

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  
University of Tlemcen



Faculty of Letters and Languages  
Department of English  
Section of English

**Exploring the Trauma of Immigration in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth***

Dissertation submitted to the department of English as partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master's degree in Literature and Civilisation

**Presented by**

Ms. Soumia HAMEL

**Supervised by**

Prof. Wassila MOURO

**Co-supervisor**

Dr Zeyneb YOUSFI

**Board of Examiners**

**Dr. Omar RAHMOUN**

**MCA**

**President**

**Prof. Wassila MOURO**

**Professor**

**Supervisor**

**Dr. Souad BERBAR**

**MCB**

**Examiner**

**2022 – 2023**

## DEDICATIONS

I dedicate my work to my beloved parents, Djamel Eddine and Hedaddji Saliha, whose unwavering love, guidance, and support have been the driving force behind my accomplishments. Without your sacrifices and endless encouragement, none of my success would have been possible. This thesis is a tribute to your profound influence on my journey.

My dear sisters, Assil Rihan, Asma, Khadidja, and Meriem, your constant belief in me has been a source of inspiration. Your unwavering support and understanding throughout this challenging endeavor have meant the world to me. This dedication is a testament to the unbreakable bond we share.

To my big brother, Mohamed, your wisdom, encouragement, and continuous belief in my abilities have been invaluable. Your guidance and unwavering presence have shaped me into the person I am today. This dedication is a reflection of our strong sibling connection.

I am deeply grateful to my friends and all those who have contributed to this research. Your support, encouragement, and engaging discussions have greatly enhanced my research journey. Your steadfast faith in my abilities has consistently motivated me to excel.

This dissertation stands as a token of appreciation for all those who have played a significant role in my academic and personal growth. I am forever grateful for the love, support, and contributions each of you has brought into my life.

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by expressing my sincerest gratitude to the Almighty God for the abundant blessings and guidance bestowed upon me throughout my research journey. Without His divine support, completing this research would not have been possible.

My deepest gratitude to my esteemed professor, supervisor, and role model, Professor Wassila Mouro. Your unwavering support, invaluable guidance, and constructive pieces of advice have played a pivotal role in shaping this dissertation. Your belief in my abilities and constant encouragement have fueled my determination to strive for excellence. I am forever indebted to you for instilling in me a passion for a diligent work. As the saying goes, "Those who have a good guide do not get lost in the jungle."

I also extend my appreciation to Dr. Omar Rahmoun, who not only contributed through his debates and enlightening lectures but also served as my esteemed teacher. Your profound knowledge, expertise, and passionate teaching style have greatly expanded my understanding of the subject matter. I am truly grateful for the invaluable lessons and guidance you have provided during our teacher-student relationship. Thank you for your support.

My heartfelt gratitude goes also to Dr. Souad Berbar, for being my esteemed teacher. Your impactful instruction, mentorship, and dedication to education have profoundly influenced my academic journey.

My heartfelt thanks to the entire English Department members, with special appreciation to the professors of the specialty Literature and Civilization. Your collective expertise and dedication to imparting knowledge have enriched my academic journey. I am grateful for the valuable insights, challenging discussions, and thought-provoking lessons that have shaped my intellectual growth.

To all those mentioned above and the countless others who have contributed in various ways, I offer my heartfelt thanks. Your support, guidance, and inspiration have played an invaluable role in shaping the outcome of this thesis.

Thank you all for being an integral part of this journey

## Table of Contents

<b>DEDICATIONS .....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>General Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: Historical and Theoretical Background.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	6
1.2 The Motives For Immigration.....	7
1.2.1 Political Unrest.....	8
1.2.2 Socio Economic.....	9
1.3 Adjustment and Maladjustment in the Host Country .....	13
1.3.1 The Myth of the West.....	14
1.3.2 Capturing the Challenges, and Complexities of Immigrant Life in the Host Country .....	19
1.3.3 The Crisis of Integration .....	25
1.4 Trauma of Immigration.....	27
1.4.1 Trauma Theory .....	29
1.4.2 The Trauma of Double Absence.....	31
1.5 Conclusion .....	33
<b>Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration.34</b>	
2.1 Introduction.....	35
2.2 A Brief Summary of the Novel .....	36
2.3 The Motives of Immigration in <i>White Teeth</i> .....	38

2.4	Navigating the Challenges of Immigrants in a Multicultural Society Explored in <i>White Teeth</i> .....	41
2.4.1	Crisis of Identity .....	43
2.4.2	Financial Issues .....	51
2.4.3	Confronting Prejudice, Racism, and Xenophobia.....	53
2.5	The Trauma of Immigration in <i>White Teeth</i> .....	57
2.6	The Character between Two Homes (the Double Absence) .....	62
2.6.1	The Double Absence for the First Generation .....	63
2.6.2	The Second Generations' Struggle with the Double Absence .....	68
2.7	Conclusion .....	74
	<b>General Conclusion .....</b>	<b>75</b>
	<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>78</b>

## Abstract

Human migration has been a constant feature throughout history, encompassing various forms such as immigration, emigration, and migration. However, the experiences of immigrants, particularly those from Third World countries, are marked by unique challenges and traumas. This dissertation aims at delving into the complexities of immigration, examining the causes and consequences of this phenomenon, and shedding light on the impact it has on individuals from Third World countries. Specifically, the research focuses on the integration of newcomers performing unskilled labor and how cultural differences and similarities with locals affect this process. By analyzing Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*, this thesis attempts to contribute to the existing body of works on the psychological states of characters, particularly in the context of their interpersonal relationships, which are laden with historical baggage and serve as the root of their struggles. Through a comprehensive analysis conducted in two chapters, this research seeks to uncover the impact of these relationships on the lives of even the most troubled personalities. Moreover, the dissertation addresses the broader social and political environment of England during the novel's setting, which was characterized by racism, sexism, and discrimination. By examining the experiences and trauma faced by Third World immigrants, this research aims to provide insights that contribute to a better understanding of the intricate issues surrounding immigration and develop strategies to support immigrants in their pursuit of a better life.

# **General Introduction**

Literature, as an art form, reflects the socio-cultural fabric of a particular period, movement, or society. Through its exploration of diverse themes and narratives, literature offers insights into the human condition, provoking thought and evoking emotions.

One compelling aspect of human existence is the phenomenon of migration—a decision made by individuals to leave their home countries in search of a better life elsewhere. For many individuals from Third World nations, this journey is fraught with fear, uncertainty, and significant risk. Crossing borders can be a grueling and dangerous endeavor, involving treacherous sea voyages or perilous treks through unforgiving landscapes. However, the challenges faced do not end upon arrival to the host country; they are merely the beginning.

Immigrants find themselves confronted with a multitude of obstacles, including language barriers, cultural differences, and the specter of discrimination. Adjusting to a new environment requires not only learning a new language but also navigating unfamiliar social norms and customs. The struggle to adapt and integrate into a foreign society can be psychologically and emotionally taxing, as individuals yearn for a sense of belonging while grappling with feelings of displacement and alienation.

Moreover, the migration experience often leaves deep psychological imprints on individuals. The traumas endured during the journey, such as the fear of persecution, separation from loved ones, or the harrowing experiences of forced displacement, can result in profound psychological distress. Conditions like anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can manifest as a direct consequence of the challenges faced during migration. Physical health issues also emerge as a pressing concern. Migrants often endure hardships such as malnutrition, dehydration, and exposure to extreme weather conditions, which can have detrimental effects on their well-being. Understanding the experiences and trauma endured by Third World immigrants is crucial in comprehending the complex issues surrounding migration and developing effective strategies to support them.



In this study, the focus is on the theme of immigration and its associated trauma. The chosen work for analysis is Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* (date of publication), which serves as a multifaceted exploration of the immigrant experience. *White Teeth* is a novel primarily about immigrants in Britain; dense with the hybridity of post-war London, the text uses multiple tones, textures, and voices to question the many tensions and conflicts that plague its characters. Smith's first novel tackles multiethnic, multiracial, and transnational issues; she likely feels close to these themes as the daughter of a white English father and a black Jamaican mother. The focus of this thesis is on how Smith's characters negotiate the psychological need of belonging. This negotiation is complicated in Smith's text by the characters' feelings of alienation that result from their position as immigrants or products of interracial marriages.

The motivation behind selecting this particular topic and theme lies in the profound impact of immigration on individuals and communities. By examining the portrayal of immigration trauma in literature, the aim is to shed light on the complexities, challenges, and transformative journeys that immigrants undertake.

Upon engaging with *White Teeth*, several observations emerged. The novel intricately weaves together the narratives of diverse characters, each grappling with their own immigrant experience. Through the exploration of cultural identity, intergenerational dynamics, and the legacy of colonialism, Smith presents a thought-provoking examination of the immigrant's search for belonging. Therefore, these observations trigger the following questions :

- How does Zadie Smith navigate the complexities of cultural identity in the context of immigration?
- What are the different forms of trauma experienced by the immigrant characters in *White Teeth*?
- How does the novel explore the intergenerational effects of immigration and the clash of cultural values?

This study employs a combination of literary analysis and theoretical frameworks to examine the theme of immigration and trauma in *White Teeth*. Drawing on concepts and theories from postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and migration studies, the aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the immigrant experience as portrayed in the novel.

The study will be divided into two main chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect of the theme. Chapter one will provide a theoretical foundation, exploring key concepts and theories related to immigration and trauma. Chapter two will analyze the practical aspect, delving into the portrayal of immigration trauma in *White Teeth* through close reading and textual analysis.

By following this structured approach, the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience and the trauma associated with it as portrayed in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. Through the analysis of this powerful literary work, this work seeks to shed light on the complexities of human migration and cultural identity.

**Chapter One:**  
**Historical and Theoretical**  
**Background**

### 1.1 Introduction

Human migration, encompassing various forms such as immigration, emigration, and migration, has been a recurring phenomenon throughout history. While these terms are often used interchangeably, they possess distinct meanings and implications. Immigration involves the movement of individuals into a new country or region with the intention of permanent settlement, driven by economic or social factors such as improved job prospects or family reunification. On the other hand, emigration refers to people leaving their home country or region to settle elsewhere permanently. Migration, a broader concept, encompasses both immigration and emigration, along with other forms of human movement like seasonal migration or temporary relocation.

In recent years, immigration has become a debated topic globally, with millions of people migrating from Third World countries to developed nations. Factors such as political instability, persecution, and economic hardship drive this phenomenon. Individuals often migrate to secure better employment, access educational opportunities, or seek safety from conflicts or wars. However, their transition into a new cultural setting can be challenging due to differences in core values, geographical barriers, and temporal distinctions. This dissertation recognizes the cultural disparities faced by immigrants and the implications for their integration into the host community.

The present chapter offers an in-depth exploration of the complex dynamics and challenges surrounding immigration. It delves into the motives for immigration, the process of adjustment and maladjustment in the host country, and the psychological impact of the immigration experience. Furthermore, it examines the concept of the "Myth of the West" and its influence on the expectations and realities faced by immigrants. Capturing the challenges and complexities of immigrant life in the host country, this chapter sheds light on the struggles and barriers encountered during the process of integration.

One significant aspect that this chapter addresses is the trauma of immigration and its psychological consequences. It explores the emotional toll experienced by immigrants as they navigate unfamiliar environments, cultural norms, and social structures. By

examining the psychological impact of immigration, this chapter aims to deepen our understanding of the unique challenges faced by individuals in their pursuit of a better life. Another crucial theme explored in this chapter is the concept of double absence. Immigrants often find themselves caught between two worlds—their country of origin and the host country—resulting in a profound sense of loss, dislocation, and identity crisis. The experience of double absence raises thought-provoking questions about cultural identity, belonging, and the search for a sense of home.

### **1.2 The Motives For Immigration**

History has witnessed the migration of human from one place to another for various reasons. However, the pursuit of new and better opportunities has always been a common factor. Pope Francis, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, who was part of his message for the 2013 World Day of Migrants and Refugee sat tests that:

Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more .<sup>1</sup>

People have been relocating to developed countries from the third world through legal and illegal ways. There exists a plethora of literary works and works of criticism which tackle the phenomenon of migration and seek to highlight the reasons that motivate people to leave their countries of origin and settle in foreign territories and strange lands.

Migration is driven by a combination of push and pull factors. Push factors refer to the circumstances or conditions that compel individuals to leave their place of origin, while pull factors attract them to a specific destination. The decision to migrate can be influenced by a range of factors, including the pursuit of better job opportunities, escaping from

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis ‘Migrants and Refugees: Towards a Better World’ (2014), complete speech available from [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

violent conflicts or persecution, environmental concerns, access to education, or the desire for family reunification.

Migration encompasses a broad spectrum of movements and is not limited to a single type of migration. It encompasses various forms such as labor migration, family reunification, refugee flows, and other migration categories. This complexity arises from the interplay between geopolitical factors, trade dynamics, and cultural exchanges. Migration presents opportunities for states, businesses, and communities to derive substantial benefits from the movement of people, shaping economies, societies, and cultural landscapes (IOM, 2018).

Political instability and persecution are driving forces behind immigration, often compelling individuals to leave their home countries. In certain instances, individuals are forced to flee due to the devastating impacts of war, conflict, or political oppression. Such circumstances instill fear for personal safety and the well-being of their families, leaving individuals with no alternative but to seek refuge in other nations. Additionally, political and social unrest can prompt individuals to make the choice to immigrate, further exemplifying the pivotal role of political factors in shaping migration dynamics.

### **1.2.1 Political Unrest**

The decision to immigrate may be influenced by political instability in the individual's country. Those who choose to emigrate abroad could run from various political issues in their home nations. The fact that most of the people who choose to immigrate live in regions where there is corruption and bad governance leads them to move to other regions in search of peace and democracy; they seek refuge. Warsan Shire (2000) states: "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark" (p.1).

In literature of migration, much is said about the socio-political causes of migration. One can take the case of the novel *Exit West* written by Mohsin Hamid, which tells about the harsh realities of war and violence. Hamid uses the main characters Saeed and Nadia to depict the circumstances that change individuals that push them to immigrate to the

West. Such a crisis may push the citizens of a given insecure country to attempt at all costs to reach the borders of any developed country looking for peace, justice, and security, “everyone migrates even if we stay in the same houses our whole lives because we can’t help it. We are all “migrants through time” (Hamid, 2017, p. 209).

The presence of war and conflict serves as a prominent socio-political factor compelling individuals to leave their place of origin. In such volatile environments, violence, destruction, and insecurity profoundly impact people's lives, prompting them to seek refuge elsewhere. Additionally, the oppression experienced due to one's ethnicity, religion, gender, race, or culture poses a significant risk to the quality of life, further increasing the likelihood of individuals seeking settlement in safer regions. Those fleeing conflict zones, human rights violations, and government persecution often fall under the category of asylum seekers, as they actively seek international protection and a more secure environment. Furthermore, individuals who are forcibly displaced due to external factors, such as war, are recognized as refugees, seeking sanctuary and stability beyond their home countries. Some people that choose to go abroad are leaving from war and dictatorship, they cannot come back home without risking their life, being jailed, or being tortured. In this situation, immigrants are forced to take the decision to save their life and their future (Kelley, 2021, p.50).

Political instability and persecution serve as compelling motives for immigration, with individuals compelled to leave their home countries in search of safety, security, and political freedom. Recognizing and addressing the root causes of political unrest is crucial in fostering a more just and stable global landscape, one that respects human rights and offers a viable alternative to those facing political upheaval in their countries of origin.

### **1.2.2 Socio Economic**

The motivating causes of immigration can differ from one individual to another. There have been many theories and analyses to explain migration in this globalizing world. According to Christian Dustmann and Yoram Weiss (2007), there are two main causes of

migration in the history of humanity: economic reasons and natural disasters or persecution (p.1-2)

Poverty is an aspect of the socio-economic causes of emigration from third-world countries. In fact, the current high-ranking phenomenon of migration from third-world countries to the West is mainly caused by the miserable economic conditions in developing countries. Immigration is a quick way to attain better living conditions. The decision to immigrate is often motivated by economic factors, specifically the aspiration to improve one's quality of life and ensure adequate sustenance for oneself and dependents. These individuals attempt to reach the European continent by any means necessary, regardless of their education level. They view developed countries as an escape from misery, poverty, and famine. This is why Bernard Kouchner, the co-founder of Doctors Without Borders and former French Minister of Home Affairs under the government of President Nicolas Sarkozy, firmly stated during a lecture on immigration in the European continent at the Onassis Stegi on Thursday, February 28, 2013.

