FAMILY DYNAMICS, FAITH AND IDENTITY ISSUES IN JONATHAN FRANZEN'S CROSSROADS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the complex relation between family dynamics, faith and personal identity in J. Franzen's novel *Crossroads*. Set in the 1970s, the novel relates the story of the Hildebrandt family showcasing their struggle with identity, family, and moral issues in a rapidly changing social context. It explores how family relationships and religious beliefs shape the characters's identities, moral choices and struggles for self- understanding, revealing the intricate interplay, between private experience and broader social and culture forces. Using P. Bourdieu's theory of "cultural capital and social capital" and E. Goffman's concept of "the presentation of self", this paper examines the tension between external societal pressures and internal struggles embodied by the protagonist Russ Hildebrandt and his family.

Keywords: **Family, personal identity, cultural capital, self-presentation, inner struggles.**

Résumé : cet article analyse les relations complexes entre les dynamiques familiales, la foi religieuse et l'identité personnelles dans « Crossroads » de Jonathan Franzen. Il examine la manière dont les relations familiales et les croyances religieuses façonnent l'identité des personnages, leurs choix moraux et leur quête de compréhension de soi, tout en révélant l'interaction complexe entre l'expérience individuelle et les forces sociales et culturelles, plus larges. En s'appuyant sur la théorie du capital culturelle de Pierre Boudieu et le concept de la présentation de soi d'erving Goffman, cet article examine les tensiosn entre les pressions sociales exterieures et les conflits interieurs incarnés par le protagoniste, russ hildebrandt, et sa famille.

Mots clés : Famille, identité, capital culturel, présentation de soi, conflits intérieurs.

INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Franzen's *Cossroads* (2021) explores the complex relationship between family dynamics, religious faith, and personal identity in American society during the early 1970s. Through the Hildebrandt family, Franzen examines how the religious expectations, family relationships, and generational differences, shape individual behavior and general conflicts between moral obligation and personal desires.

Previous criticism had examined Crossroads in relation to American family life, morality, religion and Franzen's literary developement. In this perspective, Thimothy W. Galow's critical reading of Jonathan Franzen's fiction discusses Franzen's representation of American life, particularly the expriences and contradictions, of white middle-class families and situates the novel within he broader literary career (Galow 2023, pp. 135-140). Anca Badulescu's analysis of the narrative discusses the Hildebrand family's interpersonal conflict and the characters' struggle with their personal desires that often conflict with moral expectations. In this respect, he insists on the representation of family life regarding virtues and human relationships (Badulescu 2O22, pp. 2- 7).

These critical readings provide a foundation for further investigations of the relationship between religious socialization, perdonal identity, and generational conflict. Although these themes are central to undestanding the characters's experiences, particular attention must be paid to how religious socialization influences identity formation and the pursuit of individual autonomy. Bulding on this critical bacgrounds, the present study addresses the folowing research question : how do family dynamics and religious faith shape personal identity and generate generational conflict in Crossroads ? The main objective of the analysis of Jonathan Franzen's novel is to investigate how members negociate the tensions between inherited moral values, religious expectations and individual autonomy.

Drawing primary on Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and Goffman's theory of self-presentation, with complementary insights from Robert Greene and Thimothy W. Galow, the study demonstrates how religious socialization and family expectations shape personal identity while creating space for resistance. Ultimately, the study is built on the argument that *Crossroads* portrays the family as both a vehicule for reproducting social and religious values and site of resistance, revealing the conflict between inherited expectations and individual aspirations that expose the complexities of faith, identity, generational change and individual freedom.

1. THE FAMILY: BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUGGLES AND SOCIAL ROLES

Human behaviour expert E. Goffman argues in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* that individuals in society perform different roles according to the way others view them. His argument is summarized by the following statement: "We find, then, that when the individual is in the immediate presence of others, his activity will have a promissory character" (E. Goffman, 1956, p. 2). In other words, individuals act as social actors who try to fulfil societal expectations. Goffman carries on his analysis, and suggests that those societal expectations often contrast with or contradict the individual's inner self and thoughts creating what he calls a "terrific tension" (ibid, p. 61) in the individual. This tension, hence, results in the feeling of shame, guilt or rebellion against social roles and authority to assert one's individual identity.

