



**SENSE OF BELONGING, MULTICULTURALISM AND IDENTITY
CRISIS: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF ZADIE SMITH'S *WHITE TEETH***

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Abstract

*This study aimed to critically analyze how characters negotiate the themes of multiculturalism, identity crises and sense of belonging. In the multicultural setting of metropolitan London, one's identity is always shifting. The study confers historical background on how postcolonial migration leads to hybrid but conflicted identities by generating tensions between inherited traditions and modern British values. Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* (2000) served as primary source for this research. A close textual reading of the novel has been conducted using a qualitative approach. The study examines issues faced by immigrants in the post-World War II West using Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory of hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, cultural divergence, and otherness from his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). The study examined that Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) portrayed multiculturalism and identity crises in a post-colonial context. The findings of the study revealed that characters' past and origins shaped their identities and complicated their lives in multicultural city of London. As a result, the study highlighted the experience of immigrants while demonstrating how power dynamics between former colonizers and colonized people affect their relationship in the postcolonial age. The further studies may look into the communal, monetary and religious background of author's life instead of solely focusing on the characters of this play..*

Keywords:

*Identity crises, multiculturalism, post colonialism, sense of belonging, *White Teeth*.*

Introduction

Zadie Smith is considered as the most promising young author of the Great Britain. Typically, her novel *White Teeth* addresses the issues of immigrants in the multiracial London society. In terms of social representation, all the characters are attuned to their postcolonial subject positioning, and the novel has the task of telling the story of colonialism. With the rising trends in globalism, ethnic and cultural affiliation has turned into a topical issue in contemporary literature; notions such as identity, citizenship or multiculturalism all refer to the new realities people encounter in an increasingly globalized world. These issues can be examined through the lens of post colonialism in the novel *White Teeth* (2000), as the plot is focused on the lives of immigrants and their children in London. The purpose of this research is to consider the different aspects of the main character and analyze and compare Smith's depictions of modern identification crisis and the experience of the search for an identity within a multicultural setting. Therefore this thesis will through exploring



interpersonal relations and detailing the cultural encounters portrayed in *White Teeth* (2000) strive to reveal the diverse, complex processes that underlie the construction of postcolonial subjectivity, and use such an understanding to reveal the larger questions of cultural amalgamation and the per as well as continuing process of search for identity in the multiethnic society.

Belonging, as discussed in studies refers to how an individual feels part of a group, valued and supported by others in various social settings (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Hagerty et al., 1992). Chinonye J. Chidolue once said, "When feelings of uncertainty start affecting you may start to lose your sense of belonging."

In the book *White Teeth* (2000) immigrants are portrayed as individuals coming from backgrounds, with hopes and dreams. However they are also shown as unaware of the challenges awaiting them in their land. Particularly they seem unprepared to confront their heritage when pressured to adapt to norms while preserving their own traditions. This realization often leaves first generation immigrants feeling lost and struggling to find their place in this environment.

To Doytcheva, multiculturalism is a political program, an intellectual controversy, and practice that emerges with the idea of raising different legitimate cultures in order to transform the institutions of contemporary democracies, as well as enhance and express their difference (Durugönül, 2012). It is here imperative to understand that multiculturalism does not focus on, or once again, reduces itself to, individual differences and individual identity; rather it focuses on differences and interface goods that are cultivated out of, from cultural sources including language, religion and ethnic origin. That is, it is vital to analyse collective values, daily behaviour, and practices, which constitute essential prerequisites, to discuss multiculturalism (Parekh, 2002). This paper aims at establishing that the interpretation of multiculturalism has been given several points of view.

One of the most crucial things for every human being is their "identity." According to Erikson (1970), the term "identity" connotes both a permanent sharing of some form of basic feature with others as well as a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness), expressing such a mutual link. Identity is the ability to relate with different sorts of people without viewing difficulties of variety as problems and the knowledge of oneself and one's beliefs.

In her novel *White Teeth* (2000), Zadie Smith explores the struggles of three distinct families the Jonases, the Iqbals, and the Chalfens each with a mixed ethnic origin and a unique cultural inheritance. Smith paints a different picture of London, the setting for the novel, by depicting a cast of diverse characters, most of whom are immigrants from colonized countries that were colonized before World War II. Smith also addresses issues that arise for these characters as a result of the dominant local culture, such as the erosion of their sense of identity, their sense of otherness, and their sense of belonging to a particular place.