Because the people there are not coming to us - to Europe for the pleasure of the country, they have to because of the poverty, the misery. They are fleeing out of misery. Out of misery, because there is no future – no immediate future – for their families. They have to feed their families’’ debate on ‘Europe should shut the door to immigration’<sup>2</sup> .

Economic causes have inevitably pushed many migrants to leave their respective countries, in order to escape the circle of unemployment and lack of well-paying jobs that most of them suffered from; according to Richard Layard (2005), this is one of the major causes of illegal immigration. “People care greatly about their relative income, and they would be willing to accept a significant fall in living standards if they could move up compared with other people.” (p.43)

---

<sup>2</sup> Cué, E. (n.d.). Interview with Bernard Kouchner flying over Africa. Retrieved from <https://www.alejandradeargos.com/index.php/en/all-articles/21-guests-with-art/448-flying-over-africa-with-bernard-kouchner>



Many individuals and families choose to leave their home countries in search of better employment opportunities, higher wages, and improved working conditions. For some, this may mean seeking employment in a different sector. Economic motives for immigration are often driven by a desire to improve one's standard of living and provide for themselves and their families. According to Castles and Miller (2003), scholars from various disciplines, such as demography, economics, and geography, posit that individual decisions to migrate are based on the assumption of access to perfect information and market conditions. These individuals engage in a comparative analysis of the potential costs and benefits associated with migration, weighing factors such as potential income gains, job prospects, living standards, and overall economic well-being. (p.22) This means that people move and seek higher incomes and good living conditions.

Immigration motivated by socio-economic factors is a common phenomenon among individuals and families seeking various opportunities and improvements in their lives. This form of immigration encompasses several key reasons, including family reunification, educational and professional advancement, and the pursuit of an enhanced quality of life. (Quist et al. 2015, p.40-41).

Education and professional development also motivate individuals to immigrate. Many aspiring students and professionals seek opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills, and qualifications that may not be readily available or accessible in their home countries. Pursuing higher education or specialized training in a specific field abroad can offer a distinct advantage in terms of academic excellence, research opportunities, industry connections, and career prospects. Immigration for educational and professional purposes often involves a long-term commitment to personal growth and advancement. (LU,2006, p.11-12)

Furthermore, the quest for a better quality of life drives many individuals to immigrate. This encompasses various aspects, such as access to superior healthcare services, robust social support systems, improved living standards, and enriched cultural amenities. Immigrants may seek environments that offer enhanced opportunities for

personal fulfillment, social mobility, and overall well-being. The aspiration for a higher quality of life often relates to factors such as economic stability, safety, cultural diversity, and the availability of recreational and leisure activities. “An economic migrant is someone who makes a voluntary choice to leave his/her home country and seeks work elsewhere to improve her/his quality of life. He/she has legal right to travel and work” (IOM, 2004, p21).

It is important to recognize that socio-economic immigration is influenced by multiple factors, including the socio-political environment, economic conditions, and immigration policies of receiving countries. Immigrants may encounter challenges related to cultural adjustment, language barriers, employment integration, and social inclusion. The success of socio-economic immigration often relies on comprehensive support systems, inclusive policies, and equitable opportunities that enable immigrants to fully participate and contribute to their host societies.

In the case of marital status; especially for women, there are many marital moves of women from third-world countries to developed countries; it is known as matrimonial migration. It implies family reunification. Family reunification refers to the situation where a family member joins another member of the family who is already settled and working in another country in a legal and authorized situation<sup>3</sup>. Family reunification serves as a compelling incentive for many immigrants. The prospect of joining loved ones who are already residing in another country can be a significant driving force. The desire to be reunited with family members, including spouses, parents, children, or siblings, often plays a crucial role in the decision to immigrate. The opportunity to build a life together and provide mutual support and care forms the foundation for such migration. Family Reunification can be either a legal process or an illegal one. In the novel, *The Belly of the Atlantic*, the Ghanaian writer Fatou Diom highlights this fact when she said:

---

<sup>3</sup> Ohchr Migration Papers, Family Reunifications, 2006,  
<https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/migration/taskforce/docs/familyreunification.pdf>

Immigrants had told me some of their scams: some, who lived in France with a wife and kids. had no qualms about taking a second wife when back home on a holiday and smuggling her into the country on their first's wife's passport (2003, p.144).

The character of Tomomi in Kiyomi Sato's novel provides an illustrative example of voluntary immigration driven by personal and familial motivations. Unlike individuals who are compelled to immigrate due to external factors or cultural burdens, Tomomi chose to embark on this journey out of a sense of duty and commitment to her marital relationship.

### **1.3 Adjustment and Maladjustment in the Host Country**

Adjustment is a fundamental process that immigrants undergo when moving to a new country. It entails adapting to a different environment, culture, and set of circumstances. The Collins English Dictionary (2005) defines adjustment as the ability to successfully and satisfactorily adapt to the demands of one's new environment. On the other hand, maladjustment refers to the inability to respond effectively to the challenges and expectations of the new host country. When individuals migrate to a new country, they embark on a transformative journey that involves a series of stages in adapting to their new surroundings. This process is shaped by the unfamiliarity of the environment and the need to navigate cultural differences. Immigrants often confront the need to reassess their previously held expectations and adjust their attitudes towards the new country based on their own experiences rather than relying solely on others' perspectives.

The adjustment or maladjustment experienced by immigrants in their host nations is closely tied to the alignment of their preconceived notions with the realities they encounter. Immigrants may arrive with lofty dreams and beliefs about their new life, only to find that these expectations do not align with the actual circumstances they face upon arrival. The stark contrast between the imagined ideal and the challenging reality can lead to a sense of disappointment and disorientation. Immigrants often confront the dismantling of their previously held beliefs and notions as they grapple with the realities of their host country. This process can be emotionally and psychologically challenging, as they come

face to face with the limitations and complexities of their new environment. However, it is through this process of reconciling expectations with reality that immigrants have the opportunity to develop a more realistic understanding of their host country and engage in meaningful adaptation. Successful adjustment requires a willingness to embrace the new cultural context, develop new social networks, and acquire the necessary skills to navigate the challenges of daily life. It involves learning the language, understanding cultural norms, and adapting to different societal expectations. Immigrants who are able to navigate these challenges and establish a sense of belonging and purpose in their host country are more likely to experience positive adjustment outcomes (Mesidor, 2016, p.264).

Conversely, maladjustment can arise when individuals struggle to adapt to their new environment. This may be due to a lack of support systems, cultural misunderstandings, or an inability to meet the demands and expectations of their new surroundings. Maladjustment can lead to feelings of isolation, frustration, and a sense of not belonging, impacting an individual's overall well-being and ability to thrive in their new home (Ali & Larsson, 2018; Hippe & Jakubowski, 2018, p.5).

Understanding the complexities of adjustment and maladjustment is crucial in providing support and resources to immigrants during their transition. By recognizing the challenges immigrants face and addressing their unique needs, host countries can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment that facilitates successful adjustment. This involves offering language and cultural integration programs, access to employment opportunities, and social support networks. Ultimately, promoting positive adjustment experiences for immigrants benefits both individuals and society as a whole.

### **1.3.1 The Myth of the West**

The myth of the West is the pre-existing fallacies, the wrong beliefs, or pre-made ideas that most people of Third World countries have on Europe and America. They picture them as economically advanced countries and that their people have a high standard of living, with an abundance of job opportunities under good working conditions and well-rewarding careers. Some people from third-world countries blindly believe that life is of a better

quality in the Northern continent. Whether they choose to immigrate or stay in their country of origin, they consider Europe and developed countries as the Promised Land, the land where dreams come true. This, however, is a myth that has been perpetuated and rendered a reality desperately wanted by those who believe in a better life at the other side of the sea. For many people in Third World countries, the allure of the West is deeply ingrained. They perceive it as a realm of prosperity and limitless possibilities, where economic success and social mobility are readily available. This myth is often fueled by stories and accounts from those who have successfully migrated and achieved relative prosperity. It becomes a beacon of hope for those who feel trapped in poverty or limited by the constraints of their home countries. (Mahbubani,2008, para1-para13)

Kiyo's story, as depicted in Japanese-American Family's Quest for the American Dream, serves as a poignant example of these misconceptions and unrealistic expectations. Shinji, driven by the belief in the myth, plans to journey to America in search of opportunities to provide for his family and improve their circumstances. The dialogue captured in the book illustrates the prevailing notion that even the streets in America are paved with gold, symbolizing the perceived abundance of wealth and prosperity.

“Around the gambling table there is much talk.

“If you get to America,” they say, “even streets are paved in gold.”

“Eh! Hontodesuka?” Is that so?

“Honto, honto.” True, true.

“Amerika made ittarakanewanambo demo aru.” If you get to America there is plenty of money. There are not enough workers for the fields of California, they say” (Kiyo Sato, 2007, p.8)

The reality of life in Europe and America is far more nuanced and complex. While these regions may offer certain advantages and opportunities, they are not without challenges and hardships. The depiction of the West as a utopia oversimplifies the complexities of immigration, cultural adaptation, and the realities of economic and social disparities that exist within these countries.

As myths have proven to be everlasting, one of the common beliefs about the Northern continent is that it is a land of endless opportunities, immigrants and migrants took this myth to heart and followed the drive to go westward. Some people from Third-World countries blindly believe that life is better at that part of the world.

The novel *The Jungle* (1906) by Upton Sinclair has been widely celebrated for its presentation of the immigrants' plight in America. Though the novel's events take place during the early 20th century, it remains, however, a solid reference for any argument about desperate immigration. Jurgis Rudkus, the central protagonist in Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle*, embodies the aspirations and struggles of countless immigrants who migrated to the United States in pursuit of the fabled American Dream. Hailing from Lithuania, Jurgis, and his extended family embark on a journey filled with hope and expectation, lured by the enticing promises of a better life awaiting them in the new land. His story unveils the complex dynamics of the American Dream, which had been marketed and sold to immigrants as a gateway to prosperity, freedom, and social mobility. Jurgis, like many others, believes that America is a land of boundless opportunities where hard work and perseverance will lead to financial success. This portrayal of the American Dream as a pathway to higher wages resonates deeply with the aspirations of immigrants who sought to escape poverty and create a better future for themselves and their families (Dilawar, 2019, para.9).

This fictional work highlights the failures of the capitalist system to provide equitable opportunities to all of those immigrants who have come to these shores looking for a better life. Through the perspective of Grandmother Majauszkiene, a long-time resident, Sinclair reveals the cycle of exploitation and degradation experienced by successive waves of immigrant groups. Each new group of immigrants is brought in by the packers, the employers, to replace and undermine the previous workers, resulting in lower wages and deteriorating working conditions. "Who there was poorer and more miserable than the Slovaks, Grandmother Majauszkiene had no idea," writes Sinclair, "but the packers would find them, never fear" (Dilawar, 2019, para8).

Jurgis Rudkus epitomizes numerous immigrants who, prior to their departure from their homelands, are susceptible to the influence of misinformation disseminated through movies or books. Purposefully, Western filmmakers present alluring or utopian depictions that cultivate perceptions of opulence, affluence, and perpetual bliss within European societies. These portrayals often succeed in convincing individuals hailing from even the most secluded villages to embrace such ideals. For them, relocating to developed nations represents the sole means of realizing their aspirations. This assertion is supported by Bemand Kouchner, who affirms during the Debate on "Europe should shut the door to immigration?" held at the Onassis Cultural Centre in Greece on 28/02/2013:

These immigrants watch TV and believe that our countries are close to paradise. This is not true but they believe so. The poor people are always attracted by the rich even when the rich are becoming unhappy miserable and unemployed (Colou, 2017, p.27).

There are many misconceptions that are widely spread through daily conversations between immigrants about developed countries. There is actually a widely held belief of the West. These thoughts are strengthened for instance through books and films they watch. They see America and Europe only from the perspectives of those films and books.

The myths surrounding the Western frontier have been a prominent theme in literature, novels, and films, particularly those set during the era of Western settlement. Numerous books and movies have been dedicated to depicting the West, offering varied perspectives on this subject. It is noteworthy that over time, literary works and films have undergone revisions and adaptations, often presenting a more idealized and positive portrayal of the West.

Media played a significant role in perpetuating the idealized representation of the West. However, it is crucial to examine the underlying origins of this misleading perception, which can be traced back to the colonial heritage. The colonization of third-world countries by Europeans from the 18th to the mid-19th century, as well as imperialism and globalization, have all had a profound impact on people from third-world countries

and their relationships with the West. The colonial history and its inherent aspects have influenced the mindsets of postcolonial individuals, distorting their perception of Europe. Through the lens of the civilizing mission, Western missionaries instilled in them a love and desire for the West, further contributing to the idealization (Reece, 2011, p.4).

The legacy of colonial history and its inherent aspects have influenced the mindsets of some postcolonial people by corrupting their perception of Europe. In their research titled “A Literary Representation of Educational Transformation and its Effect on South-Asia and Africa during British Colonization”, Shaheen Khan, Rasib Mahmood, and Kainat Zafar (2018) highlight that Europeans were successful in instilling a sense of inferiority among the people of developing countries during the colonial era. This feeling of inferiority was perpetuated through the colonial systems and the influence of Christian missionaries, and it continues to be nurtured by Western education. The primary objective of this educational approach has consistently been the indoctrination of Western customs, cultural norms, and religious values (p.222). Therefore, youth from the third-world countries unsurprisingly perceive the West today as a promised land since these nations are still being educated in the Western languages. They all share the experience of Westernization in the name of a civilizing mission that oriented perceptions toward the West as a mythical, powerful, and desired land. This influence explains why the migrants are choosing the West as the better place for settling and living.

Consequently, after having realized that all previously grounded thoughts in their minds about the West were merely misconceptions, immigrants will face different challenges for settlement and adaptation. Compared to those who have remained in their country of origin and who speculate all the time about the wonders of developed countries, these immigrants who have had the opportunity to discover the truth of the West itself with its luxury, shortcomings, and prejudices to name but a few must surrender to the new reality.



Unfortunately, almost the majority of immigrants fall victim to the Myth of the West. The ensuing section examines the obstacles that confront immigrants once they confront the stark and unforeseen realities of life in Western societies.

### **1.3.2 Capturing the Challenges, and Complexities of Immigrant Life in the Host Country**

After having highlighted the misconceptions that the immigrants had on the West, it is overriding importance to highlight as well the misconceptions Westerners themselves have about these immigrants too; and the new challenges that await them in the host countries.

These immigrants will undoubtedly be confronted with economic, political, and social challenges and other problems such as prejudices, stereotypes, racism, mistrust, and the inability to intellectually produce something beneficial not only for themselves but also for their host countries.

Upon preparing for their journey to a developed country, immigrants are filled with unyielding optimism regarding their prospects for success. Upon crossing the threshold into their desired destination, a sense of elation dissipates their worries. They indulge in fantasies of amassing wealth and garnering esteemed regard from their homeland. However, they often fail to consider the potential strain arising from language barriers that impede effective communication with native inhabitants. This oversight may detrimentally affect their ability to make well-informed decisions and hinder their overall immigrant experience. In certain nations, immigrants may encounter substandard healthcare due to their limited proficiency in the native language.

As an example, of where the immigrant might face the problem with language and communication, the novel *The Circuit* (1997) by Francisco Jimenez is a memoir about Jimenez's life and experience as an immigrant. At the beginning of the novel, Jimenez was a child when he and his family went to America from Mexico in the 1940s as undocumented immigrants. For his first time at school, he was nervous and because his brother was older than him and started school, Jimenez decided to ask him how things will

be in school and how his brother is handling it, this is the dialogue between Jimenez and his brother Roberto:

“I remember being hit on the wrists with a twelve-inch ruler because I did not follow directions in class,” Roberto answered in a mildly angry tone when I asked him about his first year of school. “But how could I?” he continued. “The teacher gave them in English.”

“So what did you do?” I asked, rubbing my wrists.

“I always guessed what the teacher wanted me to do. And when she did not use the ruler on me, I knew I had guessed right,” he responded. “Some of the kids made fun of me when I tried to say something in English and got it wrong,” he went on. “I had to repeat first grade.” (Jimenez,1997, p.14)

Additionally, language proficiency can also affect immigrants' employment prospects and opportunities. A study was made by Abdelkerim A Abdelkerim and Marty Grace (2011) that shed light on the issue of unemployment within Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) migrant communities, where individuals face difficulties due to their limited ability to communicate in the language of the host country. In the Australian context, for instance, it has been demonstrated that inadequate English proficiency poses a significant barrier to employment within Newly Emerging African Communities (NEAC) as well as among NESB immigrants more broadly (p.3). This finding aligns with earlier research conducted by Jones and McAllister (1991), who revealed that individuals categorized as NESB with limited English proficiency, indicated by "not well" or "not at all" English-speaking ability, experienced up to three times reduction in their chances of securing employment, primarily due to their insufficient English language skills.