Either case theorized by Goffman is applicable to the Hildebrandt family, which is torn between social issues and internal psychological struggles as portrayed in J. Franzen's *Crossroads*. Indeed, in the opening lines of J. Franzen's *Crossroads*, Russ Hildebrandt, the protagonist and the father of the Hildebrandt family is portrayed as a very devoted religious man whose position mirrors that of a role model in society. But as the story unfolds, Russ Hildebrandt is caught in a story of infidelity.

RUSS internal conflict is evident in the narrator's question: "Why did he still feel that sin, though forgiven, could be called back into life by an unexamined *thought?" (Crossroads, 2021, p.32).* This passage reveals that forgiveness has not entirely relieved Russ of his moral anxiety. His religious beliefs continue to shape his understanding of his action, demonstrating how internalized moral expectations can influence an individual even when the immediate consequence s of wrongdoing appear to have been resolved.

Moreover, Russ Hildebrandt is grappling with the feeling of guilt. His difficulties extend beyond his private relationship. Being a married man and a religious guide whom society expects to be a model. Having an affair with another woman contrasts with societal expectations. This infidelity leads him to unresolved guilt, even though his crime has been forgiven. He suffers from what the psychologist E. Goffman describes as moral guilt. He must fulfil the role of a pastor, an upright man while his inner turmoil haunts him. The narrator describes this internal feeling as follows: "He felt like a fraud in the pulpit, preaching virtues he no longer believed himself capable of." (*Crossroads*, p.14).

Russ Hildebrandt's internal crisis stems from both the contradiction between his pastoral position and his private desires, especially his infatuation with his mistress Frances Cottrell. This internal crisis also comes from his sentiment of humiliation when his authority gets waned. Indeed,

Pastor Russ is kicked out of the church community and replaced by a young progressive leader Rick Ambrose whom most members of the group regard as a better leader, because he embodies their own values and vision.

His exclusion from the Crossroads group and his loss of his former position of authority intensify his psychological distress. Following his exclusion from his religious community, Russ feels profoundly frustrated: "Nothing had wounded him more than the sense that the kids no longer looked up to him the way they had before Rick Ambrose arrived " (*Crossroads*, 17). Russ's eviction from the group leadership and the Church's choice of Rick Ambrose triggers a profound psychological scar in him. The authority and respect he has enjoyed begins to wash away. He suffers from self-validation, because his pastoral identity has been constructed through the recognition of others.

Being deprived of the authority and admiration provided by the youth, he atttempts to reconstruct his damaged self-image. However, Russ' psychological trouble is not an isolated case in the family where some members also experience inner struggles. The emergence of Rick Ambrose, whose progressive approach appeals to the younger members, challenges Russ's authority and exposes the changing expectations within the religious community. Russ's reaction illustrates how the loss of a valued social role can threaten an individual's sense of identity and belonging.

Franzen further emphazizes this conflict through the narrator's observation that Russ "felt like a fraud in the pulpit, preaching virtues no longer believed himself capable of "(*Crossroads*, 14). The word "fraud" highlights the distance between the pastor's public performance as a religious leader and his private awareness of his moral flaws. His predicaments thus illustrate the limitation of self-presentation. Although he is expected to embody religions virtues, he struggles to reconcile these expectations with his own behaviour.

Marion Hildebrandt is also portrayed as a character who experiences inner pain and distress. She carries psychological pain that ranges from self-image to sexual trauma that she has inherited from her past when she was younger. Indeed, Marion has aborted when she was in her twenties. Her past life often resurfaces when she grows older. The memories of her past life haunts her as it is revealed in the following passage: "She was afraid of the person she had been in her twenties, afraid she might still be that person" (*Crossroads*, p. 232). Marion lives in constant distress of living in her past. She wants to take her distance from her ugly past, but her memories pull her back. This state corresponds with Bourdieu's habitus concept of system of dispositions.

Bourdieu holds that the individual is involved in a process whereby the objective structures of the society are "incorporated in his mind" that forms the basis for understanding the root, the foundation of individual bahavior. In this perspective, Marion appears as an individual integrated in the structure of her society where she carries psychological burdens. These burdens include her sexual

violence, religious beliefs, secrecy, emotional neglect in her mariage, her father's depression caused by the destruction of his his business. Her conditions gets worse when her father commits suicide, an event that leaves her in a profound sense of insecurity and causes her mental health difficulties and her first abortion. These events in her life influence her behavior, especially her adult personality. In this respect, she tries and follows her social roles, while she is formed by her existential conditions. As Bourdieu states, "the practice of habitus always tend to reproduce the objective structures of which they are the product, they are determined by the past conditions which have produced the principle of their production" (Bourdieu, p. 72). Marion's experience in her young age, the memories of her past, and her later religious life become incorporated into her ways of thinking about her self.

