Duress

Smith's *White Teeth* and Adichie's *Americanah* tackle the complexities of the lives of the immigrants in Britain and America respectively. Samad's journey from Bangladesh to Britain and Ifemelu's journey from Nigeria to America lead to significant changes in their identities. Samad, a Muslim, becomes an Englishman being influenced by British culture, while Ifemelu, a Nigerian, turns out to be an American under the influence of American culture.

Samad in *White Teeth* represents the first-generation immigrants as he was born and brought up in Bangladesh but he is living in London. He has come to London looking for a better future but ends up being a waiter. A Muslim of Bangladesh turns out to be a waiter in London. He wants to live his life not as a waiter but with the identities that he had in the previous location, Bangladesh. According to Roy Baumeister, identity is a "definition or an interpretation of the self" (13). Samad sees himself not as a waiter but as a student, a scientist, a soldier, and a Muslim (58). To define identity, Baumeister has considered two criteria. The first criterion is continuity as it refers to being a special case of unity across time, which entails being the same person. The second criterion is differentiation, which refers to being distinct from others. Baumeister's model defines identity as a fixed entity and also as being different from others. Samad views his identity as the same person even in the new land. He is not ready to accept his new role. His cultural identity, of being a Muslim, prevents a drastic change or modification in his identity in the acculturation process.

In response to the question what happens to individuals who have developed in one cultural context when they attempt to re-establish their lives in another one, Berry proposes the options of acculturation strategies of "assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization" (705). Regarding the separation strategy, he states that "when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction, separation alternative is defined" (705). It means that the

separation strategy is characterized by one's love for the original culture and dislike for the culture of others. Samad's love for his Islamic culture and dislike for British culture can be interpreted as an expression of his separation strategy. As a Bangladeshi Muslim in London, Samad endeavors to uphold his native culture by rejecting the British culture, as demonstrated through his critiques of British societal norms, indicating his utilization of the separation strategy within the acculturation process. At the school meeting, he vehemently criticizes the western education system for privileging "activity of the body over the activity of the mind and soul" (127). He is against the idea of celebrating the Harvest Festival at school by his children as he finds it useless for Muslims to observe a Christian festival. Instead, he wishes the Islamic festival to be included in the school's calendar. Because of his preference for his root culture, he looks more like a Muslim and less like an Englishman.

Samad places value on his tradition, history, and culture as the factors contributing to his self and leading to roots. He likes to be recognized with his identity of Bengali Muslim. He defines himself in terms of one shared culture or what Hall calls "a sort of collective 'one true self'" (223). Hall, in his conceptualization of cultural identity, first views it as the reflection of "common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people,' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of references and meaning, beneath the shifting division and vicissitudes of our actual history" (223). Samad defines himself in relation to his root of origin and therefore has a strong objection against his friend Mackintosh who addresses him as a sultan as Samad finds the term 'sultan' geographically and historically inaccurate to describe him since he is not from Arab lands but from Bengal. As a devout Muslim, he reveres the Quran as the word of God and demonstrates his allegiance to Islam by clutching the holy book during times of crisis, such as a hurricane. Apart from religion, Samad views his ancestry as a defining element of his cultural roots. He always defines his self in relation to his great-grandfather Mangal Pande. He often (re)narrates the colonial history glorifying the bravery and contribution of his great-grandfather Mangal Pande. Hall notices the influence of the past upon the formation of identity. Samad's declaration of his position in the present because of Pande's contribution, "he is why the way we are" (226) captures Hall's notion of identity. If identity is the way in which we position ourselves towards the narratives of the past as advocated by Hall, Samad clearly sees his past and history as a defining factor in his identity as well.

Samad initially rejects the idea of assimilation into British culture. Berry regards assimilation as one of the acculturation strategies and states, "When individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, the assimilation strategy is used" (705). In this mode of acculturation, one adopts another's culture sacrificing their own culture. While talking about the children of Alsana's sister, Samad criticizes them for forgetting their culture and following British culture completely. He is troubled because they do not go to mosque and do not pray. Moreover, they speak strangely and dress strangely. They do not have respect for tradition. He finds the children corrupted under the influence of British culture. For him, the act of following British culture is just corruption, not assimilation.