Furthermore, despite the requirement of language proficiency, some skilled migrants still encounter challenges in securing employment. A study conducted by Monash University (2008) revealed that nearly half of Australia's skilled migrants from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) face difficulty in finding a job in their respective

fields of expertise (Abdelkerim and Grace, 2011, p.11). Disturbingly, both anecdotal and empirical evidence from newly emerging African communities (NEAC) indicate that even highly qualified individuals, including doctors, struggle with prolonged periods of unemployment, despite possessing excellent English language skills (Abdelkerim and Grace, 2011, p. 6). These findings highlight a significant disparity between the qualifications and skills possessed by skilled migrants from NESB and their ability to secure employment in their chosen fields. The mismatch between their qualifications and the job opportunities available not only perpetuates high unemployment rates among skilled members of NEAC but also undermines the potential contributions they could make to the host society. This issue calls for a comprehensive examination of the systemic barriers and biases that hinder the full utilization of the skills and expertise of skilled migrants from NESB, necessitating the development of targeted policies and support mechanisms to address these challenges and foster more inclusive and equitable employment outcomes (Abdelkerim and Grace, 2011, p.12).

There are also instances of insecure employment, which immigrants are more likely to engage in compared to native workers. Studies examining the reconstruction work carried out by immigrants in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina indicate that a significant number of both documented and undocumented foreign-born workers were exposed to hazardous substances and working conditions (Fletcher et al., 2006). In an article authored by Madeline Zavodny and Pia M. Orrenius (2009), it is stated that foreign-born individuals have a higher propensity to work in precarious occupations than native-born individuals. For instance, immigrants are disproportionately employed in the agriculture and construction sectors, which are known for their relatively high levels of injuries and fatalities. Furthermore, within these sectors, immigrants may undertake riskier jobs or perform tasks that entail a higher degree of risk compared to native workers (p.535).

Upon arriving in developed countries, immigrants, regardless of their educational background, often find themselves compelled to undertake precarious employment with meager wages in order to secure their survival. This forms a significant portion of the

challenges faced by immigrants in their host countries. Exploitation by Western individuals, who capitalize on the immigrants' vulnerable position, becomes evident as they are subjected to long hours of labor in exchange for inadequate compensation. Certain immigrants, particularly those lacking proper documentation, are particularly susceptible to exploitation. Gradually, these immigrants come to accept the harsh reality of their host country, recognizing that such work serves as a means to alleviate their precarious financial circumstances.

In addition to the challenges of employment and language barriers, immigrants also encounter housing issues, which can render them particularly vulnerable. Immigrants must consider multiple criteria, including safety, location, and affordability when seeking housing.

The housing problems faced by immigrants extend beyond the issue of homeownership rates. Many recently settled immigrants struggle to afford rental payments, exacerbating the housing cost burden, particularly for undocumented immigrants compared to their legal counterparts.

Some immigrants reside in labor camps, often operated by farmers or their employers. Many of these camps operate without proper licensing and lack proper sanitation facilities, as explained by Thomas A. Arcury, and Sara A. Quandt (2013) in the article entitled *Challenges for Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers*. The challenges faced by Panchito's family in the novel *The Circuit* further illustrate the difficulties immigrants encounter. One such challenge is their need to sleep in a garage, as depicted in the first chapter when Panchito's mother points to an old garage near the stables and expresses relief at having a place to stay (Jiménez, 1997, p.2).

These examples shed light on the precarious housing situations faced by immigrants, particularly those with limited financial resources or undocumented status. Access to safe and affordable housing is essential for the well-being and stability of immigrant communities. Efforts should be made to address these housing disparities through comprehensive policies that prioritize affordable housing initiatives, enforce

housing regulations, and provide support services to assist immigrants in securing suitable housing options.

The arrival of many immigrants is often marked by difficulties that significantly impact their lives. Despite their aspirations to embrace new lives and cultures in their destination countries, immigrants encounter various challenges, including cultural differences. It is widely recognized that immigrants carry their cultural backgrounds and traditions with them to their new homes, and sometimes these differences hinder successful integration into the social and work life of the host country. Unfortunately, little to no preparation is typically provided to address the specific challenges posed by cultural differences, leaving immigrants to navigate these complexities on their own. These challenges manifest in various aspects of immigrants' lives, ranging from everyday interactions with others to their experiences within educational settings.

In his book *Primitive Culture*, Tylor (1871) defines culture as a comprehensive entity that encompasses knowledge, beliefs, laws, arts, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by individuals as members of a society. This definition emphasizes the multifaceted nature of culture and highlights its influence on individuals' behaviour and perspectives (p.1).

The cultural challenges faced by immigrants require attention and support from both host societies and immigrants themselves. Efforts should be made to promote intercultural understanding, facilitate cultural exchange, and provide resources for immigrants to navigate and adapt to the new cultural landscape. By acknowledging and addressing these cultural differences, societies can foster a more inclusive and harmonious environment for all members, enabling immigrants to more effectively integrate into their new communities.

The presence of cultural differences between immigrants and indigenous populations, including Aboriginals, gives rise to notable challenges in terms of fostering mutual understanding and facilitating the rapid assimilation of each other's cultures. Nevertheless, the concept of multiculturalism has emerged as a response to the

consequences of globalization, aiming to address and accommodate these differences within societies. According to the Collins English Dictionary, multiculturalism refers to a state in which all cultural or racial groups within a society are accorded equal rights, opportunities, and recognition, without being ignored or deemed insignificant. Migration has a profound impact on individuals and cultures, manifesting in various ways. It facilitates the spread and exchange of cultural ideas and artifacts, enabling their dissemination from one cultural context to another. Moreover, migration gives rise to the development of new cultural forms and practices, often leading to the phenomenon of hybridity. hybridity, provided by the Oxford English Dictionary, is that it is a noun used to describe “a thing made by combining two different elements; a mixture”. Hybrid can also be used as an adjective to describe something of “mixed character”. Cultural hybridity involves the exchange and innovation of ideas and artifacts between cultures, as facilitated by migration and globalization. This dynamic process leads to the creation of new cultural expressions, as elements from different cultures intersect and interweave. It signifies a departure from fixed and static notions of culture, emphasizing the fluid and transformative nature of cultural identities and practices (Hastye et al, 2022, p.361).

Third-world countries have often been underestimated, particularly in terms of their historical and cultural significance. Eurocentric thinkers and writers like Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad have historically denigrated Africa's history and culture, depriving the continent and its people of their rightful place in history, civilization, and even logic (Wahome, 2019, para.3).

The decision to undertake international migration for the purpose of relocation introduces a range of opportunities and challenges. One of the key challenges faced by migrants is the experience of culture shock, which can be defined as a psychological and emotional feeling of confusion and anxiety that individuals may experience when living in or visiting another country (Oxford definition). This phenomenon is often triggered by the initial encounters and unfamiliarity migrants face upon their arrival in the host community. Culture shock stems from the disparities between the culture of the migrants' home country

and the culture of the host community. These disparities can manifest in differences in language, religion, values, and lifestyle choices, among other aspects. Migrants may find it difficult to adapt and navigate these new cultural dynamics, leading to a sense of confusion, frustration, and even a sense of isolation (Furnham, 2019, p.1833)

The process of assimilation further complicates the challenges faced by both the hosts and the migrants. Assimilation refers to the integration of migrants into the host community, where they adopt and internalize the customs, language, and social norms of the new culture. However, this process can present obstacles for both hosts and migrants. Host communities may encounter difficulties in comprehending and accepting the cultural background and practices of the migrants. This can lead to resistance in accommodating and integrating migrants, particularly in the case of refugees who may face additional stigmatization and discrimination (Oucho, 2019, p.11).

It is crucial to approach the topic of culture shock and assimilation with sensitivity and understanding. Recognizing the profound impact of cultural differences and the challenges they pose is essential for fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for migrants. By promoting intercultural understanding, providing language and cultural integration programs, and combating stereotypes and prejudices, both hosts and migrants can work together to facilitate smoother processes of adaptation and integration (Oucho, 2019, p.6).

### **1.3.3 The Crisis of Integration**

After the arrival of immigrants in a host country, they enter a phase of adaptation that varies for each individual depending on their circumstances. The duration of this adaptation process determines the speed at which integration with the society is achieved. Some migrants are able to adjust more quickly than others through social interaction and engagement in economic activities (Corrie, 2021, para.1).

However, not all migrants receive a warm welcome from the host communities or are afforded the same privileges as local residents. In such cases, migrants may face

isolation from the local community and exclusion from economic opportunities, making the process of integrating with the new community more challenging. It is widely recognized that countries attracting migrants from different regions tend to value multiculturalism, although not all cultures are equally accepted. Some host communities are less receptive towards refugees, as they fear the potential depletion of scarce and valuable resources, such as land (Oucho, 2019, p.5).

According to Ballarino and Panichella (2015), there are two distinct processes of integration that have been identified: assimilation and segmented assimilation. Assimilation refers to the outcome of a process in which the culture and language of the host group become similar to those of the existing groups in the host country. It is influenced by social ties (Facchini, Patacchini and Steinhardt, 2015, p.3). On the other hand, segmented assimilation is a more controversial result of the process, in which immigrants adapt to certain standards or groups within the host society while maintaining differences with others (Stepick, 2010, p.2). Segmented assimilation is deeply rooted in immigrants' self-perception and identity, as they selectively integrate with the groups and standards that align with their own identification (Ballarino and Panichella, 2015, p.349).

When individuals move either permanently or temporarily, they often maintain close ties with their place of origin, including connections with people, places, culture, and practices, while also attempting to develop a sense of attachment to their new place of residence (Ehrkamp, 2005). However, the process of integration can be overwhelming for migrants, and achieving a fair balance of social cohesion between the migrant and host community may prove challenging.

Schiller et al. (1992) define transnationalism as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement"(p.1). Additionally, the literature has emphasized the dichotomy between transnational and local levels, suggesting that transnational ties may hinder assimilation and adaptation to the new environment (Patricia Ehrkamp, 2005, p.346). However, other authors have advocated for the concept of hybridity between the home and host society, or



between ethnicity and assimilation, highlighting how immigrants' transnational practices create new spaces of belonging that allow them to engage with the new society (Ehrkamp, 2005, p.347).

Immigrants may experience feelings of isolation, estrangement, and alienation, which can be attributed to the challenges of establishing strong social connections in a new environment (Hurtado-de-Mendoza et al., 2014, p.73–82). These challenges can have serious implications, leading to negative emotions, depression, and other health issues (Lackey, 2008, p.228–237).

### **1.4 Trauma of Immigration**

Trauma is a concept that has gained widespread recognition and is commonly used in everyday language. However, it is important to delve deeper into the profound implications of trauma, as highlighted by renowned psychiatrist Bessel Van der Kolk. Van der Kolk astutely observes that trauma goes beyond being a mere event from the past; it leaves an indelible mark on an individual's mind, brain, and body (Van der Kolk, 2014). This perspective underscores the complex and lasting effects that traumatic experiences can have on individuals. When individuals undergo trauma, they often encounter a multitude of symptoms and responses that permeate various aspects of their lives. Anxiety becomes a constant companion, as individuals grapple with persistent feelings of apprehension and fear. The weight of depression may settle upon them, enveloping their emotions in a shroud of melancholy and despondency. Intrusive flashbacks transport them back to the traumatic event, disrupting their present reality and reawakening the intense emotions associated with the experience (Guzman, 2019, para.3).

Moreover, trauma can hinder the formation of meaningful relationships, as individuals struggle with trust issues and face difficulties in establishing and maintaining connections with others. These reactions and symptoms are not mere superficial responses; they stem from the deep-seated imprint that trauma leaves on individuals' psychological and physiological well-being. The mind, with its intricate neural networks and cognitive processes, is profoundly affected by trauma. It alters the way individuals perceive

themselves, others, and the world around them, shaping their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. The brain, too, bears the scars of trauma, with studies highlighting changes in neurobiology and neurochemistry that underlie the emotional and cognitive disturbances observed in trauma survivors. Furthermore, trauma reverberates through the body, manifesting in physical symptoms and disruptions to the body's regulatory systems (Van der Kolk, 2014, p.81).

Typical trauma checklists are designed to assess whether individuals have experienced or witnessed events that posed a threat to life. These include accidents, natural disasters, combat or war situations, sexual assault, childhood abuse or neglect, and incidents involving severe injury or death (Kessler et al., 1995; Copeland et al., 2007). Symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) involve re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoiding thoughts, feelings, or reminders associated with the event, and heightened arousal characterized by difficulties in sleep, irritability, and hyper-vigilance (American Psychiatry Association [APA], 2000). Trauma leaves a profound and lasting impact on individuals, affecting their psychological, physiological, and relational well-being. It is important to recognize the extensive reach of trauma and its multifaceted effects. By employing checklists to assess traumatic experiences and identifying symptoms of PTSD, professionals can better understand and address the complex challenges faced by trauma survivors.

In the context of immigration, trauma assumes a particularly acute nature, as individuals confront substantial challenges in adapting to new cultural and societal settings, navigating unfamiliar legal systems, and grappling with the trauma stemming from displacement and loss. Immigrants' experiences of trauma are diverse, influenced by their prior environments, current circumstances, and a myriad of situational, cultural, and psychological factors. A study by Cleary et al. (2017) emphasizes that immigrant children and parents encounter various forms of trauma throughout the stages of pre-migration, migration, and post-migration. However, the repetition of trauma in the context of immigration does not necessarily entail the reenactment of the actual migration experience.

Instead, this repetitive trauma manifests at the level of narrative, where individuals strive to establish connections with their origins and construct their identities amidst new cultural contexts and expectations. It is this representational dimension that serves as the focal point of the novel's exploration of migration and identity.

The significance of trauma within identity politics cannot be understated. Trauma poses a fundamental threat to identity, as it disrupts the continuity of one's personal narrative, severing the connections between the remembered past, lived present, and anticipated future (Brison, 2003, p.41). In the context of immigration, trauma can fragment an individual's sense of self, hindering the cohesive construction of their identity within the complexities of their new socio-cultural environment. Farha Abbasi, M.D., an Assistant Professor in the Psychiatry Department at Michigan State University, aptly captures the challenges faced by immigrants worldwide. She said “Imagine being alone in a new country — unable to speak the language, surrounded by an unfamiliar culture, and forced to leave your entire life behind. This is the reality for many immigrants around the world” (Abbasi, 2017, para2).

In summary, within the realm of immigration, trauma assumes heightened significance due to the myriad challenges immigrants face and the trauma associated with their migration experiences. Immigrant individuals encounter diverse forms of trauma influenced by various factors. It is essential to recognize that the repetition of trauma in the immigration narrative occurs at the representational level, impacting individuals' construction of identity as they negotiate their past and present. Trauma's impact on identity is profound, as it disrupts the narrative coherence of one's life story, posing a threat to the continuity and integration of self in the face of immigration-related challenges (Brison, 2003, p.41).

### **1.4.1 Trauma Theory**

The foundation of the contemporary understanding of trauma can be traced back to the pioneering work of Sigmund Freud over a century ago. Freud's psychoanalytic approach to trauma continues to exert a significant influence on trauma theory in the present day.

Essentially, Freud defines trauma as an overpowering event that overwhelms an individual to such an extent that its memory is effectively blocked and unable to be processed at the time of its occurrence (Freud cited in Kurtz, 2018).

In the realm of literature, trauma theory explores how traumatic experiences are represented and narrativized within literary works. This theoretical framework posits that trauma disrupts an individual's capacity to comprehend and make sense of their experiences, leading to feelings of helplessness, disorientation, and fragmentation. In the realm of literary narratives, trauma is often conveyed through fragmented, non-linear, and disjointed storytelling techniques, aiming to capture the disorienting effects of traumatic experiences.

Cathy Caruth's seminal work, "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History" (1996), stands as a cornerstone in trauma theory. Caruth argues that trauma narratives divulge the manners in which traumatic experiences are remembered, processed, and re-experienced by individuals. She contends that trauma narratives "challenge the limits of representation" and "unsettle the foundations of memory and understanding" (Caruth, 1996, p.3). Caruth's research draws upon the key principles of contemporary clinical trauma specialists such as Van der Kolk and Herman, who claim that trauma is ineffable and possesses an amnesic dimension (Van der Kolk, 2014, p.81). This implies that trauma victims may suffer from memory loss regarding the horrific incident, and even if they do retain memories, they may struggle to articulate them coherently.