Marion's situation is also worsened, because she is the wife to a Pastor. She is constrained to hide her internal struggle in order to maintain the role of a perfect minister's wife. Nonetheless, during a therapy with a psychologist, her inner trouble is revealed: "There was a darkness in her, she had never to name" (*Crossroads*, p.233). Marion conceals her dark side, because of the societal role expectations she is expected to fulfil. She is constrained to be a devoted wife while she internally fights against despair. She tries to claim a self beyond her role as wife and mother. From the lens of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Marion Hildebrand's psychologial suffering can be read a consequence of embodied conflict between personal history and social structure. Indeed, the French Sociologist describes habitus as an "acquired system of generative shemes" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 34). Distinction that produces thoughts, perceptions and actions that are consistent with the conditions in which the habitus was constituted.

Goffman's theory of self-presentation explains how people manage their ways others perceive them in social situations. His main idea is that people behave somewhat like actors on a stage, adjusting their behavior, appearance, language and emotions according to the social situation and the audience. In this perspective, the individual develops "the front stage which refers to a person who presents a particular version of himself to others. On other side some people develop back stage" where they live freely and reveals feelings or desires that they do not normally show publicly. The protestant pastor Hildbrant 's private doubts, jealousy, frustration, sexual desires, and personal ambitions can be understand as part of his back stage self. This contrast between the societal expectations and individuals' own desires may create in the individual a feeling of rebellion.

This revolt comes from the need of the individual to depart from social norms in order to assert their personal identity or individual self. This observation is obvious in the portrayal of the Hildebrand family. As a father, husband and devoted religious man, Russ Hildebrand expects his family members to follow moral and religious norms. This attitude arouses tensions in his own family as his son, Clem, pictures: "There's nothing you can say that's going to make me love you again. I have to go; I have

to find myself." (*Crossroads*, p. 73). Eloquently enough, Clem thinks of leaving the family home, because he can no longer stand his father. His rejection of his father's authority through the rebellious act of leaving his father's home is expressive of his desire to take his independence.

Erving Goffman explains that this kind of tension occurs in a family, because of the generational gap and the children's need to assert their individuation and create their own identity outside the oppressive paternal influence and norms. For him identity is not simply something fixed inside an individual. It is also produced and negotiated through social interaction. This is why the pastor Hildebrand is not an individual with private desire, he is also performing the social role "of pastor.

The picture of the Hildebrand family illustrates tensions within the family sphere and the larger society as well. These conflicts mostly stem from the contradictions between the assertion of the individual self, societal expectations and religious norms. The novel depicts this struggle between religious morals and the Hildebrandt family members' real aspirations and desires.

2. BETWEEN MORAL VALUES AND FAITH: GRAPPLING WITH RELIGIOUS IDEALS.

Moral values and faith constitute a major theme in Franzen's narrative. The protagonist, Russ Hildebrand is portrayed as a character who experiences internal struggles because of the conflict between his personal human nature and moral and religious norms. Throughout the novel, Russ Hildebrandt's internal struggle is juxtaposed with his quest of redemption. After his extra-marital relation with Frances Cottrell, a member of the church, has been revealed, he has to grapple with the thought of forgiveness and redemption which he believes should come from himself and God. In other words, he is haunted by what he regards as a sin and his search of forgiveness in God and himself. His psychological state is highlighted through his prayer to God: "God forgive me for the thing I cannot forgive myself" (*Crossroads*, p. 95). His call for divine pardon captures the internal conflict he goes through. He is devastated by his feeling of guilt to the point that he cannot pardon himself for his sin. As a result, he grapples with the idea of redemption.

Russ Hildebrand is deeply tied to his ego, his professional status and bitter rivalry with the young who rejects him. His quets for personal and professional redemption is linked to the youth's rejection of his personality. In his analysis of religous socialization, habitus, and the conflit between moral norms and personal desires, Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework provides a perspective for understanding the complex relationship between religious moral values, individual behavior, and personal identity in Jonathan Franzen's *Crossroads*.