However, Samad's identity as a Bengali Muslim is contested when he experiences intercultural contact. The experience of the acculturation process poses a threat to his cultural identity. Berry's definition of acculturation as a dual process of cultural and psychological change resulting from a contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members (698) that applies to Samad's situation. In this light of definition, the cultural and psychological changes that Samad undergoes are the product of his intercultural contact. Samad, the Bengali Muslim, happens to be the follower of

“Western pragmatism” (134). Smith begins the chapter entitled ‘Samad’ with the quotation of Norman Tebbit: “The Cricket Test- which sides do they cheer for? Are you still looking back to where you came from or where you are?” (123), which sums up Samad’s life in London; he is torn between Islamic values and British values.

David L. Sam identifies three issues: contact, reciprocal influence, and contact as the building blocks of acculturation process (14). Regarding contact, Sam asserts that it is a meeting between at least two cultural groups or individuals who come together in a continuous and firsthand manner. Samad’s ‘continuous and firsthand’ contact with the British gives him a new identity, that is the identity of an Englishman. In this process of cultural contact, as Sam writes, Samad identity changes. According to Berry, “At the individual level, acculturation involves changes in a person’s behavioral repertoire” (699). Samad, who previously believed, “Every bit of my blood comes from Allah. Every bit will return to him” (89) becomes “a masturbator, a bad husband, an indifferent father with all the morals of an Anglican” (141). Samad does not care about his duties and responsibilities as a Muslim. He becomes someone who has the morals of an Englishman.

It is true that the acculturation process makes Samad an Englishman, but acculturation turns out to be ‘reactive’ in his case. It means that he rejects the cultural influence of British society and once again returns to his own culture. The Social Science Research Council defines acculturation not only as the cultural change but also as a ‘reactive adaptation’: “acculturation may be a reactive adaptation of traditional modes of life” (974). The major event in the text reawakening Samad’s cultural identity is the discovery of his extramarital affair by his children. This incident shatters Samad emotionally filling him with a realization that he cannot teach his children the family culture as he himself has deviated from it. He does not want to see his children growing up as an Englishman but wishes them to follow the Islamic culture. Samad’s concern for his son reawakens his cultural identity.

In Adichie’s *Americanah*, the first-generation immigrant Ifemelu’s Nigerian identity is contested in American society, and she becomes what the title of the novel reads out, “*Americanah*”- someone who follows American culture and thus has been Americanized. The term ‘*Americanah*’ in that sense refers to Ifemelu’s transfiguration following her cultural encounter with the American society. In the process of adapting American ways of life, Ifemelu undergoes what Berry calls ‘acculturative stress’. According to Berry, “acculturative stress is a reaction by people in response to life events that are rooted in intercultural contact” (43). When people belonging to one cultural background come into contact with a different culture, they provide responses in the process of adjusting to a new culture. Ifemelu’s confusion with American language, food, socialization process, and relationship can be likened with acculturative stress. Acculturative stress entails negative affectivity such as bad moods, anxiety, and heightened levels of depression (Beiser et al. 736; Ward et al. 93). Ifemelu’s anxiety is the product of unemployment and financial insecurity. Despite her several attempts to get a job, Ifemelu becomes a failure. The anxiety caused by her economic crisis leads her to such depression that she accepts the ‘help to relax’ job of a tennis coach understanding the implication of sexuality behind the offer. This experience is so embarrassing for her that she begins to experience self-hatred and goes through depression.

Ifemelu deals with the acculturative stress along with her adaptation in American society. Following American language and hair style, she tries to assimilate in the American culture. Khaled Hosseini elaborates the concept of language and states that it is the “key into the front door of culture” (4). Ifemelu is successful in adopting the American accent after a careful watching of friends and newscasters. Apart from

language, hair also reflects Ifemelu's attempt to follow American culture. It is after having been rejected several times with her braided hair in the interviews, one of her friends suggests Ifemelu to lose the braids and straighten her hair. Considering her straight hair as 'new adventure,' Ifemelu applies creamy relaxer on her hair and is delighted when the hairdresser remarks: "Look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you've got the white-girl swing!" (203). This transformation highlights the lengths to which she goes to fit into the American society.

It is true that Ifemelu has to struggle with her identity in America and she first deals with this by following American culture, taking on an American accent and straightening her hair, seemingly giving in to a new identity as an American. But the assimilation process is problematized by her experience of racism in America. In this regard, she says: "I came from a country where race was not an issue. I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America" (290). She also comes to realize that the dominant white American society categorizes all blacks as one group based solely on phenotypical likeness. She finds America still enjoying the marvelous rhyme: "[I]f you're white, you're all right; if you're brown, stick around; if you're black, get back!" (184). She begins to understand what being black means in America: her blackness is not biological, but rather a socially constructed aspect that taints her identity with ugliness, exoticism, and difference.