Statement of the Problem

While there has been significant research on Zadie Smith's works and the theme of identity, there remains a gap in the comparative analysis of how her characters negotiate their identities and sense of belonging in the context of contemporary multiculturalism. This research seeks to address this gap by conducting a deep study of *White Teeth* (2000) through the theoretical framework of post colonialism.



Research Objectives

- To explore how the characters, in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* grapple with their feeling of belonging in environments.
- To investigate the portrayal and reflection on multiculturalism and postcolonial identity within the selected novel.
- To probe the factors shaping characters sense of self and their contribution to identity challenges, within a framework.

Research Questions

- 1) How do characters in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* negotiate their sense of belonging?
- 2) How does Smith portray multiculturalism in *White Teeth*?
- 3) How different characters of *White Teeth* face identity crises?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addresses contemporary issues related to identity and belonging. As societies become increasingly diverse, understanding how individuals navigate their multiple identities and the sense of belonging is crucial for fostering inclusivity. The comparative nature of the analysis allows for a deeper understanding of how multiculturalism is depicted in different contexts and eras. This approach helps in identifying common themes and unique perspectives across Smith's works, shedding light on the evolution of multiculturalism in contemporary literature.

Literature Review

According to McLeod (2004), "Smith's novel offers a version of London in which the fortunes of plot and character development are no longer primarily determined by the depressingly familiar social conflicts of previous decades." In this way, it addresses post-postcolonial urban daily life rather than reliving postcolonial struggles.

In *White Teeth* (2000), Beens (2017) explores Irie's struggle with her hybridity, which Homi K. Bhabha defines as "the migrant culture of the 'in-between', the minority position". She feels as though she doesn't fit in this early era of Western culture in the twenty-first century. The "English Rose," who is envisioned as being white, slender, and having long, straight hair, is the focal point of beauty standards. Irie is not at all at ease in her own skin as she lacks each and every one of these qualities.

According to Nath (2020), there are also autobiographical elements in this novel. Being the daughter of a White man and a Black woman, Smith's mixed-ethnic identity and the multicultural environment she lives in have a significant effect on her works. The book's first-generation protagonists find it difficult to both integrate into British culture and uphold their cultural values. Being unable to reintegrate into London society, they are constantly overcome with a sense of "rootlessness".

Decentralization also occurs in the narrative domain, where the omniscient narrator and any particular racial or ethnic group of characters are no longer considered to be the sources of authority. According to Paul Gilroy (1993), the construction of English identity can be achieved through the juxtaposition of both routes and roots. Irie Jones's subjectivity is defined by both her routes and her roots, as evidenced by the way she alternates between her allegiance to her British identity as a second-generation immigrant and her loyalty to her ethnic origins back in



Jamaica. According to Thompson (2005), "this clash of roots which challenges Irie's social and cultural location" may be the cause of Irie's desire for a body that denies its Africanness.

In his 2009 book *Zadie Smith*, Philip Tew offers a thorough critique of Smith's investigation into hybrid identities. Tew talks about how Smith's characters navigate their heterogeneous backgrounds in a postcolonial London, embodying Bhabha's concept of hybridity. According to Tew's research, *White Teeth* (2000) challenges dogmatic ideas of cultural authenticity and purity by portraying identity as flexible and multidimensional.

John McLeod, (2004), addresses the themes of religion and secularism in *White Teeth* (2000). McLeod discusses how Smith portrays the influence of religion on identity and community, particularly through the characters of Samad and Millat Iqbal. His analysis shows that *White Teeth* (2000) critiques both the rigid adherence to religious orthodoxy and the challenges of secularism in a multicultural context, highlighting the complex interplay between faith, identity, and cultural belonging

Every character in *White Teeth* (2000), according to Patil and Junne (2019), has a distinct identity within a particular setting. It's important to understand that Samad's heritage, history, and religion are what make him who he is as a member of the first generation of immigrants. But the second generation immigrants are defined by their hobbies, which include the formation of Magid and Irie's identities. They have chosen their hobbies, and sometimes their behavior deviates from their public image. Irie tries to pass like a white British girl despite having dark complexion and Jamaican background, while Magid acts almost like a British youngster, although his father believes he is Muslim and Bengali.