Jonathan's fiction suggests that religious values, individual behavior and personal identity are three interconnected elements. Franzen thus doesn,t present faith simply as a fixed moral system to

regulate human being bahavior. Instead, it demonstrates how religious ideals become internalized by individuals, influence their behavior, and sometimes create conflits between who they believe they should be and who they actually are. Religious values remain greatly as a moral framework, that higlights family that lives within a strongly religious environment. Russ is a pastor, Marion has a catholic religious backgroung and their children encounter religion through the church and the youth group Crossroads.

Religion therefore provides them concepts such as sin, goodness, sacrifice, forgiveness, responsability and redemption. However the Crossroads of Franzen complicates these values because most the characters do not always behave according to these values. Hildbrant example testifies and remain one the clearest examples. As a pastor russ is expected tod embody christian morality, fidelity, humility and spiritual leadership. Yet he experiences sexual desires for France, resentement towar rick Ambrose and frustration with his marriage and declining professional status.

Hilbrandt's problem is therefore not simply that "he breaks religious rules." More deeply these religious rules and identities conflict with the personal desires and wounded sense of self. In this perspective the novel repeatedly asks whether their actions are fixed with the personal desires and self-interest. He desire for Frances becomes connected to his desire to recorver a sens of importance and masculinity. His conflict whith Rick ambrose is similary connected to his wounded professional identity.

In this perspective one critic describes him as being a Crossroads "sexuality and spirituality" as well as his family and his professional life. Thus Franzen portrays russ as religious crisis due to his inability to reconcile his desires, professional ambition, marital responsabilities, and religious ideals that destabilize his own undertanding. As far as P .Bourdieu is concerned, Marion, Hildbrandt wife's religious habitus and internalized moral values from her catholic formation, offers him a particular useful case for his approach.

Although Bourdieux does not theorize a direct opposition between religious principles and an innate or universal human nature, his concept of habitus, socialization, and symbolic power, helps explain how religious virtues are incorporated into individuals, and subsequently influence their perceptions, desires, and conduct. For bourdieu, Marion 's catholic formation has given her a deeply inernalized system of dispositions concerning sin, guilt morality, marriage and forgiveness. Thus even she suffers, psychologically, she continous to interpret her experiences through this moral and religious framework. This means that religious is not simply a thing Marion consciously chooses. It has become and remains part of the way she perceives herself and interprets the world.

Through Bourdieu's concept of habitus : socialy and historicall acquired dispositions become internalized and guide perception and behavior. Thus Marion's religious values can simultaneously,

give her a moral guidance, regulate her behavior , produce guilt and self-reproach, constain her ability to express certain desires and contribute to her sens of identity. Her case helps to deeply understand that religious values can become embodied dispositions rather than simply external rules. Thus religiou is belonging to moral interpretation and identity formation.

As well as Marion, the youngers group of crossroads also are instilled with protestant religious values, and are socialized under the concept of habitus. Thus religious as members they cannot forgive Russ Hildebrand's sin, and give him corresponding considerations. They implicitely represent this social structure, and they unconsciously incorporate its orders and norms in Bourdieu's terms. In this perspective, Russ's conflict with the young makes the Bourdieu's interpretation stronger. This conflict that seems in surface a mere disagreement between an older pastor and younger peoples,reveals the gap between an individual and a whole system, which refers to religious's organization. This reaveals the generational gap in Bourdieu's definition of habithus. Russ belongs to an older generation whose habitus has been formed around discipline, authority, hierarchy, self sacrifice and moral restraint. Pastor Russ experts religious expectations to involve obedience and selft-denial.

Younger members are shaped by different historical environments, or their social change that includes attidudes toward authority, sexuality, drug addiction, war, racial discrimination and individual freedom. Thus, the novel alludes to a clash between two systems. While the young search autonomy, experimentation, and resistance to traditional norms, the older adopt authority, attitude of obedience, religious responsibility and moral control.