The experience of racism in America turns Ifemelu towards her Nigerian cultural identity. She not only resolves to stop faking the American accent but also decides to stick to her braided hair. In fact, she uses the strategy of separation of acculturation in the later part of her life in America. Berry defines the separation strategy as a situation "when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others" (705). Ifemelu's preference of West African English to American accent implies her preference to her original culture. It is because of the love for own culture, she prefers braided hair to straight hair.

Despite her economic, social, and emotional successes, Ifemelu feels that she is unfortunately unrooted in America. She experiences fatigue, bleakness, and borderlessness. She is frequently hunted by piercing homesickness. She discovers that she is unhappy in America as America is never a root or a home. Because of her dissatisfaction in and alienation from a country that debases and violates African soul and identity, she decides to return to her country. Ifemelu's return to Africa symbolizes her return to Nigerian identity and highlights the significance of reclaiming African heritage and consciousness. To Ifemelu, "Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil" (6). In contrast to restlessness that she felt in America, Ifemelu feels peace in her reunion with her root and country. Finally, after arriving in Nigeria, she states that "she was at peace: to be, home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being" (475). It is after reaching Nigeria, Ifemelu experiences happiness and peace. A return to original culture makes her aware of her existence and being.

The Second-Generation Immigrants: Living in In-Betweenness

The second-generation immigrants, commonly known as the offspring of first-generation immigrants, are individuals born and raised in the country where their parents migrated. In *White Teeth*, Millat born and brought up in England, is the son of Samad and in *Americanah*, Dike brought up in America, is the son of Uju. Unlike their parents, who often maintain strong ties to their homeland and cultural heritage, second-generation immigrants lack such connections due to their upbringing in diverse cultural

environments. While the first-generation immigrants frequently return to their cultural identity, the second immigrant generations, disconnected from their cultural roots, often find themselves in a state of in-betweenness.

Millat, the son of Samad and Alsana in *White Teeth*, is born and brought up in London and is highly influenced by British culture. His identity as an Englishman is evident in terms of his love for popular culture and his manner of clothing. He loves Bruce Springsteen and Michael Jackson and gangster movies. With a desire to re-enact the gangster movies in his own life, he likes to be called “the BIGGEST and BADDEST, the DON, the BUSINESS, the DOG’S GENITALIA, a street boy, a leader of tribes” (218). Millat’s preference for multinational corporation’s clothing popular among the British youth reflects what Berry calls ‘assimilation acculturation strategy’ (705). In this mode of acculturation strategy, people disregard their culture and follow the culture of others. Millat rejects his heritage culture and becomes absorbed into the dominant society. Despite his Muslim background, Millat does not follow Islamic culture. He farts in mosque, chases blondes, and smells of tobacco (218). Millat does what the Quran has prohibited.

Millat’s identity as an Englishman due to his assimilation into British culture is problematized along with the experience of racial discrimination. He has a realization that he is always ‘a Paki’ in the eyes of British society no matter what he does. He is always an outsider and has no identity or future in England. In the process of acculturation, Millat chooses the option of separation acculturation strategy. Berry defines it as “When there is little possibility of interest in heritage cultural maintenance and little interest in having relation with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination) then marginalization is defined” (705). Millat’s reluctance to pursue assimilation has a direct link with the discrimination he experiences in British society. Regardless of his efforts, he is still seen as an outsider, leading him to join the Islamic fundamentalist group KEVIN. Despite this, Millat retains the western values, secretly loving gangster movies, smoking cannabis, and dating white women. Who is Millat then? An Englishman? A Muslim? Or none of them?

In fact, Millat has become a hybrid man. He is neither an Englishman nor a Muslim. In hybridity, the old identity does not disappear easily although the new cultural identity strongly influences it. Bhabha views hybridity as a type of a “Third Space,” an in-between stage. This in-between stage, in its most basic sense, is what is meant by the term liminality – immigrants live in between two cultures, and their identities are in the middle of a forming process (5). Millat at KEVIN lives in two cultures simultaneously: “he stood schizophrenic, one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden” (219). Millat hybridity is best reflected when Smith remarks: “Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali; he lived for the in between, he lived up to his middle name, Zulfikar, the clashing of two swords” (351). In this phase of liminality, he continues to smoke, drink, date white women, and admire gangster movies, while simultaneously adhering to his Islamic duties, praying five times a day without fail.