Within the domain of literature, trauma theory has been employed to analyze the ways in which trauma is depicted and explored in fictional works. Some scholars contend that literature holds the capacity to assist individuals in processing and comprehending their own traumas by offering a means of identification with characters who have undergone similar experiences.

Trauma theory in literature furnishes a framework for comprehending how traumatic experiences are represented and narrated within literary works. It underscores the distinctive challenges and opportunities presented by trauma narratives for both readers

and scholars and sheds light on the profound impact of trauma on narrative structures and storytelling techniques.

### **1.4.2 The Trauma of Double Absence**

The concept of Double Absence, pioneered by the Algerian-French immigration sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad, represents a significant departure from conventional research on migration. Sayad's influential work in the field of immigration studies emphasizes the need to acknowledge the entirety of the migratory experience and challenges the ethnocentric perspective prevalent in immigration studies. By recognizing migration as both an immigration from the home society and an emigration from the host society, Sayad highlights the ambivalent nature of the migratory process, which in turn contributes to the suffering and trauma experienced by migrants (Veikou et al, 2015, p.119).

Sayad's concept underscores the dual dimensions of the immigrant experience. On the one hand, immigrants are absent from their society of origin and increasingly detached from their cultural roots. On the other hand, they remain outsiders in the host society, often excluded from full participation in civil society. This duality intensifies the sense of displacement and generates psychological distress among immigrants, Emmanuelle Saada (2000) writes:

On the one hand, the immigrant is always an emigrant - absent from the society of origin, and increasingly distant from its culture. On the other hand, the immigrant remains an outsider in the host society prevented from participating in civil society (p.33).

The concept of double absence challenges the traditional perspective that solely focuses on immigrant populations within the context of the host society. By emphasizing the significance of understanding the conditions of origin for emigrants, Sayad argues against a partial and ethnocentric view of the phenomenon. He highlights the importance of considering the immigrant's entire journey, rather than solely focusing on their arrival in

the host country, to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. He states that “any study which neglects the conditions of origin of emigrants is to give only a partial and ethnocentric view of the phenomenon as if his (the migrant's) existence began at the moment he arrived in France [or any host society]” (Sayad, 1977, p 56).

Within the immigrant’s experience, trauma manifests in complex and multifaceted ways. It encompasses not only the direct challenges and hardships faced by immigrants but also the psychological impact of straddling two worlds and reconciling conflicting identities. Immigrants often grapple with cultural dissonance as they navigate between their heritage and the pressures of assimilation in the host country. Moreover, the trauma experienced by immigrants can be perpetuated by social attitudes, discrimination, and xenophobia. The prejudice and marginalization faced by immigrants exacerbate feelings of alienation and reinforce a sense of not belonging; intensifying the psychological distress they endure.

The concept of double absence sheds light on the profound implications of the immigrant experience and its associated trauma. It calls for a comprehensive understanding of the migratory process and the complex interplay between the individual and social factors that shape the psychological well-being of immigrants.

Furthermore, the trauma experienced by immigrants is not solely confined to their individual struggles. It is deeply intertwined with broader structural and systemic factors that contribute to their marginalization and vulnerability. Socioeconomic disparities, limited access to resources and opportunities, and discriminatory policies all contribute to the perpetuation of trauma within immigrant communities.

Literature and art have emerged as powerful tools for exploring and conveying the trauma of immigrants. Through storytelling and creative expression, literature offers a means for individuals to articulate their experiences, validate their emotions, and foster empathy and understanding among readers. Trauma narratives in literature provide a platform for immigrants to reclaim their agency and challenge dominant narratives, while also offering opportunities for broader societal reflection and dialogue.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

This chapter attempted at shedding light on the diverse motives for immigration and the unique experiences that each immigrant undergoes, which are influenced by their backgrounds and expectations. Recognizing and addressing the trauma associated with immigration is crucial for the overall well-being and successful integration of immigrants into their host societies. To achieve this, policies and support systems should be established to provide adequate resources for mental health services, cultural sensitivity training, and opportunities for social and economic empowerment. It is through a comprehensive understanding of the trauma experienced by immigrants that we can strive towards creating more inclusive and supportive environments for all individuals, irrespective of their migration status

**Chapter Two:**  
**Navigating the Perils: The**  
**Challenges and Trauma of**  
**Immigration**



### 2.1 Introduction

The power of language in literature is evident in the works of prominent authors throughout history. It is a potent force that possesses the potential to create vivid and lasting impressions in the minds of readers, showcasing its capacity to evoke complex emotions and convey intricate ideas. In this regard, literature serves as a testament to the profound influence of language and the enduring impact that well-crafted literary works can have on society. During her Nobel prize acceptance speech in 1993, esteemed writer Toni Morrison eloquently expressed, "We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives" (Santos, 2019, para.8). This poignant quote suggests that while mortality is an unavoidable aspect of the human condition, the manner in which we utilize language and engage in communication with others imparts significance to our existence. Morrison firmly believed that language serves as a formidable tool capable of generating meaning and fostering connections among individuals. Consequently, words possess the remarkable ability to yield masterpieces that transcend time, enduring for generations to come. An example of the transformative power of words in literature can be observed in Zadie Smith's acclaimed novel, *White Teeth*.

Zadie Smith is a British author, who has garnered acclaim for her significant contributions to contemporary literature. She was born in London in 1975 to a Jamaican mother and an English father, Smith's writings exhibit a remarkable awareness, incisive wit, and a profound commitment to exploring intricate topics of race, identity, and the concept of belonging. Remarkably, at the tender age of 24, she published her debut novel, *White Teeth*. Within this literary work, the author adeptly constructs a setting that reflects the tumultuous and disordered nature of Western society. *White Teeth* engages with themes centered around immigration, multiculturalism, and social transformation, shedding light on the challenges inherent in the convergence of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds within a shared space.

In this second chapter of the dissertation, a succinct overview of the novel *White Teeth* is presented, encompassing a summary of its plot and characters. Furthermore, an

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

exploration of the motives behind immigration for the various characters is undertaken, followed by an examination of the challenges they encounter, both within the first and second generations. The repercussions of these challenges are investigated, particularly the resulting traumas that prompt the characters to grapple with a sense of duality as they navigate between two countries, ultimately experiencing a profound sense of double absence. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the novel's thematic elements pertaining to immigration and its effects on the characters' identities and lived experiences.

### 2.2 A Brief Summary of the Novel

Spanning multiple decades, from the 1970s to the 1990s, *White Teeth* delves into the lives of three families residing in London, namely the Joneses, the Iqbals, and the Chalfens originating from distinct cultural backgrounds. The narrative commences with the story of Archie Jones, a divorced man in his forties who attends the End-of-the-World party after a failed suicide attempt. There, he meets Clara, a young black woman with a unique smile due to her missing front teeth. Instantly smitten, Archie enters into a marriage with Clara, a Jamaican woman with an enigmatic past, resulting in the birth of their daughter, Irie.

Archie's best friend, Samad Iqbal, originally from Bangladesh and a devout Muslim, is introduced. He is married to Alsana, and they have twin sons named Millat and Magid. The narrative includes a chapter about their friendship during World War II when Samad coerced Archie into shooting an unarmed Nazi scientist. At a certain point in the novel, Samad decides to send Magid to Bangladesh without Alsana's consent, concerned that both his sons are losing touch with their Muslim heritage and becoming too influenced by English culture. This decision strains Samad's relationship with Alsana. Several years pass, during which Samad engages in an affair, Millat grows into a handsome but troubled teenager, and Irie becomes a despondent and confused adolescent. Irie develops feelings for Millat, but he does not reciprocate. The two are caught smoking weed, leading the school's head to order them to attend the Chalfen family, a respectable white English family, in an attempt to provide them with a more stable environment.

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

The Chalfens consist of Mr. Marcus Chalfen, a renowned scientist researching cancer using mice, and Mrs. Joyce Chalfen, a radio advice host. Their son Joshua becomes infatuated with Irie, who begins assisting Mr. Chalfen with his research. Meanwhile, Millat joins an Islamic fundamentalist group. Both Irie's parents and Millat's parents disapprove of their children spending time with the Chalfens but are powerless to prevent it.

Eventually, Magid returns to England, appearing calm but distant and failing to embrace his Muslim identity. Samad is deeply disappointed and rejects him. Magid finds solace with the Chalfens, joining their research project. Joshua, feeling neglected and rejected by Irie, moves in with the Iqbal family and becomes involved in an animal rights movement, protesting against his father's research on mice. Irie, seeking solace, moves in with her grandmother, who attempts to convert her to Seventh-day Adventism.

The climax occurs when all the different groups the children are involved with—the Islamic fundamentalists, Seventh-day Adventists, and animal rights activists—plan to disrupt Mr. Chalfen's Future Mouse conference, mainly driven by personal reasons. On the day of the conference, Mr. Chalfen introduces his idol, who turns out to be the Nazi scientist Archie, supposed to have killed during World War II. Samad realizes that Archie did not shoot the scientist, leading to a revelation that their friendship is built on lies. Meanwhile, Millat, intoxicated and armed, attempts to harm the scientists. Archie bravely shields them, taking a bullet but surviving the incident. The novel offers a view of modern-day London, exploring the lives of the Jones, Iqbal, and Chalfen families who represent the diverse cultural and ethnic fabric of the city.

Religion emerges as a central theme in the novel, delving into the rich tapestry of beliefs, cultures, ethnicities, and national identities. Spanning generations, the narrative delves into the clash of religious perspectives, personal convictions, and the exploration of individual and collective identities rooted in heritage and upbringing. The author expertly employs a blend of religious references, infusing the story with wit, sarcasm, and irony to navigate the complexities of these themes.

### 2.3 The Motives of Immigration in *White Teeth*

The characters in *White Teeth* predominantly consist of immigrants from various countries, including Jamaica and Bangladesh, who have settled in England. These characters have diverse motivations for their immigration, influenced by their individual circumstances and backgrounds. The narrative revolves around two families, one Jamaican and one Bengali, as they establish their lives in London. Each family has distinct reasons for their migration, representing the diverse factors that drive people to leave their homeland and pursue new opportunities abroad. John Clement Ball notes that *White Teeth* stands out among recent black British novels as it strives to depict the experiences of multiple generations and origins (2004, p.236). This section explores the characters' diasporic experiences and their histories of travel.

Samad Miah Iqbal, a central character in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*, immigrates to England from Bangladesh as part of a post-war labor recruiting drive aimed at addressing labor shortages in Britain. Samad, who served in the British Army during WWII, was given the choice to return to Bangladesh or stay in the UK following the war. “What am I going to do, after this war is over, this war that is already over – What am I going to do? Go back to Bengal? Or Delhi, who would have such an Englishman there? To England? Who would have such an Indian?” (Smith, 2000, p.112). It is the persistent question for Samad, a Muslim immigrant in the British land.

Motivated by the desire for a better life and greater opportunities, Samad chooses to remain in England, seeking to escape the poverty he experienced in Bangladesh. His decision mirrors the aspirations of many immigrants who leave their home countries in pursuit of economic stability and a brighter future for themselves and their families. However, Samad's immigration journey also highlights the challenges of assimilating into British culture while preserving his own traditions and values. Samad grapples with reconciling traditional Muslim values with the more liberal and secular values prevalent in the British society, resulting in feelings of cultural alienation and exclusion. Samad's immigration experience in *White Teeth* reflects the complex and multifaceted reasons

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

people move, including economic opportunities, the pursuit of a better life, and the challenges of cultural assimilation and preservation.

Alsana, the wife of Samad Miah Iqbal, embarks on her own immigration journey from Bangladesh to England. Like Samad, Alsana's decision to leave her home country and settle in England is driven by a complex interplay of motivations, reflecting the multifaceted nature of migration experiences. Alsana, a Muslim woman from Bangladesh, who relocated to England after marrying Samad as part of an arranged marriage agreement “Why did you go all the way to Bengal for a wife” (Smith, 2000, p.199). The decision to immigrate is not only influenced by personal aspirations but also shaped by the limited opportunities available in their home country. Alsana views immigration as a chance to break free from the constraints and restricted opportunities she experienced in Bangladesh. Alsana's motivations for immigrating to England are twofold: to seek better opportunities for her family and to escape the dire circumstances faced by many in Bangladesh. The quote, "I am crying with misery for those poor families and out of relief for my own children! Their father ignores them and bullies them, yes, but at least they will not die on the streets like rats" (Smith, 2000, p.198), encapsulates her mixed emotions of empathy for those left behind and the relief she feels for her children's safety and well-being in their new country.

By portraying Alsana's immigration experience, *White Teeth* sheds light on the intricate motivations that compel individuals to migrate. It highlights the desire for better opportunities, the pursuit of a safer and more secure future, and the yearning to escape oppressive circumstances. Alsana's journey reflects the resilience and determination of individuals who are willing to uproot their lives and navigate the challenges of cultural adjustment in pursuit of a better life.

Magid, the son of Samad and Alsana, undergoes a significant journey of cultural education and self-discovery. At a young age, Magid is sent back to Bangladesh by his father, Samad, in an effort to provide him with a traditional Muslim education and preserve their cultural heritage. This decision reflects Samad's belief in the importance of

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

maintaining their roots and ensuring Magid's solid cultural foundation. Samad's decision to send Magid to Bangladesh is portrayed in the quote, "It was simply a matter of choosing the child. For the first week it was going to be Magid, definitely Magid. Magid had the brains, Magid would settle down quicker, learn the language quicker..." (Smith, 2000, p.195). Samad's intention is to give Magid the opportunity to learn the language, customs, and traditions of their homeland, with the hope that he will become a custodian of their cultural heritage. Magid's time in Bangladesh becomes a formative period in his life, shaping his understanding of his family's cultural background and strengthening his connection to their heritage. The traditional Muslim education he receives provides him with a solid foundation and a deep understanding of their customs and practices. However, Magid's eventual return to England as a well-educated and accomplished young man marks a turning point in his journey. His return showcases his personal aspirations and longing to reconnect with his family and cultural origins. He sees himself as a bridge between the two cultures, endeavoring to assist his family in reconciling their British and Bangladeshi identities. Magid's experiences shed light on the complexities and nuances of cultural education and the ways in which individuals grapple with their cultural roots while embracing the realities of their current lives.

Clara Bowden, born in England, is the daughter of Jamaican immigrants. Her parents migrated to England from Jamaica in the 1950s as part of the Windrush generation. "Darcus Bowden, Clara's father ...Darcus had come over to England fourteen years...he come to England and earn enough money to enable Clara and Hortense to come over, join him and settle down" (Smith, 2000, p.30). The Windrush generation encompasses immigrants who arrived in Britain from the Caribbean between 1948 and the late 1960s, in response to the labor shortage following World War II. They were invited by the British government to help rebuild the country and were initially hailed as British subjects. Clara's parents, like many other Caribbean immigrants, came to the UK in search of better financial opportunities and a better life for their children. However, they faced significant discrimination and racism in Britain, which is explored in the novel through Clara's

experiences. Clara's experience of immigration in *White Teeth* reflects the broader historical and social context of the Windrush generation (Deniela, 2019, p.7).

Clara Bowden, the daughter of Jamaican immigrants, embodies the experiences of the Windrush generation. Her parents, Darcus and Hortense, migrated from Jamaica to England in the 1950s, joining the wave of Caribbean immigrants known as the Windrush generation. They sought better economic opportunities and a brighter future for their family, responding to the post-World War II labor shortage in Britain.

The characters in *White Teeth* have complex and varied motivations for immigration, reflecting the social, economic, and political realities of their respective backgrounds and histories.

### **2.4 Navigating the Challenges of Immigrants in a Multicultural Society Explored in *White Teeth***

This section of the research explores the issue of multiculturalism and the challenges faced by immigrants living in foreign lands, which significantly contribute to the multicultural nature of their adopted countries. Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* serves as an insightful exploration of multiculturalism within the contemporary setting of London. The novel provides insights into the profound effects of multiculturalism on individual lives and the broader community. Through the development of characters, significant events, and narrative techniques employed by Zadie Smith. Simon Hattenstone describes *White Teeth* in *The Guardian* in December 11, 2000 as:

... a book about modern London, a city in which %40 of children are born to at least one black parent, a city in which the terms black and white becomes less and less relevant as we gradually meld into different shades of brown (para.11)

Through vivid narrative portrayals, the book effectively depicts post-World War II England and highlights the city's remarkable cultural diversity. By following the Iqbal, Jones, and



## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

Bowden families across three generations, Smith adeptly unravels the complexities of navigating diverse societies with distinct cultural identities.