As a person who holds a position of authority, specifically as a Pastor, Russ' religious capital gives him legitimacy. Reversely, the young people increasingly refuse to accept his authority due to his sin. The young's attitudes produce generational conflict between an inherited religious habitus and the rapid transformation of social clauses these young Church members live. Having internalized religious's ethic based on discipline, authority, sacrifice and moral restraint Russ struggles to accommodate the younger generation's growing demand for autonomy and resistance to traditional authority. For instance, the Pastor's own child rejects paternal authority. Religious norms and expectations are where they have been bring up. In this perspective one must well understand their opposition to Russ for having praticed extra marital relation from wich he tries to obtain redemption. These youth are structurally linked to the religious'expectations that they unconsciously defend in Bourdieu's terme.

For Bourdieu, the construction of the habitus, was "a way of escaping , from the choice between a structuralism without a subject the philosophy of the subject"(Bourdieu, 1990 , p. 10). Thus he dialectically related the self determined agency of invidivuals with their structural

subordination. He argues that children unconsciously inherit moral values, cultural tastes, language and communication styles and attitudes toward authorities not forgetting their aspirations and expectations from parents in their different communities as well as in their societies and living places. These dispositions become so deeply embedded in their behavior that people and children most of the time often mistake them for their own natural personal. That is why the family reproduces the social structures by passing them to one generation to the next.

The Hildebrand family socializes their children through their parental expectations, their devotion to religion, their emotional relationships and their daily interactions. To this end, religion plays a significant role in this process of socialization, as it helps to transmit moral values, beliefs and indeniable behavioral norms that individuals gradually internalize. For instance, Marion, Pastor Russ's wife is said to have Catholic backgrounds that influence her life. Like the family, religion contributes to the formation of the individuals' habitus by shaping their opinions and patterns of conduct that often persist throughout their lives.

In *Crossroads*, religion remains the pillar of a strong education about the right and wrong, ritual and practice, authority, duty, sacrifices and forgiveness. Religious institutions play a crucial role in the reproduction of cultural values and social order across generations. As Bourdieu asserts, "the habitus is the product of the history. In this sense, the habitus is the generative sheme that underlines concrete human practices as assets (Audehm 2001, p.160). Habitus coporates external objectives living conditions and develop internal dispositions, which in turm generate schemes of pratice and perception. Hence can be understood as simultaneous internalization and externalization. In Bourdieu's terms, this was "structured and stucturing structures" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.295). P. Bourdieu's theory of habitus can helps explain how moral values and faith can become internalized through religious upbringing, while also producing inner conflit when personal desires do not fit religious ideals.

For Bourdieu, the habitus is a system deeply internalized dispositions acquired through family, education, religion and social experience. These influence how people think, feel, juge and behave. In the religion's context, a person may gradually internalize values such as, obedience to religious authority, fidelity and self. In this contex, religiou's faith becomes thus part of the habitus as this habitus refers to deeply internalized dispositions acquired by indivuduals through socialization. These dispositions profoundly influencehow people perceive situations, jugdge what is right or wrong and act. Religious's upbringing and socialization echo internalized dispositions of moral values that influence the individuals' behaviors. In this perspective, faith is not only a set of beliefs that a person consciously accepts. Through family, church, religious education, and repeated practices, religious principles become incorporated into the person's way of thinking and acting

within his environment. Bourden describes as a "system of durable, transposable dispositions", (*The Logic of Practice* published 1990 p.53).

Jonathan Franzen's *Crossroads* illustrates this sociological approach by highlighting the connection between religious values and family issues. However, this connection between religious institutions and family leadership often leads to conflict as it is the case in the novel. As the main constructors, these children are involved in a process in which the objective structure of the protestant religious norms and are incorporated.

Thus as a reverend pastor, he holds the responsibility of not only being a model for the youth, but he also have to teach these, young people religious values. However, Russ Hildebrandt is contested by the members of his group who find his religious values hard and somehow constraining for them. The members of the group soon begin to reject Hildebrandt's rules, directions and instructions. After a group mission, Pastor Russ Hildebrandt begins to pray. But he is suddenly interrupted by Sally Perry, a *Crossroads* church member, in the following terms: "No (…) I'm sorry, but no. I'm sick of his stupid prayers (…) Is anyone else in his article "Finding the Middle Zone: Redefining Spirituality Through Contemporary American Literature" where he suggests that "given that Russ is the symbol of the traditional religious ideology which initially provided the foundation of Crossroads", his growing rejection from the members such as Sally and Laura is expressive of the "disinterest in those (religious) ideologies as well" (M. Mc Poland, 2023, p.17). For M. Mc Poland, the rejection of Russ as a religious leader symbolizes the dismissal of religious values viewed as repressive and restrictive.