According to Michlin (2006), *White Teeth* (2000) subverts conventional notions of a steady, cohesive identity by presenting people whose identities are molded by their multicultural upbringings. According to her research, Smith's book highlights the ongoing process of redefining and negotiating one's identity in a multicultural society and captures the dynamic and fractured character of postcolonial identities. In order to illustrate the legacy of multi-cultural Britain's past, this book depicts daily bigotry and a comedic portrayal of a hybrid community, writes Moss (2003), emphasizing the everyday hybridity in *White Teeth* (2000). In this sense, it addresses postcolonial urban daily life rather than reliving postcolonial struggles.

Brooke-Rose (2007) investigates how historical narratives are portrayed in the book. Brooke-Rose draws attention to the way Smith used metafictional devices to examine the nature of historical memory and reality by fusing personal and societal history into the story. According to her study, *White Teeth* (2000) addresses the effects of migration and colonialism, showing how past events continue to influence present identities and experiences.

Upstone (2010) talks about how race, gender, and class are intertwined in *White Teeth* (2000). Upstone observes that Smith skillfully combines various social categories to draw attention to the complex difficulties her characters encounter. Her findings suggest that Smith's story challenges gender dynamics and socioeconomic inequality within London's multicultural context in addition to addressing racial and cultural hybridity.

Tran Thu (2013) discusses the concepts of diversity in Britain. The research's study mainly focuses on Magid, Millat, and Irie since they are second-generation migrants whose identities are rooted in both their new country and their parents' culture. They differ from first generation migrants and their peers without an immigrant background in that they are simultaneously rooted in two cultures



and see equal value and relevance in both. People have to negotiate their identities as a consequence, and by doing so, they effectively create the multicultural identity of Britain. Smith describes her ideal multicultural identity in this passage, implying that it will take time to develop such. The repercussions of an "excess of belonging" are examined by Molly Thompson (2002) in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. First-generation immigrants, according to Thompson, might recognize and feel a connection to a familiar "home" where they can find and follow their ancestry (122). Jawich (2014) said that the Samad's incapacity to control his two boys' course choices highlights the unexpected transformation of cultural identity that people in diaspora endure. In addition to Gayatri Spivak's criticism, Zadie Smith presents problems in a unique way. She draws attention to the difficulties that first-generation immigrants in the UK encounter while assimilating into a new society, but second-generation immigrants naturally incorporate aspects of both dominant and minority cultures.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The study uses a qualitative approach to compare and contrast the themes of multiculturalism, identity crisis, and sense of belonging in Zadie Smith's book *White Teeth* (2000). The novel *White Teeth* is one of the key sources. Books, journals, articles, library resources, and online sources are examples of secondary sources. This research used an inductive technique to critically and qualitatively investigate the postcolonial themes of identity crises, multiculturalism, and belonging found in Zadie Smith's writings. Concepts like hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and otherness are highlighted in Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory to explain how cultural identities are flexible and change over time in colonial and postcolonial contexts. His theories from *The Location of Culture* (1994) shed light on how people balance identity and belonging in the face of colonizer-colonized power relations.

Postcolonial theory serves as the foundation for this research study's theoretical framework. Examining colonial history's effects on modern multicultural societies, the intricate dynamics of identity and belonging, and the lasting effects of imperialism are all made possible by using post colonialist theory as a lens. This approach is especially insightful in the context of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) because it permits a thorough examination of the ways in which characters negotiate their cultural identities in the dynamic environment of postcolonial diversity. The postcolonial framework plays a crucial role in analyzing the identities of the characters and their interactions with the complicated historical and cultural context of postcolonial Britain. When read via a postcolonial lens, the novel's examination of diversity, hybrid identities, and the blending of diverse cultural influences becomes deeper and more subtle.

Key publications like Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which challenges Western conceptions of the Eastern world and establishes the groundwork for postcolonial theory, have had a substantial influence on the investigation of identity, belonging, and diversity in postcolonial literature. The power structures and cultural hegemony that affect identity formation in postcolonial situations are highlighted in Said's work. Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) extends these conversations even farther and offers a framework for comprehending the fluid and dynamic character of postcolonial identities by proposing ideas like hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and the "Third Space." Stuart Hall's essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990) stresses that cultural identities are created and unfolded, especially in diasporic communities, and his conclusions



regarding the complex nature of the diasporic experience are central to the presentation of the characters populated in *White Teeth* (2000).