In *Americanah*, Dike, the cousin of Ifemelu and the son of Uju, is brought up in America. Dike’s adaptation of American culture is evident in terms of his language as he grows up with “seamless American accent” (105). Even his mother Uju talks to him in the American accent as suggested by her command in nasal sliding accent: “Dike, put it back” (pooh-reet-back) (103) at the grocery store. She prevents the use of Igbo language in communication with Dike considering “two languages will confuse him” (109). She tries her best to make him grow not as a Nigerian but as an American, talking to him in

the American accent and placing her son in the school where he is the only black child in the class.

Despite his attempt of assimilation into American culture, Dike becomes a failure due to the lack of ethnic community and the experience of racial discrimination. Dike's mother Uju has no time to look after the son due to the work-pressure to sustain in America and she leaves Dike under the care of a Hispanic babysitter. She cannot provide him an ethnic community with role models to teach him about his cultural heritage. The major reason behind the unsuccessful acculturation of Dike is the experience of racial discrimination in America. At school, he is regarded as aggressive only because he looks different because of his dark skin. Eventually unable to cope with the experience of racial discrimination, he undergoes depression and attempts suicide at the age of fifteen but fortunately, he does not succeed. After his suicidal attempt and rescue, Ifemelu invites him to come to Nigeria to stay with her for a while.

Dike's visit to Nigeria provides him an opportunity to understand his cultural heritage and identity. While driving in the street of Nigeria, he comes into a contact with his ethnic community for the first time in his life: "Oh my God, Coz, I've never seen so many black people in the same place" (420). This cry of happiness gives voice to his relief and fascination of finding a home ultimately, something he has been missing when he was growing up in America. In Nigeria, he is surrounded by people who share his skin-colour and speak native language. He also visits his father's old house. All these experiences help him to understand where he comes from and who he is. Despite his familiarity with Nigerian culture, he shares what Bhabha calls the space of liminality- an in-between state (5). He lives between American culture and Nigerian culture. Living in Nigeria among his own people, he eats both 'hamburgers,' a typical American food and 'jollof rice and fried plantain,' a typical African dish. His hybridity is reflected in his ability to speak Nigerian language, Igbo. "I wish I spoke Igbo" (424) wishes Dike in English.

The textual analysis of both the novels reveals the complicated connection between identity formation and acculturation among the first and second-generation immigrants. Samad's struggle in *White Teeth* reflects the tension between his Bengali Muslim heritage and the pressures of assimilating into British culture, which ultimately leads him to reaffirm his cultural roots. Ifemelu's journey in *Americanah* highlights the challenges of adapting to American culture, which ultimately drives her to reclaim her Nigerian identity. The experience of the second-generation immigrants, Millat and Dike, illustrate the complexities of living in between two cultures. Both the novels, through their narratives, reflect on the ongoing process of identity formation and acculturation that characterizes the immigrant experience across generations.

Conclusion

Both Smith's *White Teeth* and Adichie's *Americanah* offer insights into the immigrant experience in Britain and America, respectively. They explore how the first and second-generations navigate their identities amidst the pressures of acculturation and intercultural contact. Samad in *White Teeth* struggles to maintain his Bengali Muslim identity while being inexorably drawn into British culture, reflecting the tensions between cultural preservation and assimilation. His son, Millat, represents the state of in-betweenness, feeling alienated from both his inherited and adopted cultures. Similarly, in *Americanah*, Ifemelu's journey from Nigeria to America and back to Nigeria underscores the transformative impact of migration on personal identity. Her experience of racism in America leads her to reclaim her Nigerian heritage, highlighting the complexities of cultural identity in a diasporic context. Her nephew Dike becomes a failure in his attempt

of assimilation into American culture due to the lack of ethnic community and the experience of racial discrimination.

Both the novels underscore the generational differences in the immigrant experience. The first-generation immigrants, like Samad and Ifemelu, have a tangible connection to their cultural roots, which they frequently seek to preserve or return to. In contrast, the second-generation immigrants, represented by Millat and Dike, often experience a profound sense of in-betweenness and struggle with identity due to their upbringing in a different cultural setting. This generational divide illustrates the evolving nature of immigrant identities, shaped by ongoing negotiations between heritage and new cultural environments. In addition, both the novels emphasize the multifaceted nature of identity formation among immigrants, both the first and second-generation, capturing the ongoing and dynamic process of acculturation and the quest for identity.

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