Zadie Smith explores the immigrant experiences and the complexities of assimilation in a multicultural community. Through her depiction of characters from diverse backgrounds, she offers readers a window into the challenges and dynamics of navigating cultural identity in a postmodern world. As Matthew Walker Paproth suggests, Smith's portrayal of immigrant characters colliding with each other in the search for meaning reflects the struggles and uncertainties that arise in a rapidly changing and diverse society (Walters, 2008, p.9). The characters in the novel grapple with questions of identity, belonging, and purpose, mirroring the complexities of living in a postmodern world where traditional boundaries and cultural norms are constantly challenged.

One notable aspect of the immigrant experience depicted in *White Teeth* is the unique response of the immigrant children, such as Magid, Millat, and Irie. Initially, they appear indifferent to the boundaries of cultural identity and embrace a global culture, viewing themselves as citizens of the world. This perspective reflects the generational shift and evolving attitudes towards cultural identity in multicultural societies. Within the narrative, Smith adeptly explores the various hurdles faced by immigrants attempting to navigate the complexities of multiculturalism. These challenges extend beyond cultural identity and encompass language barriers, prejudice, racism, and the struggle for assimilation and integration into a new society. The novel provides a poignant examination of the immense pressure placed on immigrants to conform to societal norms while simultaneously grappling with the preservation of their own cultural practices.

After the Second World War, the British government actively encouraged immigration from Commonwealth countries as a means of rebuilding the nation. Consequently, there was a significant influx of immigrants from colonies such as the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent. Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* employs the term "Neutral" to depict the transformation of Britain from a predominantly white society to a multicultural one. However, despite this shift, the issue of identity persists for immigrants



who have left their histories behind and arrived in a purportedly "Neutral" space where individuals strive to forge new histories while grappling with the weight of the past. Smith argues that attempting to define who is considered "British" and who is not is an arbitrary and futile exercise, given the chaotic nature of the contemporary world and the ever-evolving nature of identity. This notion is evident in Alsana's reaction to Samad:

Alsana said, revealing her English, "it's easier to go back and forth and find the right Hoover bag than it is to find someone with pure, pure, universal faith. Do you think someone is British? Are you really? It's a fairy tale!" (Smith, 2000, p.236).

However, *White Teeth* explores various aspects of London, but the recurring and prominent theme is the depiction of London as a multicultural, diverse society with a significant immigrant population.

### 2.4.1 Crisis of Identity

*White Teeth* delves into the profound impact of multiculturalism on immigrants' sense of belonging as they strive to strike a delicate balance between preserving their heritage and embracing the new culture. The characters undergo significant transformations in their identities and perceptions of the self while facing the emotional tensions and traumas inherent in navigating multiculturalism.

Zadie Smith adeptly portrays the ongoing internal struggle experienced by immigrants as they strive to establish their identities in a new cultural context. These individuals often find themselves torn between honoring their past and embracing the possibilities of their future. The weight of social expectations and the desire for a sense of belonging can create profound internal tension, leading individuals to feel compelled to conform or suppress aspects of their authentic selves.

The novel contains the historical roots of British immigrant identity and describes them in detail, as noted by T. Beukema (2008), "*White Teeth* is, at its core, a novel about identity, and the way that identity is shaped and constructed by cultural and historical

factors” (p. 1). Through the characters Joneses, Iqbals, and Chalfens, Smith explores the complexities of identity that arise from living between different cultures and the struggles that come with being seen as 'the other' in a society dominated by a particular culture. It becomes evident that Smith's exploration of identity in *White Teeth* extends beyond the individual level and encompasses the broader social dynamics of cultural assimilation and acceptance. The characters' experiences and interactions within the novel reflect the intricate web of social expectations, cultural clashes, and the desire to preserve one's heritage while adapting to the dominant culture.

### 2.4.1.1 The First Generation

*White Teeth* delves into the profound impact of multiculturalism on immigrants' sense of belonging as they strive to strike a delicate balance between preserving their heritage and embracing the new culture. The characters undergo significant transformations in their identities and perceptions of the self while facing the emotional tensions and traumas inherent in navigating multiculturalism.

In the novel, the characters grapple with the preservation of their identity and consistently feel threatened throughout the narrative. Zadie Smith skillfully explores the various individual reactions to these threats. One example is Samad, a Bangladeshi Muslim who immigrated to England after serving in the British Indian Army during World War II. Samad wrestles with a complex identity crisis, torn between his traditional Muslim values and his desire to assimilate into British culture. His war experience further complicates his struggle, leading him to question his faith and his place in the world. Despite fighting alongside his friend Archie for England, Samad still confronts the dilemma that haunts every immigrant: ‘Which side am I on?’ (Paola, 2021, para.1). During the war, Samad felt more loyal to England, a country that was not his own and where he was never fully accepted. The novelist vividly captures Samad's internal turmoil, depicting his conflicting loyalties; “A vein on Samad's forehead is struggling violently to get rid of his skin. He wants to protect a country that is not his and avenge the murder of men who do not recognize him on the civilian streets” (Smith, 2000, p. 95). These words aptly illustrate the

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

dilemma immigrants face from the moment they arrive in a foreign country. Zadie Smith accurately refers to England as a 'Blank Space' for immigrants, as this term exclusively applies to them and not to the dominant ethnicity.

Furthermore, Samad wrestles with feelings of unworthiness as a father and husband, as he tries to reconcile his desire to uphold cultural traditions with the realities of life in a new country. He deeply regrets his decision to come to England, leaving behind his home. Samad's frustration is evident as he exclaims,

I should never have come here, that's where every problem has come from. Never should have brought my sons here, so far from God. Willesden Green! Calling cards in sweetshop windows, Judy Blume in the school, condom on the pavement, Harvest Festival, teacher-temptresses! (Smith, 2000, p. 137).

His struggle with identity is also apparent in his interactions with other characters, particularly his sons. Samad is determined to instill his cultural and religious values in his children, but he recognizes the challenges they face in navigating their identity as second-generation immigrants.

Samad's fear of losing his cultural identity and religion in England is highlighted when his wife, Alsana, tells him, "I restrain myself. I live. I let live." In response, he expresses, "It is not a matter of letting others live. It is a matter of protecting one's religion from abuse" (Smith, 2000, p. 235). Another instance where Samad grapples with the oppression of his religion and culture is during a parent's meeting at school. He raises the question of why there are fewer Muslim festivals included in the school curriculum compared to pagan festivals. Samad argues that the inclusion of more Muslim festivals would ensure equality and address the perceived denial of cultural rights for Muslim immigrants in England. His advocacy for greater recognition of Muslim festivals reflects his belief in the importance of preserving his cultural and religious heritage. In the school attended by Magid, Millat, and Irie, the Harvest Festival is included. However, Samad questions this inclusion during a meeting with Mrs. Owens, the school principal. He points

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

out that while the school claims to respect every religion and culture by including festivals of minor communities, he perceives the oppression of Muslim minority culture because only one Muslim festival is mentioned in the school's list.

In his query, Samad states, "That is precisely what I want to know. What is all this about the Harvest Festival? What is it? Why is it? And why must my children celebrate it?" (Smith, 2000, p. 129). The school, represented by Mrs. Owens, the principal, attempts to convey that they respect every religion and culture by including festivals of minor communities. However, Samad challenges this notion, highlighting the oppression faced by Muslim minority cultures due to the limited representation of Muslim festivals. By advocating for more Muslim festivals, he emphasizes the importance of equality and emphasizes the belief that Muslim immigrants are denied proper recognition in England.

Zadie Smith captures the irony and complexity of immigrant fears related to issues of identity, assimilation, and the preservation of their cultural heritage. The narrator vividly illustrates this through the character of Alsana Iqbal, who experiences vivid nightmares depicting imagined scenarios of intermarriage between individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds,

... it makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, peanuts, compared to what the immigrant fears - dissolution, disappearance. Even the unflappable Alsana Iqbal would regularly wake up in a puddle of her own sweat after a night visited by visions of Millat (genetically BB; where B stands for Bengaliness) marrying someone called Sarah (aa, where a stands for Aryan), resulting in a child called Michael (Ba), who in turn marries somebody called Lucy (aa), leaving Alsana with a legacy of unrecognizable great grandchildren (Aaaaaaa!), their Bengaliness thoroughly diluted, genotype hidden by phenotype" (Smith, 2000, p. 327).

The passage begins by contrasting the fears of nationalists, who are concerned about threats such as infection, penetration, and miscegenation, with the fears of immigrants, which the

narrator describes as "small fry" or insignificant in comparison. The nationalists' fears stem from a fear of cultural contamination or the mixing of different racial or ethnic groups. However, the narrator suggests that these fears are minimal compared to what immigrants themselves fear: dissolution and disappearance.

### 2.4.1.2 The Second Generation

In the novel *White Teeth*, the characters grapple with the task of establishing their individual identities amidst a backdrop of cultural diversity. The second-generation immigrants in the novel face the task of establishing their own identities, while simultaneously negotiating the cultural heritage inherited from their parents. As Fernández points out, the second-generation characters are not simply trying to fit into a pre-existing culture but rather seeking to carve out their own space by drawing from the culture they have been raised in and, to some extent, appropriating or rejecting elements of their parents' culture. This leads to conflicts and tensions between the first and second generations, highlighting the complexities of intergenerational dynamics and the struggle to define one's own sense of self (2009, p.145).

The novel delves into themes of race, ethnicity, and religion, all of which significantly influence the characters' sense of identity. These factors shape their experiences and interactions with others, adding layers of complexity to their quest for self-discovery. The characters grapple with questions of belonging, cultural assimilation, and the impact of societal expectations on their individual identities. The second-generation immigrants in *White Teeth* often experience a heightened sense of chaos and confusion compared to their parents. While the older generation faces their own challenges as immigrants in a foreign land, the second generation must navigate the complexities of straddling multiple cultures and identities. They find themselves caught between their parents' cultural heritage and the society in which they are growing up, often feeling like they do not fully belong to either.

According to Smith's portrayal of second-generation migrants, they are completely distinct from Western societies in terms of how they are brought up, live, think, etc. Even

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

though they spent the majority of their lives in London, several of the characters perceive themselves as outsiders in an unfamiliar world. Some other characters seek affiliation with important organizations in order to create their identities and rise in society. At a particular point in the story, Millat Iqbal finds himself in need of help, but Samad proves to be a failed father figure for him. Initially, as a teenager, Millat adopts pop culture and adopts a style of dressing and speaking that is not his own but rather an attempt to blend in with English society,

Millat was like youth remembered in the nostalgic eyeglass of old age, beauty parodying itself: broken Roman nose, tall, thin; lightly veined, smoothly muscled; chocolate eyes with a reflective green sheen like moonlight bouncing off a dark sea; irresistible smile, big, white teeth (Smith, 2000, p.269).

Millat is popular in his own hometown (Willesden) and those surrounding it. He fits into all kinds of different groups, including the "Raggastani crowd," the "cockney wide-boys," the "black kids," and the "Asian kids" (Smith, 2000, p.269). The problem is that Millat feels as though he has to please everyone, and that he must be someone different for each group in order to fit in with their way of life.

Samad is concerned about this complete assimilation into British culture. However, Alsana calms him down, saying, "Let the boy go, he is second generation – he was born here – naturally, he will do things differently" (Smith, 2000, p.240). At a certain point, Millat realizes that he does not belong to Western culture despite being born in London. He will never be perceived as English due to his distinct appearance. In response, Millat joins the Islamist organization KEVIN, which the author suggests represents the younger immigrant generation's more intense reactions compared to their older counterparts when it comes to matters of identity. The second generation seeks guidance from their parents in discovering their true identities, but the older generation is preoccupied with their own issues. As Beukema observes, *White Teeth* ultimately suggests that cultural identity is not

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

fixed or absolute, but rather a fluid and ever-changing construct that is shaped by a multitude of factors" (Beukema, 2008, p.3).

The second generation immigrants in *White Teeth* find themselves at a crossroads, grappling with the cultural duality between their native heritage and the culture of their new home. They face the challenge of navigating between two distinct cultural identities, often feeling torn between their roots and the influences of the society they were born or raised in. This internal conflict shapes their experiences and perceptions of belonging, as they seek to reconcile their ancestral traditions with the realities of their multicultural surroundings. This phenomenon, often referred to as "dual identity," engenders a range of challenges as individuals endeavor to reconcile and harmonize multiple cultural influences within their lives.

Magid's struggle to reconcile his immigrant background with his British upbringing is a complex process that requires a comprehensive understanding. Several factors contribute to Magid's inclination towards embracing British identity, even though he was sent to live in Bangladesh at the age of ten. Firstly, Magid experiences conflicting expectations from his immigrant parents and the British society in which he grows up, resulting in a sense of displacement and ambiguity. The clash between the cultural values instilled by his parents and the social norms he encounters creates a challenging environment for his identity formation. Additionally, the influence of education and social perceptions further shapes Magid's identity and affects his navigation of the multicultural landscape.

An example that highlights the tensions within Magid's identity is evident when Joyce angrily tells Alsana, "You and your husband have involved Magid in something so contrary to our culture, to our beliefs, that we barely remember him." (Smith, 2000, p.441-442). As a mother, Alsana deeply feels the impact of this conflict on her children. Overall, Magid's struggle to find his true identity is influenced by various factors, including conflicting expectations, social norms, and the contrasting cultural values of his immigrant background and British upbringing.

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

Irie, a main character in the novel, represents the challenges faced by second-generation immigrant children. She grapples with the complexities of her identity despite being born and raised in the multicultural city of London. Notably, Irie's physical appearance aligns with that of a Black Jamaican girl, further complicating her sense of self. Irie's primary struggle arises from her limited knowledge about her mother's past, which contributes to her perception of a lack of roots and absence of role models. As depicted in the novel, when Irie asks her mother about their past, her mother's angry responses: "For other individuals every single f\*\*\*ing day is not this huge battle between who they are and who they should be, what they were and what they will be" (Smith, 2000, p. 515).

Initially, she endeavors to fully assimilate into English society, influenced by her place of birth and her half-English heritage. Believing that she should not regard herself as the 'Other' in London, she perceives herself as belonging to English society (Smith, 2000, p.351). Fascinated by Western beauty standards, she aspires to transform her Jamaican body to conform to English ideal "unwilling to settle for genetic fate; waiting instead for her transformation from Jamaican hourglass heavy with the sands that gather round Dunn River Falls, to English Rose" (Smith,2000,p266- p267). However, as her journey unfolds, Irie gradually recognizes the futility of pursuing purity in this manner, leading her to confront the inherent failures associated with such pursuits. Irie's trajectory serves to illuminate the multifaceted challenges and conflicts arising from straddling two cultures. Her exploration of assimilation and subsequent realization underscores the intricate struggles faced by individuals who lack a strong connection to their ancestral roots and grapple with the search for belonging. Through Irie's experiences, Zadie Smith delves into the complex and nuanced facets of identity and the quest for self in the context of a multicultural society.

Moreover, many characters within the novel carry with them a sense of a rewritten past, an imagined homeland. Irie, for instance, envisions Jamaica as a mythical and picturesque land, while Samad idealizes Bangladesh as a place characterized by flawless functionality. Such portrayals further highlight the characters' yearning for a sense of



belonging and their attempts to construct idealized versions of their ancestral homes. By delving into the intricacies of these characters' experiences, Zadie Smith invites readers to contemplate the intricate dynamics surrounding identity formation and the profound impact of a multicultural environment.

In the following section, we will delve into the financial issues encountered by the characters in *White Teeth* and examine the implications of these challenges on their lives and aspirations. By exploring the novel's portrayal of financial struggles, we aim to shed light on the broader socio-economic realities faced by immigrants and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of their experiences.

### 2.4.2 Financial Issues

The novel *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith presents a vivid portrayal of the challenges and struggles faced by immigrants in developed countries. One significant aspect that emerges from the narrative is the profound impact of financial issues on the lives of these individuals. In particular, Alsana's poignant statement, "I come from the land of tea to this godawful country, and then I can't afford a proper cup of it" (Smith, 2000, p.440), sheds light on the economic difficulties experienced by immigrants. This statement not only highlights the disparity between the affordability of everyday pleasures in their home countries and their limited financial means in places like London but also underscores the larger economic challenges faced by immigrants. Within the context of the novel, financial issues represent a significant obstacle for the characters. Alsana's statement draws attention to the financial disparity between the subcontinent where tea is grown and the struggles faced by immigrants in developed countries like Britain. The inability to afford something as simple as a cup of tea reflects not only the economic limitations but also the broader socio-economic and cultural barriers faced by immigrants. It becomes evident that immigrants are not only subject to racial and cultural oppression but also experience economic marginalization in their adopted countries.