Diaspora and displacement are central issues within this framework. Migration is the main factor causing diaspora and is strongly associated with the theories of place and displacement. Prominent diaspora theorists like Avtar Brah, Robin Cohen, and William Safran contend that migration, displacement, and diaspora are interwoven processes. Bhammer describes displacement as the separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture. This sense of displacement and alienation injects psychological imbalance that complicates adaptability in a new land. The German word *unheimlich*, meaning strange and terrifying, is the source of the English phrase unhomely. Bhabha's definition of unhomeliness borrows from Freud's work, explaining how boundaries between home and world become confused, forcing upon individuals a divided and disorienting vision.

Useful overviews of postcolonial literary trends, which depict the various strategies by which postcolonial writers deal with and alter colonial legacies, are featured in two influential literary analyses: Boehmer's book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (1995), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). These analyses shows critical modes of understanding how Smith works through postcolonial identity crisis and multicultural confrontation in *White Teeth* (2000).

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is seminal in postcolonial theory. He refers to hybridity as an interstitial space that gives birth to new signs of identity through negotiation of differences. Cultures, according to Bhabha, are not pure; they are composites shaped by values that oscillate in space and time. The interaction between colonizer and colonized creates hybrid forms, challenging fixed cultural notions. Mimicry, another concept by Bhabha, emerges when colonized individuals imitate the dominant culture almost the same but not quite producing exaggerated forms that mock authority. Ambivalence arises as these individuals simultaneously resist and internalize colonial influence, leading to mixed feelings about both cultures.

Applying these theoretical concepts, this research critically analyzes *White Teeth* (2000) within the diasporic setting to examine hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and unhomeliness as postcolonial consequences. The framework incorporates the insights of Said, Bhabha, and Hall to understand identity conflicts, cultural negotiation, and the lingering colonial legacy in multicultural Britain. By linking postcolonial claims and defensive tactics, the analysis explores how Smith's characters confront the burden of colonial history while adapting to modern diversity. This theoretical approach deepens understanding of multicultural identities and highlights the lasting effects of imperialism in contemporary literature.

Textual Analysis

This chapter will describe the textual analysis carried out on Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and has been aligned to three major research questions. The inference about Smith's characters' employment of cultural terrains and subjectivity is grounded on concrete references to textual examples from *White Teeth* (2000). Consequently, the analysis show that characters like Samad Iqbal, Irie Jones, and Millat Iqbal face issues with identity and place in terms of the cultures they identify with and the colonial histories they inherited. Analyzing these characters' transformations,



the chapter illuminates the representation of multiculturalism in the novel to provide the understanding of how the postcolonial subjectivity is negotiated and problematized in today's society.

Characters' Sense of Belonging in *White Teeth* (2000)

In *White Teeth* (2000), the characters search for a place they can call "home" and feel a feeling of acceptance. The connections in *White Teeth* (2000) are crucial to the story because they provide the sense that home is determined only by the people one is with. The families' complex lives in *White Teeth* reflect the complex nature of their "Britishness."

Immigrant Samad Iqbal, who is from Bengal, finds it difficult to balance his traditional beliefs with the demands of a cosmopolitan London. His struggle to balance his need to adjust to his new surroundings with his wish to preserve his cultural heritage is evident in his negotiation of belonging. This battle is best illustrated by Samad's attempts to teach his boys, Magid and Millat, traditional values. For example, Samad believes that "*roots were essential*" and sends Magid back to Bangladesh in an effort to retain his ethnic identity (Smith, 2000, p. 161).

Multicultural London

The British city, London, serves as the setting for the book. Smith was born and raised in this location; therefore it's possible that this has no particular importance. However, given that the novel *White Teeth* (2000) examines the lives of immigrant families, picking London as the scene may have been a conscious decision. The whole tale takes place in London in *White Teeth*, with sporadic trips to Jamaica, India, and Eastern Europe. The primary characters reside and interact there. Here, the lives of the three families the Chalfens, the Iqbals, and the Joneses develop and become intertwined.

London as a truly multi-ethnic space demonstrates itself when, for instance, Archie attends a party to celebrate the presumed end of the world and meets,

"Two black guys, a topless Chinese girl, and a white woman wearing a toga [...] sitting around on wooden chairs, playing rummy" (ibid 21).