The younger generation that wants to move away from oppressive religious ideals show their resistance and express the desire to free themselves from inherited religious ideals. Their desire is to construct their own identities based on personal autonomy and individual choices. However, as a novel, *Crossroads* suggest that moral autonomy loses its legitimacy when it is not supported by personal integrity.

3. SOCIAL CONTEXT: THE GENERATIONAL GAP.

Franzen's *Crossroads* narrates the story of the Hildebrandt family in the past highlighting how the social context influences characters' conducts. This way of setting narratives in the past, Timothy W. Galow, the American scholar professor of English and contemporary American novelist, argues that it is one the major characteristic of Jonathan Franzen' s novels and understanding the social context is of paramount importance to understand the conflicts and other societal issues depicted in his novels.

Timothy Galow's conception of social context, especially the idea that literary characters are shaped by historical, cultural, and social conditons of their particular moment. In his book *Understanding Jonathan Franzen* (2023) Timothy W. Galow observes:

> Within this larger historical framework, Franzen's novels create a sense of depth in part by carefully positioning characters in a matrix of institutions and discourses. People engage with families and neighborhoods, jobs and corporations, religion and politics. Each of these sites of interaction is in turn inflected by the prevailing attitudes about gender, sexuality, race, class, ethnicicity and age (Galow 2023, p. 8).

Galow infers that most of Franzen's novels which are inscribed in a historical context and characters attitudes echo a broader network of social forces. In this perspective, Franzen's characters do not act as self-determined individuals but as family and institutional ideals of the period in which they live in. This period contributes to shape their thoughts, behaviors and relation to others as Bourdieu asserts through his concept of hahitus. The characters' struggles and internal conflicts are inseparable of the historical and ideological. (Bourdieu &Wacquant, 1992, p. 136). Such an observation is expressed in Jonathan Franzen's *Crossroads*.

Set in the 1970s, Franzen's *Crossroads* depicts a period marked by major social and cultural changes in the United States. Hildebrandt family embodies this historical transition. The novel profoundly deals with the generational conflict and David Garner believes that the prevailing context of that period has influenced the narrative of *Crossroads*. In the novel, Jonathan Franzen reveals that the 1970s marks a rupture between traditional and modern values. This created a conflict between generations. Younger generations sought to depart from traditional and conservative norms that have come to view as oppressive and somehow backwards. The parents Russ and Marion are largely attached to establish religious and moral values whereas their children, Clem and Becky specially are increasingly questioning or rejecting those inherited religious norms.

The children seek to carve out their own ways different from the ones determined by family and religious institutions. Proportionally, the old generations who are tied to traditional ideals resist any change. This generational conflict is highlighted in Jonathan Franzen's *Crossroads* through the Hildebrandt family where the relation between the family members reflects this generational divide. On the one hand, Russ Hildebrandt and his wife Marion, embody the old generation, with their beliefs in traditional and cultural values. They represent, an older generation shape by religious morality, pastoral authority, family hierarchy and expectations. Thus religious values should regulate personal behaviour marked by self-sacrifice, fidelity, self-control and the preservation of family unity. On the other hand, Becky and Clem, seek autonomy in different ways. Becky explores her independence through romantic relationships sexuality, and changing social statut, while her invol in youth culturethrough relationship, social status, sexuality and involvement with the youth culture reflects

her search for a personal identity beyond traditional family and religious expectations. Contrastively, when Clem decides to participate in the Vietnam War, he justifies his decision as a moral duty and an expression of personal convictions. Like Clem, the younger generation rejects traditional values. Such decisions made by the young illustrate the increasing distance between them and traditional parental authority.

The generational discrepancy becomes apparent when Clem, rejecting his father's strong devotion to religious practices and his insistence on keeping traditional norms. The young boy voices: "I can't be part of this anymore. I can't live in this house, with this family," (*Crossroads*, p. 117). Clem's statement summarizes the whole idea of generational gap that exists in the Hildebrandt family. His detachment from his father and his intentions to leave the familial house are not merely physical but ideological. His departure highlights the great divide between him and his father. Clem ends up viewing his father's values and conducts as oppressive and opposed to his own values. In other words, he expresses his desire to depart from his father's values and to assert his own individual identity.