The character Alsana, in particular, struggles to sustain herself and her family in their adopted country. Her concerns regarding their predicament in the foreign land become

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

apparent in her dialogue with Samad, where she raises profound questions about the purpose and implications of their relocation:

“What is the point of moving here - nice house, yes, very nice, very nice - but where is the food? You fight in an old, forgotten war with some Englishmen... married to a black! Whose friends are they? These are the people my child will grow up around? Their children - half blacky-white? But tell me, where is our food?” (Smith, 2000, p. 61).

In their conversation, Alsana underscores the stark contrast between their seemingly comfortable residence and the harsh reality of lacking basic necessities, thereby highlighting the tangible hardships confronted by immigrants in their day-to-day lives. The novel serves as a poignant reflection on the socioeconomic disparities and struggles endured by immigrants, inviting readers to critically examine the systemic barriers that hinder their integration and well-being in their adopted societies. Moreover, the characters of Samad and Alsana exemplify the economic challenges faced by immigrants. Samad works as a low-wage waiter, while Alsana is employed as a seamstress. Despite their hard work and efforts, they feel a profound sense of frustration and alienation, perpetuated by the notion that they do not truly belong in British society. This sentiment captures the experiences of numerous immigrants striving for a better life, only to encounter barriers and limitations that hinder their economic progress and social integration.

The novel further underscores the impact of income inequality and inadequate living conditions on immigrants. Statistics from the Department of Social Security in July 1990 reveal a widening income gap, reaching levels not seen since the Second World War, between 1979 and 1988. These statistics parallel the experiences of Samad Iqbal, who endures the pain of being a stranger in England and faces degradation in the restaurant where he works. Samad's plight mirrors the struggles of immigrants facing income inequality, precarious living conditions, and unfavorable working environments.

In light of these challenges, it is crucial to explore and understand the financial issues faced by immigrants in *White Teeth*. By delving into the economic aspects of their

experiences, we can gain deeper insights into the profound impact of financial constraints on their lives and the broader implications for immigrant communities in developed countries. Through this analysis, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of immigration, which extend beyond cultural and racial boundaries to include significant economic dimensions

### 2.4.3 Confronting Prejudice, Racism, and Xenophobia

Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* offers a profound exploration of the social realities of prejudice and racism within the context of a multicultural society. The narrative portrays the pervasive and deeply ingrained nature of racism in British culture, shedding light on the microaggressions endured by its non-white characters. Through the experiences of its diverse cast, the novel unveils the subtle forms of discrimination and racial insensitivity that permeate everyday interactions. One notable example is illustrated through the character of Mr. Hamilton, a former soldier, whose offensive remark regarding African soldiers' skin color, referred to as "black as the ace of spades" (Smith, 2000, p. 172), serves as a poignant illustration of racial prejudice.

In the novel, Mr. Hamilton's derogatory expression carries racial undertones, exposing the evolution of the term "spade" into a racist epithet during the twentieth century. It is important to note that Mr. Hamilton's offensive remarks are directed at a girl with mixed parentage and two Bengali boys, intensifying its impact on the children's feelings of belonging in England. Millat, one of the Bengali boys, feels compelled to defend their rightful existence in England by emphasizing his father's service in the English army during the war. However, Mr. Hamilton dismisses Millat's efforts to establish their acceptability with a polite yet discriminatory response: "I'm afraid you must be mistaken," said Mr. Hamilton, genteel as ever. "There were certainly no wogs as I remember...no Pakistanis...what would we have fed them? ...I could not possibly have stomached that rich food?" (Smith, 2000, p.172). The racially offensive term "wog" is employed by Mr. Hamilton to derogatorily refer to individuals with dark skin. This exchange demonstrates the racial insensitivity and prejudice exhibited by Mr. Hamilton towards individuals from

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

different racial backgrounds. The derogatory language he employs reflects the discriminatory attitudes prevalent in society at that time and underscores the challenges faced by immigrants and individuals of mixed heritage when confronted with racial stereotypes and offensive remarks.

Zadie Smith explores how even white characters can face consequences for their close relationships and intimacy with individuals of different races. Archie, the protagonist, experiences these repercussions due to his marriage to a Jamaican woman and his friendship with Bengalis. This challenges social norms and prejudices surrounding interracial relationships, highlighting the impact of such relationships on individuals and the broader community.

Maureen, a character who has romantic feelings for Archie, feels a sense of sadness upon seeing Clara, Archie's wife, due to her skin color (Smith, 2000, p.69). This reaction reflects Maureen's internalized racism and discomfort with interracial relationships. Furthermore, Archie's boss summons him urgently and excludes him and Clara from company dinners because of Clara's skin color (Smith, 2000, p.72). Despite the boss claiming not to be racist, his actions demonstrate a clear display of racism. In these instances, the characters' dark skin color becomes a basis for discrimination. Smith underscores how social biases and prejudices can impact relationships and opportunities, even for white individuals who challenge racial boundaries. The novel confronts the hypocrisy of individuals who claim not to be racist while perpetuating discriminatory actions and attitudes.

By highlighting the consequences faced by white characters who dare to form close bonds with people from different racial backgrounds, Smith sheds light on the systemic racism and social barriers that exist within society. These examples serve as a critique of the narrow-mindedness and prejudice that continue to shape people's perceptions and interactions, ultimately emphasizing the need for understanding, empathy, and dismantling racial biases.

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

In the novel, Zadie Smith incorporates Lord Tebbit's mention of the "cricket test" to offer insight into a specific perspective on immigration and loyalty. Lord Tebbit, a former chairman of the Conservative Party, proposed that the loyalty of British Asians could be assessed by the cricket teams they support in international matches. This viewpoint raises thought-provoking questions about the allegiances and identities of British Asians, forcing them to consider whether they align themselves with their country of origin or fully embrace their current place of residence. Lord Tebbit's words capture this sentiment as he states, "The cricket test—which side do they cheer for?... Are you still looking back to where you came from or where you are?" (Smith, 2000, p.123). This quote exemplifies the idea that one's loyalties and sense of belonging can be evaluated based on their affiliation with a specific cricket team, symbolizing a broader question about immigrant identity and their connection to both their heritage and their adopted country.

By including this quote, Zadie Smith provides a critical lens through which readers can examine the challenges faced by immigrant communities and the various ways in which their loyalty and integration are often scrutinized. It prompts reflection on the limitations and potential biases of such tests or criteria when assessing individuals' commitment to their adopted country. Overall, Zadie Smith employs Lord Tebbit's controversial statement as a means to engage with and criticize social attitudes toward immigration and the complexities of measuring loyalty within diverse and multicultural societies.

Zadie Smith also explores the theme of xenophobia through the experiences of immigrant characters who struggle to find their place in British society. The notion that they are perceived as perpetual guests rather than fully integrated members of the community underscores the barriers they encounter and the persistent sense of otherness they often face. According to the definition provided by Merriam Webster, xenophobia refers to the fear and hatred of strangers, foreigners, or anything that is perceived as strange or foreign. The term itself is derived from the Greek words "xenos," meaning "guest," and "phobos," meaning "fear" or "flight." Throughout the novel *White Teeth*, the theme of

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

xenophobia is present through various characters, illustrating the notion that immigrants or individuals from other cultures are often seen as perpetual guests or strangers who are feared or kept at a distance. They are not fully accepted as members of the society, in this case, the British society.

The concept of xenophobia highlights the challenges faced by immigrants in their quest for acceptance and belonging in a foreign land. It emphasizes the underlying fear or discomfort that exists towards those who are perceived as different or unfamiliar. This fear can manifest in various ways, including discrimination, prejudice, or exclusionary practices. By incorporating the theme of xenophobia, Smith sheds light on the broader issues of prejudice and the challenges of multiculturalism. She invites readers to reflect on the consequences of fear and hatred towards strangers or foreigners and encourages a more empathetic understanding of the immigrant experience, which is the crisis of not belonging.

After facing challenges such as identity crisis, financial issues, and racism, immigrants often grapple with a profound sense of not belonging. This sentiment arises from persistent feelings of being alienated or excluded within their adopted society. Despite their efforts to adapt and assimilate, immigrants may find themselves continuously perceived as outsiders, struggling to establish a genuine sense of connection and acceptance. The feeling of not belonging emerges as a result of various factors. First, the process of cultural adaptation and assimilation can be complex and arduous. Immigrants may confront barriers such as unfamiliar social norms and cultural differences that hinder their integration. This struggle to bridge the gap between their original cultural identity and the new cultural context can contribute to a deep sense of disconnection. Furthermore, experiences of racism and discrimination exacerbate the feeling of not belonging among immigrants. Prejudice and bias from the receiving society can result in exclusionary practices, limited opportunities, and marginalization. These systemic and interpersonal manifestations of racism reinforce the notion that immigrants are perpetually viewed as outsiders, perpetuating a sense of alienation.

The cumulative effect of these challenges creates a profound emotional and psychological impact on immigrants. The sense of not belonging can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and a longing for acceptance. Immigrants may yearn for a sense of community where their cultural background and experiences are valued and embraced, rather than perceived as barriers to belonging.

The subsequent section of this dissertation delves into the profound trauma experienced by immigrants as a result of the myriad challenges they face, along with the concept of "double absence." The objective of the next section is to comprehensively explore the psychological and emotional consequences of migration on individuals, elucidating how the absence of their home country and the arduous process of adapting to a new environment intertwine to contribute to their traumatic experiences.

### **2.5 The Trauma of Immigration in *White Teeth***

Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* explores the challenges faced by immigrants navigating cultural shock, hybridity, and mimicry<sup>4</sup> in postcolonial Western societies. Through its compelling narrative, the novel paints a vivid picture of an author in post-war London, grappling with the complexities of hybridity and adaptation stemming from his cultural background. It also offers a profound and illuminating exploration of the immigrant experience, effectively capturing the enduring impact of power dynamics between the former colonized and the former colonizer in the postcolonial era. By delving into the intricate relationship between these two groups, the novel encapsulates the lingering effects of historical power imbalances, "too much bloody history" (Smith, 2000, p.202). The novel indeed offers a nuanced portrayal of the challenges faced by immigrants, highlighting their profound sense of unbelonging and uprootedness in a new cultural context, "who would

---

1 <sup>4</sup> Mimicry in postcolonial and colonial discourses means the imitation of the behaviour, language, dress etc. of the colonizer (Bhabha, 1994, p.122)

---

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

want to stay? In a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. Just tolerated” (Smith, 2000, p.407).

The term "expertly fictionalized portrayal" emphasizes Smith's skill in capturing the realities of immigrant experiences. Through her storytelling, she provides readers with a glimpse into the complexities and struggles that individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds encounter when attempting to navigate their lives in a foreign land.

The trauma of immigration is a central theme explored in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, particularly as it pertains to the first and second generations of immigrants. Smith delves into the psychological, emotional, and social impact that the immigrant experience can have on individuals and their families. For the first generation of immigrants, the trauma stems from the uprooting of their lives in their home countries and the subsequent displacement in the host country. These individuals often leave behind their familiar surroundings, cultural norms, and support systems, embarking on a journey into the unknown. They face numerous obstacles, such as cultural differences, and discriminatory practices, which can lead to a sense of isolation, alienation, and a loss of identity. The first-generation immigrants grapple with feelings of nostalgia for their homeland, a longing for familiarity, and the constant negotiation between preserving their heritage and assimilating into the new society.

In *White Teeth*, the narrative effectively highlights the profound cultural anguish endured by a Bangladeshi immigrant family as they confront a multitude of hardships stemming from their distinct cultural, social, and religious disparities. One character, Samad, emerges as a poignant embodiment of the numerous challenges faced by individuals hailing from immigrant backgrounds. Despite harboring aspirations for a more fulfilling occupation, Samad's ambitions are thwarted, leaving him no choice but to toil as a waiter, subjecting himself to demeaning treatment and ceaseless humiliation. Through the passage, "But, no such placard existing, he had instead the urge, the need, to speak to every man, and, like the ancient Mariner, explain constantly, constantly wanting to reassert something, anything" (Smith, 2000, p. 58), the author powerfully illustrates Samad's



## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

perpetual struggle to establish his identity and surmount the prejudices that beset him. Zadie Smith's portrayal of Samad's experiences vividly captures the prejudice, discrimination, and social marginalization that immigrants encounter in a society where their cultural and ethnic differences render them as 'other'.

The novel further delves into the concept of 'original trauma' to elucidate the diasporic journey and the enduring sense of unbelonging and uprootedness. The passage that mentions 'original traumas' highlights the painful constants of the immigrant experience and the perpetual feeling of going back and forth, both physically and emotionally.

It's something to do with that experience of moving from West to East or East to West or from island to island. Even when you arrive, you're still going back and forth; your children are going round and round. There's no proper term for it—original sin seems too harsh; maybe original trauma would be better (Smith, 2000, p.161).

It suggests that even upon arrival, individuals and their children continue to navigate a cyclical journey, struggling to find a sense of belonging. The term "original trauma" captures the ongoing psychological and emotional struggles faced by immigrants like Samad, as they grapple with the complexities of identity, heritage, and displacement. Although the repetition is not in the literal act of migration itself, it occurs at the level of narration. According to Ulrike Tancke, the trauma experienced by migrant characters in both diasporic British fiction as a whole and in *White Teeth* specifically stems from their arduous struggle to establish connections with their origins and construct their identities amidst the new cultural contexts and expectations they encounter (Tancke, 2011, para. 1). This perspective underscores the complex interplay between personal and collective experiences and sheds light on the intricate processes of identity formation and cultural adaptation within the diasporic framework. In *White Teeth*, a number of characters embark on a journey to confront their original trauma by delving into their past and personal history, seeking solace and a sense of comfort. By revisiting their roots, these characters

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

aim to navigate the complexities of their traumatic experiences and find a semblance of inner peace, as the narrator of the novel claims at one point, “this is the other thing about immigrants (‘fugees, émigrés, travellers): they cannot escape their history any more than you yourself can lose your shadow” (Smith, 2000, p.466). Consequently, trauma becomes an avenue for delving into memory and history. In the narratives of Samad, Millat, and Irie, the exploration of trauma serves as a means to alleviate the weight of an enduring history shaped by colonialism and the enduring effects of historical and collective traumas that transcend multiple generations. Through their personal accounts, these characters strive to come to terms with the burdensome legacy of the past, seeking to free themselves from the persistent grip of history's insidious influences. Their stories become vehicles for unearthing the complex interplay between individual and collective traumas, revealing the profound impact of historical forces on their lives and the arduous journey towards healing and liberation.

The trauma of immigration also extends to the second generation—the children of immigrants—who are born or raised in the host country. These individuals often navigate the complexities of dual identities, caught between their parents' cultural heritage and the dominant culture of their birthplace. They may face a sense of cultural confusion, feeling neither fully belonging to their parents' culture nor completely accepted in the society they grow up in. Second-generation immigrants often experience a conflict of loyalties, attempting to reconcile their parents' expectations with their own aspirations, leading to a profound search for their own sense of self and belonging. One example of this search is seen in Irie, who embarks on a personal journey to discover the history of her Jamaican family branch (Smith, 2000, p.337-39, 398-402). Her exploration of her family's past becomes a means for her to connect with her heritage and understand her place in the world. Irie's quest for identity takes her on a path of rediscovery, seeking a connection to her ancestral history by turning to her grandmother and seeking the company of individuals who share her like-complexioned heritage. This pursuit of historical roots and a sense of cultural belonging becomes instrumental in her journey of self-definition. By aligning

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

herself with individuals who mirror her experiences and physical attributes, Irie seeks solace and security, aiming to achieve a peace of mind that stems from a shared identity and a sense of communal understanding.

The search for the same flocks, metaphorically representing a desire for familiarity, emerges as a crucial aspect of Irie's journey. This yearning to mix with like-minded individuals reflects her pursuit of a community that can provide validation, support, and a sense of belonging. By associating herself with those who share similar backgrounds, Irie hopes to navigate the complexities of her identity formation and alleviate the mental struggles that arise from inhabiting an "amphibian culture". Being situated in a peculiar "amphibian culture," she experiences a sense of voidness that permeates her psyche. As the child of immigrants, Irie lacks the strong emotional foundations and historical roots that her parents possess, resulting in considerable mental turbulence and a fervent desire to establish an authentic and individual identity.