He himself was married for thirty years to Ophelia, an Italian, and his second wife, Clara, is Jamaican. The legacy of British imperialism is reflected in the cosmopolitan environment and multiethnic clientele. Furthermore, when only frequent customers are allowed in, the significance of history is highlighted even more. When a visitor does enter, though, he or she will see that many pairs of eyes are watching them some doubtful, some superior implying that the locals, however diverse, are home there and feel protective about it.

"The hapless stranger will stumble out, warily, backwards, knocking over the life-size cut-out of Viv Richards as he goes. The customers will laugh. O'Connell's is no place for strangers."

Family Ties and Cultural Traditions

Belonging from different cultures in a multicultural society, every character has portrayed the themes of attachment. This can be seen when Alsana was so much concerned about her son:

"And this is what Alsana really held against Samad... that Magid should learn to hold his life lightly... still she hated the thought that Magid should be as she had once been: holding on to a life no heavier than a paisa coin, wading thoughtlessly through floods, shuddering underneath the weight of black skies."



Samad suffers from both a severe sense of cultural loss and physical displacement. His attempts to maintain his identity by the upholding of cultural customs, including his resolve to return his son Magid to Bangladesh in order to preserve their history, serve as an example of this. Samad's discomfort with Western civilization reflects his fear of cultural loss and physical displacement. For him,

"Tradition was culture, and culture led to roots, and these were good, these were untainted principles. That didn't mean he could live by them, abide by them, or grow in the manner they demanded, but roots were roots and roots were good."

Adaptation to Multicultural Society

Stereotypically, England is thought of as a primarily secular nation that once suggested that the rules of science may perhaps supersede the laws of religion the Enlightenment period comes to mind. Bangladesh is also perceived as a nation that has historically been characterized by its many religious beliefs, which may increase the likelihood of producing citizens who are more radicalized in their religious views. Smith plays hilariously with the stereotypes assigned to various cultures and peoples in *White Teeth* (2000).

Millat is really looking for anyplace that he truly feels comfortable, and while it appears as though this place is with Irie, he never seems to fully accept or formally identify it. Likely this is due to his struggle to find his place in Britain. Smith describes Millat best when she says:

"Underneath it all, there remained an ever present anger and hurt, the feeling of belonging nowhere that comes to people who belong everywhere".

Millat's strained relationship with his parents is the main site of his instability. Undoubtedly, Millat feels as though his father chose his brother Magid over him at a very young age when he decided to send only one son back to Bangladesh for what he thought would be a more traditional and respectful upbringing.

"There is rebellion in them, Archie... People call it assimilation when it is nothing but Corruption. Corruption!" (190).

Alsana fails to accept the culture in which she is living and raising a son, and punishes her son for growing up to be more "British" than "Bangladeshi." Alsana's ideas as to what constitutes family life are very unhealthy and indicative of her own upbringing. In an effort to offer advice before the birth of Irie, Alsana tells Clara and her niece Neena that:

"When you are from families such as ours you should have learnt that silence, what is not said, is the very best recipe for family life."

Alsana and Millat's difficulties obviously come from their very different childhoods; this is a particular problem for immigrant families. While she loathes Britain, Alsana feels much attached to her home country; she feels she has responsibilities there to her family and friends. Alsana's nostalgia for her home country is evident when she learns of the death of Indira Gandhi. Samad discovers her in tears, to which she cries:

"I am not crying for her, you idiot, I am crying for my friends... There will be blood on the streets back home... It will be like Mahshar, Judgment Day."

Since Alsana, Ambrosia, Hortense, and Clara Bowden all grew up in British-colonized nations (Alsana in India, the Bowdens in Jamaica), their perceptions of the nation to which they immigrated are unquestionably negative. In *White Teeth*, Samad responds to the term "Indian" by referring to the erratic character of his native nation. He says:



"I'm not actually from India, you know ... No. I'm from Bangladesh ... Previously Pakistan. Previous to that, Bengal" (133).

Generation Gap

Millat and Magid's political and personal views are opposed in the most fundamental ways, and as a result they avoid meeting each other again once Magid is back in England. The two go to lengths to avoid meeting. The complex past she keeps running into is the belonging she so desperately seeks. Due to her racial construction by society, she is the daughter of black Jamaican immigrant Clara and white British man Archie. Irie's quest to fit in is problematic. Clara, Irie's mother, finds this recall unsettling since she has strong negative memories of her grandpa, Captain Charlie Durham, having only heard stories of him from her mother. Clara says:

"Captain Charlie Durham wasn't smart. He had thought he was, but he wasn't. He sacrificed a thousand people because he wanted to save one woman he never really knew. Captain Charlie Durham was a no-good djam fool bwoy"

Due to their position as second-generation immigrants and their parents' challenging experiences growing up abroad, Millat and Magid have similar emotions of marginalization and inbetweennes. The two boys have quite different upbringings: Millat becomes popular in school, particularly with young ladies; he also grows resistant to authority and confused about religion in a more secular England.