Another instance of the generational gap in the novel is observed in the conversation between Clem and his father about the Vietnam War. Both have a very contrasting view on the war as the narrative voice puts it: "Clem couldn't stand to be in the same room with him. He was giving up his student deferment to show his father what a strong man did" (*Crossroads*, p. 315). Clem wants to join the battle field in Vietnam. He believes that fighting at this war means showing off his bravery and displaying his masculinity. Through this masculinity, Clem wishes bring up his courage identity, sacrifice and moral commitment. Thus, he exposes his desire of moral values and patriotism. While his father, Russ Hildebrandt, Clem stands for manhood, which equates with bravery at the battle field. Both likely agree on nothing. Clem finally feels alienated by his father's authority and the values the latter represents. He rebels against his father's views and tries to define masculinity on his own terms.

Clem's attitude contrasts with that of his own mother, Marion Hildebrandt. While Clem discloses a readiness to challenge norms and institutional expectations and an openness to new perspectives, Marion is confined in the mold of a traditional pattern, unable to move ahead. Talking about Marion, the narrative voice avers: "She had plenty of secrets, but there were all too large for a pastor's wife to safely betray" (*Crossroads*, p.503). Marion is portrayed as a devoted wife who holds the responsibility of being a model for the youth. Her responsibility extends to her desire to teach religious values to those young people.

Robert Green would argue that Marion's recurring guilt and self judgement reflect deeply ingrained behavioral and emotional patterns that are difficult to escape. Thinking about Marion, Franzen's novels however goes further by showing that although these sharping forces are powerful,

Marion gradually achieves a greater degree of self-awareness, making her one of the characters who comes closest to genuine transformation.

This description pictures how older generations, particularly women, bear hidden burdens such as guilt, repression and social expectations that contrast with younger generation's openness or rebellion. Timothy W Galow (2023, p.9) illustrates this point when he argues that the generational gap in Jonthan Franzen's novels can be seen in the fact that "Franzen's literary imagination problematizes notions of development or change, they are hihghly critical of the characters who refuse the hard, if often unsuccessful, work of introspection. (…) Disparaging characters for their resistance to change has, (…) evolved into a more evolved exploration of individuals struggles." Accordingly, Marion who in several ways embodies the older generation, is entrapped in the old patterns and norms. She seems to resist change as opposed to the younger generation represented by Clem. Marion resists change because change threatens the psychological defense that have allowed her to survive decades of unresolved trauma, guilt and shame. Her apparent resistance is a form of self-protection rather than mere stubborness. Marion 's adoption of fixed identity is based on her guilty when she interprets her past through a religious lens, convincing herself being fundamentally deserving of punishment. Marion through these ways seem to deeply embodies once more the older generation.

The notion of generational conflict can also be located in Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural or social capital. Here, the cultural capital of Russ Hildebrandt is connected with his position of a devoted religious man who respects traditional and religious values while the cultural of his son Clem, and to a larger extent, younger characters in the family are linked to their strong rejection to the values embodied by their father. This contradiction highlights a social context in which young people try to reject the traditional patterns and norms to embrace their own individualistic identity and values.

CONCLUSION

Jonathan Franzen's *Crossroads* portrays the Hildebrandt family as a social unit in which religious faith, social expectations and personal desires intersect, and often generating psychological struggles and generational conflict. Franzen's characters Russ and Marion illustrate how religious beliefs and family responsibilities influence individual behaviour while creating tensions between moral ideals and private desires.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus helps explain how inherited values influence the characters' identities, while Goffman's theory of self- presentation illuminates the gap between their public roles and private experiences. Erving Greene's insights into human nature further complement this analysis

of individual motivations and interpersonal relationships while Galow's critical perspective situates the novel within Franzen's broader exploration of American family life. Meanwhile Becky and Clem's attempts to achieve autonomy reveal the younger generation's struggle to negotiate inherited values and changing social expectations.

Ultimately, *Crossroads* suggests that identity is neither entirely determined by the past, nor completely through the ongoing negotiation between social inheritance, personal experience and the desire for individual freedom. Thus, the fiction presents family as a social unit the reproduces established norms and, paradoxically as a structure that can potentially operate resistance and transformation.

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