Smith emphasizes the resilience and strength exhibited by these individuals and their capacity for growth and transformation. She portrays the complex journey of navigating multiple identities, finding a sense of belonging, and carving out spaces where the trauma of immigration can be reconciled and healed. However, the characters' search for roots is contrasted with their reception by white British society. They are often subjected to stereotyped perceptions and narratives authored by others, which influence how they are perceived and treated. Millat, the son of Bangladeshi parents, experiences a profound sense of alienation in a society that struggles to come to terms with its postcolonial present. Ethnic difference is met with blunt and discriminatory categorizations, further exacerbating the characters' feelings of not fully belonging.

Smith delves into the psychological and emotional struggles faced by both generations, highlighting the generational divide and the tensions that arise within families as they grapple with different cultural values, traditions, and aspirations. The characters in *White Teeth* navigate issues of identity, assimilation, and the longing for connection and

acceptance, all while carrying the weight of their ancestors' experiences and the legacy of their immigrant backgrounds.

The juxtaposition of the characters' personal quests for identity and their reception by society highlights the complexities of immigrant experiences. While they strive to define themselves on their own terms, they are constantly confronted with external narratives and prejudices that shape their interactions and opportunities. The novel underscores the tension between self-definition and the limited agency afforded to immigrants within the larger societal framework. By portraying the characters' struggles to unearth their family histories and navigate societal perceptions, Smith sheds light on the complexities of identity formation in a multicultural and postcolonial context. The characters' search for roots reflects a longing for connection and a desire to establish their place in a world that often imposes predefined narratives and stereotypes.

The characters' search for identity in *White Teeth* serves as a compelling representation of the complexities faced by individuals in multicultural societies. Zadie Smith captures the inner struggles, yearnings, and aspirations associated with the pursuit of self-definition. By seeking connections to their roots and aligning themselves with like-minded individuals, characters strive to establish a sense of belonging and achieve a harmonious state of mind. Smith's nuanced depiction contributes to scholarly discussions surrounding identity formation, cultural assimilation, and the intricate interplay of personal and communal experiences within diverse societal contexts.

### **2.6 The Character between Two Homes (the Double Absence)**

Rushdie said that "our identity is at once partial and plural. Sometimes we find that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools" (Sharma, 2014, p.1) this statement does reflect the experiences of many individuals who navigate multiple cultural contexts or have a hybrid identity. In the context of the novel *White Teeth*, this statement can be seen as accurate in portraying the characters' struggles with their sense of identity and the tensions arising from straddling different cultures.

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

In *White Teeth*, characters like Samad, Alsana, and their children face the challenges of maintaining their cultural heritage while adapting to British society. They often find themselves caught between two worlds, trying to reconcile their immigrant roots with the cultural expectations and influences of their new environment. This struggle is evident in their interactions with family members, their cultural practices, and their attempts to find a sense of belonging. The concept of "double absence" as discussed by Abdelmalek Sayad can be applied here. The characters experience a simultaneous absence from both their home country and the host country, resulting in a sense of dislocation and a complex negotiation of their identities. They may feel fragmented, caught between cultural norms and expectations, and unable to fully belong to either culture. Furthermore, the novel explores the plural and diverse nature of identity. It presents characters from various ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, highlighting the multiplicity of identities within a multicultural society. The characters' identities are shaped by their familial, social, and historical contexts, resulting in a rich tapestry of individual experiences and perspectives.

Overall, the accuracy of the statement in *White Teeth* can be seen in how the characters grapple with their partial and plural identities, straddling two cultures, and sometimes feeling as if they fall between two stools. Their experiences reflect the complexities and nuances of identity formation in multicultural societies.

### 2.6.1 The Double Absence for the First Generation

*White Teeth* delves into the representational level, where the characters grapple with the challenges of bridging the gap between their past and present, their cultural heritage and the expectations of their new environments. The novel delves into the complexities of migration, addressing the deep-seated traumas that arise from the continual negotiation of one's identity and the quest for a sense of belonging. In this way, the novel reflects the ongoing struggle faced by immigrants in their attempts to reconcile their multiple identities, navigate cultural differences, and find a place within the tapestry of their new societies. The repetition of these traumas in the narrative highlights the enduring impact of migration on individuals and their continuous search for a cohesive sense of self. Therefore, *White*

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

*Teeth* serves as a significant exploration of migration and identity, shedding light on the intricate interplay between personal experiences and the challenges of representation. Through its characters and their narratives, the novel confronts the complex dynamics of migration, offering insights into the profound and lasting effects it has on individuals and their ongoing pursuit of self-discovery and integration.

Immigrants often encounter numerous challenges that can lead to significant distress and trauma. The disruption of familiar social, cultural, and familial structures can create a profound sense of dislocation and alienation. The character of Samad embodies the concept of "double absence" as discussed by Abdelmalek Sayad. The term refers to the experience of immigrants who feel a sense of absence or displacement in both their home country and the host country. Samad, as an immigrant from Bangladesh living in England, grapples with this double absence throughout the novel.

On the one hand, Samad experiences a sense of absence from his home country, Bangladesh. Despite living in England for an extended period of time, he still considers Bangladesh as his primary location of home. He maintains a strong attachment to his cultural heritage and holds onto his identity as a Bengali Muslim. However, as time passes and he becomes more integrated into English society, he feels a growing disconnection from his roots and a fear of losing his cultural identity. This internal struggle between his past and his present contributes to his experience of absence and a longing for a sense of belonging. Samad desperately tries to preserve the culture of the East, even though he is not immune to Western influence – he seems to think that he and his family have been “corrupted by England ” (Smith, 2000, p.144). Samad admits that he now does several things that Islam forbids: “I swear. I eat bacon. I regularly slap the salami. I drink Guinness. My best friend is a kaffir nonbeliever” (Smith, 2000, p.149). It could be argued that Samad is only willing to admit the influence of what he calls “Western pragmatism” (Smith, 2000, p.139) when he is in the process of doing something that does not accord with his Islamic morals. In these instances, Samad moves between different identity positions and leans towards an English mentality, repeating two phrases that he has acquired during his stay in

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

the country, namely “To the pure all things are pure” and “Can't say fairer than that” (Smith, 2000, p.137). Despite his aversion to the notion that certain aspects of his habits and values may be perceived as more English than Bangladeshi, Samad still yearns for acceptance within the English community.

On the other hand, Samad also experiences a profound sense of absence within English society. He consistently wrestles with the feeling of being an outsider, facing challenges with language, customs, and social norms. Despite his efforts to assimilate and adopt English mannerisms, he is always aware of his "otherness" and how he is perceived as different. This sense of absence and marginalization within the host country further compounds his identity crisis and adds to the double absence he experiences. This can be particularly observed in the following paragraph, where Samad metaphorically relates himself and his work of serving Asian food to an English clientele to the role of a colonial subject serving the English:

It is a long walk to table twelve. [...] It is a long walk if you are to negotiate the jungle; attending to the endless needs and needless ends, the desires, the demands of the pink faces that strike Samad now as pith-helmet-wearing gentlemen, feet up on the table with guns across their laps; as tea-slurping ladies on verandas cooling themselves under the breeze of the brown boys who beat the ostrich feathers" (Smith,2000,p.206).In addition to the racism that Samad encounters in English society, he also faces limitations in job opportunities. "I AM NOT A WAITER. I HAVE BEEN A STUDENT, A SCIENTIST, A SOLDIER" (Smith, 2000, p.58).

This is one of several factors contributing to his feelings of alienation from England. It is therefore not surprising that Samad continues to regard Bangladesh as his home, as the country provided him with a sense of belonging and self-worth, sentiments that England and the available opportunities there are unable to provide. It is evident that Samad perceives his cultural identity as an essential and unchanging entity, as reflected in his search for "pure" identifications and cultural coherence. However, it becomes apparent that

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

in reality, his identity is a fluid construct that is subject to historical and temporal shifts – after all, Samad embodies multiple cultures and occupies a diasporic position. Despite his reluctance to acknowledge it, Samad's cultural identity is undergoing a clear process of hybridization. His case serves as a prime example of how *White Teeth* portrays cultural and national identities: even though individuals may strive to cling tightly to a particular understanding of their national or cultural identity, it remains susceptible to transformation. Therefore, identities should be viewed in terms of "becoming" rather than "being" – they are constantly in a state of flux. In Bhabha's terms, one can strive to live their culture or nationality pedagogically, but such attempts will never be entirely successful due to the performative nature of nationalism, which is inevitably influenced by everyday experiences and the subsequent reimagining of national ideals (Katisko,2011,p.1).

It can be argued that Samad has constructed his cultural identity based on his Bengali ethnicity and Islamic faith. Despite residing in London for an extended period, Samad maintains a diasporic perspective, considering Bangladesh as his primary homeland and viewing his stay in England as temporary. As mentioned earlier, identities often take shape through the lens of difference, a notion evident in Samad's perception of his cultural identity as distinct from the Western culture. He identifies as a devout Muslim who values his Eastern roots and morals, placing significant importance on his past and cultural heritage. However, the complexity of Samad's identity becomes apparent in the novel. He grapples with the idea that his participation in fighting for England during the Second World War has made him too "English" to fully belong to his cultural and national community of the past. Simultaneously, he recognizes that he will always be perceived as too "Indian" to fully integrate into English society. Samad cannot conceive of inhabiting both of these competing identity positions. While acknowledging his position in between the English and Bengali communities, he sees the two as mutually exclusive. Consequently, he views this middle ground as an undesirable and impossible situation, perceiving these identities as polar opposites in his mind. Furthermore, the double absence experienced by



## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

Samad between Bangladesh and England intensifies his feelings of being absent from both places.

Through the character of Samad, *White Teeth* delves into the intricate complexities of immigrant experiences and the inherent struggles of navigating multiple cultural and national identities. Samad's journey reflects the tension and conflict arising from his desire to preserve his cultural heritage while attempting to assimilate into English society. His experience of double absence is evident in his continuous search for a place where he can genuinely belong and be accepted for who he is. Samad serves as a prime example of the concept of double absence, illustrating the intricate challenges immigrants face in reconciling their past and present, their cultural roots, and their yearning for integration. His story poignantly explores the psychological and emotional toll of living between two worlds and offers a profound examination of the immigrant experience depicted in the novel.

Clara immediately feels like an outsider in London, a feeling which is made even stronger by her belonging to the church of Jehovah's Witnesses. She is therefore constructed as an "other" on various grounds at her school whose student body is for the most part white, English and Catholic – that is, she is an "other" by way of "race", nationality and religion. Clara's solution to her multicultural stance is to change herself in order to become less of an outsider and more "English". She leaves the church of Jehovah's Witnesses, which as noted earlier, begins the stage of rootlessness in her life. Clara is unsure about her complicated position in-between the Jamaican and English cultures, and she responds to this by marrying the Englishman Archie shortly after meeting him, despite the fact that she does not actually love him.

In addition, Clara takes Archie's name, changing her Jamaican surname to Jones. That is to say, she replaces one of the cultural markers of her Jamaican past by taking on a traditionally English name. She also begins to adjust her manner of speaking towards an English pronunciation. Therefore, Clara's solution to her in-between position is adapting to her new host culture and trying to become "English" herself. However, her manner of

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

speaking still on occasion betrays her Jamaican accent – it is noted that she drops “into the vernacular when she [is] excited or pleased about something” (Smith, 2000, p.66). Her use of language is therefore hybrid, similarly to her cultural position.

In the subsequent section, we will delve further into the portrayal of the second generation's struggles in *White Teeth* exploring additional instances and their implications for the characters' lives. By critically examining their experiences, shedding light on the nuances of their identities and the challenges they face as they forge their paths between two cultures, contributing to a broader understanding of the complexities of cultural assimilation and the search for belonging.

### 2.6.2 The Second Generations' Struggle with the Double Absence

In the novel, the second generation of immigrants grapples with the "double absence." While these younger characters may not dwell on past incidents in the same way as their parents, the novel portrays their ongoing struggle to detach themselves from the history and roots of their immigrant backgrounds. It becomes apparent that severing ties with one's cultural heritage and navigating a sense of identity in a new environment is a complex and daunting task, even for the second generation.

Despite their willingness to focus on the present and embrace their current circumstances, the characters in *White Teeth* face significant hurdles in disentangling themselves from the influence of their immigrant pasts. As the work of Molly Thompson who critically analyses *White Teeth*'s multicultural nuances in her article "'Happy Multicultural Land?': The Implications of an 'excess of belonging' in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*". Thompson notes that the plight of second-generation immigrants is significantly different from that of first-generation immigrants, as they "have arguably had to navigate a more problematic relationship with their racial identities, often having to straddle two different, conflicting cultures" (2005, p.122). The lasting effects of migration on the mental health of immigrant children are underscored, shedding light on the detrimental impact it can have on their overall well-being throughout their lives. The novel emphasizes that

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

insufficient support and guidance during childhood exacerbate their symptoms and contribute to social, psychological, and emotional conflicts in adulthood.

Within the narrative, the second-generation character Millat embodies this struggle with the double absence. Feeling caught between multiple identities and unable to fully identify with a particular location or culture, Millat becomes an "in-between" figure, he "stood schizophrenic, one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden" (Smith, p.183). His internal conflict is evident in his statement, "Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali; he lived for the in between." This sense of disconnection and ambiguity leads Millat to seek a sense of community elsewhere, aligning himself with groups like Raggastani and the fundamentalist organization known as "the Keepers of the Eternal Victorious Islamic Nation."

Millat's search for belonging can be viewed as a survival strategy and a reaction to the fear of racism and prejudice he encounters. The novel suggests that associating with these groups provides a measure of protection, as they project an image that discourages others from challenging or mistreating them. Millat's choice reflects the complexities of the second generation's experience, where the yearning for connection and protection can lead to affiliations that may not align with conventional norms or ideals.

Ultimately, "White Teeth" stands as a testament to the resilience and fortitude of immigrants, while also serving as a call for heightened awareness and support for the mental health needs of individuals grappling with the trauma of "double absence." Through the medium of literature, the novel encourages readers to delve into and empathize with the immigrant experience, fostering a society that is more inclusive and compassionate. As ongoing research continues to unveil the complex dynamics of immigrant journeys and their enduring impacts, "White Teeth" emerges as a significant contribution, offering valuable insights and provoking meaningful dialogues. It exemplifies the transformative power of literature to illuminate the intricacies of the human condition and provide a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, understood, and appreciated.

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

Despite being born and raised in England, characters like Magid and Millat find themselves marked as foreigners due to their parents' migrant history. In an interview with Kathleen O'Grady, Zadie Smith discusses the conflict between generations in the novel, highlighting how the children inherit a sense of this double absence from their parents. The weight of this historical baggage becomes an integral part of their identities, one that they cannot easily escape. It is a burden they carry, symbolizing the complexities and challenges faced by the second generation. Smith says; "...your roots come with baggage. And the baggage isn't always fun" (O'Grady, 2002).

Furthermore, the novel addresses the issue of how even though these characters may be British citizens by law, they are still constructed as "others" in relation to the concept of "true" English nationality. The pedagogical understanding of English nationality often emphasizes historical ties and whiteness, excluding individuals like Magid and Millat from a sense of authentic Englishness. This exclusionary mindset denies them genuine belonging and perpetuates a racist logic that undermines their national membership and cultural identity. After all, as Paul Gilroy suggests, black settlers and their British-born children are denied authentic national membership on the basis of their 'race' and, at the same time, prevented from aligning themselves within the 'British race' on the grounds that their national allegiance inevitably lies elsewhere. This racist logic has pinpointed obstacles to genuine belonging in the culture and identity of the alien interlopers (Gilroy, 1987, p.46). This, then, relates to the problematic nature of multiculturalism.

Despite the inherently unessential nature of hybridity and its critical stance towards fixed origins, Magid and Millat in *White Teeth* are still confined to specific positions by English society, which prevents them from fully defining themselves. This limitation denies the twins the opportunity to embrace and celebrate their hybrid identities as something positive and productive.