Conversely, Magid acquires discipline in his academic pursuits and goes back to England to pursue a legal education. To his father's dismay, he rejects the Islamic faith and instead believes in the principles of nature and science. He also partners with eminent British scientist Marcus Chalfen on his Future Mouse project, which involves studying a publicly displayed mouse in order to treat cancer. The twins' upbringings obviously differ greatly, yet despite living far apart, they still have a strong emotional bond. It's crucial to keep in mind Smith's Russian doll metaphor in this situation.

Since Millat and Magid did share a womb, they must first reestablish themselves as significant figures in each other's life if they are to discover their identities through a quest backwards (into the past). Whereas Magid was raised in Bangladesh, Millat was raised in England. Each kid developed during this time apart in such a distinct way that, despite their twin status keeping them partially linked, none of them was able to truly identify the other as them. Samad Iqbal chooses to return one of his boys to Bangladesh in an attempt to prevent the "corruption" of his sons in England.

Samad's Disillusionment and Archie's Assimilation

Samad's way of behaving can be figured out through Bhabha's idea of mimicry, where the colonized subject emulates the colonizer, yet in a flawed way. Samad's endeavors to maintain his social customs in an English setting frequently bring about a mixture personality that is neither completely English nor altogether Bangladeshi.

"Samad was a man divided, torn between the past and the present."

Bhabha's concept of mimicry highlights how Archie's identity is shaped by his interactions with different cultural groups, leading to a sense of belonging that is dynamic and contingent. Archie's adaptability illustrates the potential for individuals to negotiate their sense of belonging through the strategic use of mimicry.

"Archie found himself fitting in nowhere and everywhere."



Portrayal of Multiculturalism in *White Teeth* (2000)

Britain is a multicultural nation that is made up of different nations within itself. The majority of immigrants came to Britain with high hopes of improving their living conditions and finding better jobs. However, they were met with inadequate conditions, humiliation, poverty, and misery, and especially after World War II, they suffered too much from cultural trauma, racism, and otherness issues in Britain. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity, in which diverse cultural traditions come together to form a dynamic and inclusive community.

“This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow, and white... you can walk into a playground and find Isaac Leung... Danny Rahman... Quang O'Rourke... and Irie Jones humming a tune” (Smith 326).

Smith portrays multiculturalism's dual nature, enriching yet challenging. Immigrants often conform to dominant culture for acceptance. Irie, for example, straightens her “afro-hair” to appear British. Such mimicry echoes Bhabha's theory colonized subjects adopt colonial traits, unsettling colonizer–colonized relations. Immigrants fear losing their heritage, while majority groups fear dilution of national identity. Millat's teacher's remark “*and we can learn about each other through each other's culture, can't we?*” (Smith 156) underscores aspirations for mutual understanding, though prejudice persists.

Jones Family's Multicultural Lifestyle

According to Bhabha, the lifestyle of the Jones family exemplifies the hybrid nature of multiculturalism. Their home, a “mixture,” mirrors the mixing and cooperation of various social customs. The Joneses' experience exemplifies the dynamic and inclusive nature of multicultural societies, where the third space facilitates the emergence of novel cultural identities from a variety of backgrounds.

The narrative highlights the paradox of immigrants racing toward integration while remaining tied to their past: “*they cannot escape their history any more than you yourself can lose your shadow.*” This tension reflects ongoing negotiations of belonging in diverse societies. Smith not only depicts the difficulties of the Iqbal family but also the desperate situation of the Jones family. Irie tries her best to look like an Englishwoman by changing the originality of her hair. The situation demonstrates that Irie wants to be recognized and accepted by English society, which is the source of superiority and power that is emphasized in the novel. When Archie calls him Sam instead of Samad, he turns out to be angry and says:

“Don't call me Sam, [...] I'm not one of your English matey-boys. My name is Samad Miah Iqbal. Not Sam. Not Sammy. And not – God forbid – Samuel. It is Samad’.