Moving on to the character Irie, she was growing up in a modern multicultural London as a child of a white Englishman and Jamaican mother she encounters an identity crisis. She has the appearance of a black Jamaican girl, but she has never been to Jamaica

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

and she does not even know much about her mother's history. She feels not fitting anywhere. The character Irie Jones embodies the concept of the "double absence" as she navigates her identity and sense of belonging in relation to Englishness and Jamaican heritage. Irie's relationship with Englishness is fraught with contradictions and a longing for acceptance. She perceives herself as a "stranger in a strange land" (Smith, 2000, p.266) in England, feeling disconnected from the dominant culture and its ideals. According to Edouard Glissant (1997) this is typical to the second generation of immigrants:

When identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened. Usually an outcast in the place he has newly set anchor, he is forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging (p.143)

While initially searching for a sense of belonging within Englishness, she gradually realizes the limitations and exclusionary practices that prevent her from fully fitting into the narrative of English identity. Consequently, Irie turns her gaze towards Jamaica, her ancestral homeland, and embraces it as a symbolic "homeland". However, her connection to Jamaica is more abstract and ideological rather than grounded in a physical location. This diasporic longing for a homeland reflects her yearning for a place where she can authentically belong and find a sense of cultural rootedness. Irie's desire for a sense of belonging stems from the realization that the idealized notion of Englishness cannot truly accommodate her. She questions the need to exert effort in trying to fit into a culture that feels resistant and unwelcoming. Instead, she sees Jamaica as a newly discovered place, brought into existence by her own recognition.

It just seemed tiring and unnecessary all of a sudden, that struggle to force something out of this recalcitrant English soil. Why bother when there was now this other place? (For Jamaica appeared to Irie as if it were newly made. Like Columbus itself, just by discovering it she had brought it into existence.) This well-wooded and watered place. Where things sprang from the soil riotously and without supervision [...]. No fictions, no myths,

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

no lies, no tangled webs – this is how Irie imagined her homeland. Because homeland is one of the magical fantasy words like unicorn and soul and infinity that have now passed into the language” (Smith, 2000, p.402).

In this quote, Irie's hybrid identity as both English and Jamaican becomes apparent. The passage portrays her diasporic longing for a homeland in Jamaica, a former British colony, using imagery associated with Columbus and the New World, which carries colonial connotations. This serves to highlight Irie's dual role and reminds the reader of her Englishness, despite her inability to fully fit into the discourse of English identity. Consequently, Irie's mindset is influenced by colonial allusions, creating a complex and somewhat problematic hybrid position. These conflicting ideas stem from the antagonistic and contradictory nature of her hybrid identity, which is hindered by racism and inequality. It is not surprising, therefore, that Irie desires to change her appearance to resemble an "English rose" rather than being perceived as "Jamaican hourglass heavy." This desire for transformation reflects her longing for acceptance within the dominant English culture (Katisko, 2011, p.56)

Irie's complex relationship with Englishness is further exemplified in an English class discussion of Shakespeare's "Sonnet 127". The class engages in a conversation about the lines: “In the old age black was not counted fair, / Or if it were, it bore not beauty’s name” (p.1–2). Irie questions whether the woman addressed in the sonnet could be black, but her suggestion is quickly dismissed by the teacher. This interaction upsets Irie as she realizes the enduring exclusionary practices and discourses that marginalize her from the narrative of Englishness. “She had thought, just then, that she had seen something like a reflection, but it was receding” (Smith, 2000, p.272). The significance of this exchange lies in the fact that Shakespeare is widely regarded as the epitome of English literature, which plays a pivotal role in the construction of national identity. For the character, this encounter serves as a stark reminder of the enduring discourses and practices that marginalize her from the narrative of Englishness. It reinforces the notion that blackness and Englishness

## Chapter Two: Navigating the Perils: The Challenges and Trauma of Immigration

---

have historically been portrayed as mutually exclusive, reinforcing her sense of exclusion (Katisko, 2011, p.57).

Irie, along with Magid and Millat, faces the challenge of having her cultural, national, and racial identities imposed upon her rather than being able to define them herself. These characters are consistently portrayed as non-English, highlighting the historical reality that Englishness has been constructed on notions of imperialism and the perceived superiority of the English people over their “others”. However, Irie's character also represents the emergence of a new and diverse England. Born in 1975, a year depicted in the novel as a post-colonial turning point for Britain, she embodies the idea of a London in the process of transformation. It is important to acknowledge that Irie's relationship with Englishness is highly intricate, as she perceives herself as a "stranger in a strange land" within England. This highlights her struggle to find a sense of belonging and negotiate her place within the evolving cultural landscape. At the same time, Irie feels a disconnection from her Jamaican roots, as she has never visited the country and has a limited understanding of its culture. This confirms the notion of double absence in the character Irie, she is disconnected from her ancestral homeland and the cultural heritage she yearns to connect with and the alienation in England, where she is seen as an outsider despite being born and raised there.

The children of first-generation immigrants find themselves caught between two worlds. They are growing up in Britain, immersed in its present reality, yet their identities are also deeply rooted in their ancestral homelands. This dual existence is aptly described by one character as having "one leg in the present, one in the past." This sense of duality and dislocation intensifies the challenges they face as they try to navigate their cultural heritage while assimilating into British society. Smith's exploration of the double absence underscores the profound impact of historical and cultural legacies on individuals and their identities. It sheds light on the complexities of belonging and the ongoing struggle to reconcile multiple cultural influences. The characters in *White Teeth* grapple with these

challenges, striving to forge their own paths and define their sense of self in a world shaped by migration, empire, and the tensions between tradition and modernity.

### 2.7 Conclusion

Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* delves into the complex experiences of immigrants and their search for identity and belonging. The characters in the novel, particularly those who are first- and second-generation immigrants, navigate the challenges of reconciling their personal histories with social expectations. Smith employs humor and irony to create a balanced narrative that allows readers to engage with the story at various levels. Through this approach, the novel sheds light on the impact of colonialism on cultural identity and exposes the enduring effects of colonial education.

*White Teeth* stands as a remarkable example of storytelling, skillfully weaving together multiple narrative threads to explore the intricate dynamics of contemporary society. It tackles profound themes with finesse, making it a captivating and thought-provoking examination of the complexities and contradictions of cultural identity.



# **General Conclusion**

## General Conclusion

---

This work has delved into the exploration of the trauma of immigration in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, shedding light on the profound experiences and challenges faced by Third World immigrants. Throughout the chapters, questions have been raised and addressed, leading to a better understanding of the psychological and emotional toll of migration.

As a first step, the significance of literature as a reflection of socio-cultural dynamics has been emphasized. By delving into diverse themes and narratives, literature offers valuable insights into the complexities of the human condition, provoking contemplation and evoking deep emotions. The phenomenon of migration was examined, highlighting the fear, uncertainty, and immense risks faced by individuals who leave their home countries in search of a better life abroad. The arduous journey, language barriers, cultural disparities, and discrimination were discussed as significant challenges encountered by immigrants upon their arrival in the host country. Additionally, the focus was on the trauma associated with the migration experience. The psychological distress, physical ailments, and social isolation endured by Third World immigrants were explored.

On a practical level, the analysis of Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* shows a multifaceted exploration of the immigrant experience. The characters' negotiation of the psychological need of belonging in the context of their experiences of alienation, stemming from their status as immigrants or products of interracial marriages, was a central focus.

In terms of findings, this dissertation has highlighted the significant impact of migration on individuals' psychological well-being and their sense of identity. It has underscored the need for greater understanding and support for Third World immigrants, as they navigate the complexities of integration and face various challenges in their pursuit of a better life.

This dissertation serves as a starting point for further research and advocacy in the field of immigrant trauma. By amplifying the voices and experiences of immigrants, people can contribute to a more empathetic and compassionate society that recognizes and values the resilience and contributions of those who have undergone the challenges of migration.

## General Conclusion

---

In conclusion, this dissertation has contributed to a deeper understanding of the trauma of immigration in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. By examining relevant literature and case studies, it has shed light on the challenges faced by immigrants and emphasized the importance of empathy and support in fostering inclusive societies. Further research is encouraged to explore additional dimensions of the immigrant experience and develop strategies to address the complex issues surrounding immigration.

# **Bibliography**

### Primary Sources

Smith, Z (2000) *White Teeth*. Harlow, England: Penguin Books

### Secondary Sources

Abdelkerim, A. A., & Grace, M. (2012a). Challenges to Employment in Newly Emerging African Communities in Australia: A Review of the Literature. *Australian Social Work*, 65(1), 104–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407x.2011.616958>

Abdelkerim, A. A., & Grace, M. (2012b). Challenges to Employment in Newly Emerging African Communities in Australia: A Review of the Literature. *Australian Social Work*, 65(1), 104–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407x.2011.616958>

Amanda, M.W.(2007). At the root of the teeth : a consideration of *White Teeth* [Master's dissertation, McMaster University]

Amanda S. M. (2018).The Miseducation of Irie Jones in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* [Master's dissertation, Georgia Southern University].

Anyikwa, V. A. (2016a). Trauma-Informed Approach to Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. *Journal of Evidence-informed Social Work*, 13(5), 484–491. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761407.2016.1166824>

Arikan, S. (2014a). “History” and “Root” in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*. *Firat*. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/3755334/History\\_and\\_Root\\_in\\_Zadie\\_Smiths\\_White\\_Teeth](https://www.academia.edu/3755334/History_and_Root_in_Zadie_Smiths_White_Teeth)

Baübock E Faist, *Diaspora and Transnationalism Concepts, Theories and Methods*. (n.d.-a). Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/document/79135207/BAUBOCK-e-FAIST-Diaspora-and-Transnationalism-Concepts-Theories-and-Methods#>

Brian Finney Essay on Zadie Smith. (n.d.-a). Retrieved from <https://home.csulb.edu/~bhfinney/smith.html>

## Bibliography

---

- Charles, Ivan (2020) *Terrorizing Images: Trauma and Ekphrasis in Contemporary Literature (Culture & Conflict, 16)* : Armstrong, Langas, Unni: Langas (Herausgeber)
- Clemens, C. (2017a). Exit West. *World Literature Today*, 91(3), 91–92. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wlt.2017.0148>
- The Construction of Identity in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*. (2019a). *Journal of Humanity Sciences*, 23(5). <https://doi.org/10.21271/zjhs.23.5.18>
- Cué, E. (n.d.-a). Interview with Bernard Kouchner flying over Africa. Retrieved from <https://www.alejandradeargos.com/index.php/en/all-articles/21-guests-with-art/448-flying-over-africa-with-bernard-kouchner>
- Cultural Integration of Immigrants in Europe. (2012a). In *Oxford University Press eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199660094.001.0001>
- Ehrkamp, P. (2005a). Placing identities: Transnational practices and local attachments of Turkish immigrants in Germany. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31(2), 345–364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183042000339963>
- Elizabeth, E. H. (2009). A Search for Authenticity: understanding ZADIE SMITH’S *White Teeth* using JUDITH BUTLER’S Performativity and JANE AUSTEN’S satire [Master's dissertation, East Carolina University]
- Figueiredo, S., Nune, O., & Martins, M. A. (2020a). School maladjustment of immigrants: the self-concept neglected in the Psychology and Education studies of PISA series. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 24(04), 795–799. <https://doi.org/10.37200/ijpr/v24i4/pr201052>
- Godlewska, M., & Ładuch, E. (2019a). Multicultural Hybridity in the Construction of the Young Generation presented in Zadie Smith’s novel *White Teeth*. *www.academia.edu*. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/40708187/Multicultural\\_Hybridity\\_in\\_the\\_Construction\\_of\\_the\\_Young\\_Generation\\_presented\\_in\\_Zadie\\_Smith\\_s\\_novel\\_White\\_Teeth](https://www.academia.edu/40708187/Multicultural_Hybridity_in_the_Construction_of_the_Young_Generation_presented_in_Zadie_Smith_s_novel_White_Teeth)

## Bibliography

---

Hamid, M. (2017). *Exit west*. Penguin Books.

Hernandez, P. (2021a, October 18). Haunting Histories in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* – Paola Hernandez. Retrieved from <https://sites.gsu.edu/phernandez5/2021/10/18/haunting-histories-in-zadie-smiths-white-teeth/>

Jean Louis Prosper Alphonse Colou, F. (n.d.-a). *African Women's Emigration to the North and the Myth of the West in Amma Darko's Beyond the Horizon (1991) and in Fatou Diome's The Belly of the Atlantic (2006)*.

Jiménez, Francisco, (1999). *The Circuit : stories from the life of a migrant child*. Boston: Houghlin Mifflin Company.

Jurgis Rudkus in *The Jungle* | Shmoop. (n.d.-a). Retrieved from <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/the-jungle/jurgis-rudkus>

Lewis, N. (2006a, June 2). *Zadie Smith's White Teeth: Identity Construction between Historical Roots and Transcultural Hybridity*. Retrieved from <https://www.grin.com/document/55924>

Ma. (2021a, April 24). Otherness and identity crisis in the novel “White Teeth” by Zadie Smith | ma.2005's Site. Retrieved from <https://u.osu.edu/ma-2005/2021/04/24/otherness-and-identity-crisis-in-the-novel-white-teeth-by-zadie-smith/>

Marcus Aurelius Meditations Book Review by Ndiritu Wahome. (n.d.-a). Retrieved from <https://www.ndirituwahome.co.ke/>

Meeting the Challenges of Migration. (n.d.-a). Retrieved from <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/meeting-challenges-migration>

Mkandawire, T. (2011a). *Running while others walk: Knowledge and the challenge of Africa's development*. *ResearchGate*. Retrieved from

## Bibliography

---

- [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286384479\\_Running\\_while\\_others\\_walk\\_Knowledge\\_and\\_the\\_challenge\\_of\\_Africa's\\_development](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286384479_Running_while_others_walk_Knowledge_and_the_challenge_of_Africa's_development)
- Nowicka, M. (2020a). (Dis)connecting migration: transnationalism and nationalism beyond connectivity. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00175-4>
- Nys-Ia. (2020a). The 8 Biggest Challenges Facing Immigrants. *NYS-IA*. Retrieved from <https://nysiaf.org/the-8-biggest-challenges-facing-immigrants/>
- Orrenius, P. M., & Zavodny, M. (2009a). Do immigrants work in riskier jobs? *Demography*, 46(3), 535–551. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.0.0064>
- Pavlová, N. (2019a). A Sense of Crisis in Zadie Smith's White Teeth. Retrieved from <https://theses.cz/id/41ehqr>
- Recupero, A., Triberti, S., Modesti, C., & Talamo, A. (2018a). Mixed Reality for Cross-Cultural Integration: Using Positive Technology to Share Experiences and Promote Communication. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01223>
- Reece, A. (2011). Annie Oakley, Calamity Jane and the Myth of the West. *www.academia.edu*. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/65943604/Annie\\_Oakley\\_Calamity\\_Jane\\_and\\_the\\_Myth\\_of\\_the\\_West](https://www.academia.edu/65943604/Annie_Oakley_Calamity_Jane_and_the_Myth_of_the_West)
- Sato, K (2009) *Kiyo's Story: A Japanese American Family's Quest for the American Dream*. New York: Soho Press.
- Schwartz, S. (2023). The Traumas of Displacement and Not Belonging. *Analytical Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.32388/e77vd8>
- Shaheen, K., Rasib, M., & Kainat, Z. (2018a). *Literary Representation of Educational Transformation and its Effect on South-Asia and Africa during British Colonization* (Vol. 40, No. 3). *Bulletin of Education and Research*.



## Bibliography

---

- Smith, S. (2020a, July 10). The Jungle Was Actually About Immigrant Labor Abuses. Retrieved from <https://talkpoverty.org/2019/01/10/sinclair-jungle-immigrant-narrative/>
- Spreier, K. (2022a, January 27). The Trauma of Migration in the Novel “Exit West” by Mohsin Hamid. Retrieved from <https://www.grin.com/document/1172378>
- Tancke, U. (2011, June 15). “Original Traumas”: Narrating Migrant Identity. Retrieved from <https://www.postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/1238/1165>
- Taylor & Francis (Routledge). (n.d.-a). “Black holes in the fabric of the nation”: Refugees in Mohsin Hamid’s “Exit West”. | LJMU Research Online. Retrieved from <https://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/11411/>
- Tripkovic, M. (2017). Integration of Migrants and Refugees. *Edinburgh*. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/31200044/Integration\\_of\\_Migrants\\_and\\_Refugees](https://www.academia.edu/31200044/Integration_of_Migrants_and_Refugees)
- Wiśniewska, L. A. (2016a). Bessel van der Kolk, The body keeps the score. Brain, mind and body in the healing of trauma, New York 2015, ss. 443. *ActaUniversitatis Nicolai Copernici*. [https://doi.org/10.12775/aunc\\_ped.2015.012](https://doi.org/10.12775/aunc_ped.2015.012)
- Zadie Smith and Postcolonial Trauma: Decolonising Trauma, Decolonising Selves 2021001429, 9780367460693, 9781003187387, 9781032034638 - EBIN.PUB. (n.d.-a). Retrieved from <https://ebin.pub/zadie-smith-and-postcolonial-trauma-decolonising-trauma-decolonising-selves-2021001429-9780367460693-9781003187387-9781032034638.html>