One of the most important characteristics of immigrants in the West after World War II is their fear of losing their identity. These struggles intensify across generations: Millat becomes militant, Magid an atheist, both fractured by parental expectations and British societal pressures. As Joyce observes, Joyce indicates in the novel:

“The fact is both these boys have serious emotional problems. They've been split up by their religions, by their cultures. Can you imagine the trauma?”

In this way, immigrants who came to Britain after World War II were oppressed by English culture, customs, and way of life. Because of this, Smith wants to bring people together to show how hard they tried to live together despite their problems.



White Teeth situates personal histories within larger imperial legacies. The narrative spans 1974–1999 yet constantly returns to formative historical moments, underscoring Shakespeare’s *Tempest* line: “What’s past is prologue.” Characters inherit histories of empire; their present identities are inseparable from colonial pasts. Through interconnected families Iqbals and Joneses, Smith interrogates how multicultural Britain reshapes, and is reshaped by, these legacies.

Archie 1974, 1945

Archie appears at the beginning of the book, which takes place in 1974. England in that time was tolerating outcomes of WWII but after the war ended, no one cared and "no one wanted to talk about that any more" (WT). England was attempting to fail to remember the horrible experience and was abusing its ex-officers simultaneously. Archie encounters responses that denigrate his war experience while looking for employment, stating that they "would require something other than merely having fought in a war" (ibid. 14), implying that his skills are "not relevant, not transferable" (ibid. 14, emphasis added). Archie winds up folding papers for a printing company in the end. The post-war time was likewise set apart by the flood of foreigners, who looked for work and a superior life on the English Isles. Archie "was the only man Samad knew on this little island" (ibid. 12), so Samad seeks him out, moves into the same London borough, and rekindles their friendship. Samad does this out of nostalgia. Life is not easy for the Bangladeshi couple either, so despite the fact Samad has been "*a student, a scientist [and] a soldier*" (ibid 58), he waits the tables in his cousin’s pseudo-Indian restaurant. Alsana comes from a wealthy family, but in Britain she has to sew "*together pieces of black plastic for a shop called Domination in Soho*" (ibid 55).

Samad 1984, 1857

British society in the 1980s was more open and multiracial, as the novel illustrates with presenting all the three families already. The Joneses’, Iqbals’ and Chalfens’ offspring attend the same school. The school demonstrates its openness and friendliness towards cultural diversity through celebrating. Samad protests against almost anything, for instance, he questions

“Why the western education system privileges activity of the body over activity of the mind and soul?”

And wants to abolish the Harvest Festival and replace it with one of the Muslim festivals. The headmaster responds that "*these things are more about community than religion as such*", which is exactly what he fears.

Irie 1990, 1907

Irie, the daughter of Archie and Clara, Millat and Magid, the twin sons of Samad and Alsana, and their (UN) fitting in and acceptance by society are the focus of this section. Albeit each of the three was brought into the world in England, and are, subsequently, English brought up, they actually can't feel they have a place. Irie endures in light of the fact that, being fifteen years of age, her body is getting greater and shapelier in examination with her female companions. She believes that her appearance makes her feel wrong, ugly, and out of place in society. On the other hand, Millat is extremely popular with girls because it is "beauty parodying itself" (ibid. 269).

There were no maps, but common sense told you, for example, not to mess with the area between the craft department and the trash cans. This indicates the development of a multicultural society and the growing tendency toward pluralism, in contrast to the previous decade, when cultural differences were kept to a minimum. By and by, even a portion of the previously mentioned



separate 'islands', Irie, Millat and Joshua, who are of Jamaican, Bangladeshi and Jewish legacy individually, are united upon the episode of being discovered partaking in pot. They should be subjected to a remedial program at Joshua's house for a period of two months as punishment.

Magid, Millat and Marcus 1992, 1999

The story reaches its climax in this section, which also serves as a metaphor for multiculturalism as a concept. In order to witness and participate in the end of the second millennium, all of the characters are brought together. Future Mouse is a project that Marcus Chalfen, an engineer who studies genetics, is working on. The mouse is hereditarily changed to foster various kinds of disease at arranged spans during its life.

This suggests the fate of multiculturalism as an issue that could be basically arranged or controlled. Emblematically, at the last stage the mouse ought to *"lose all its pigmentation and become pale skinned person: a white mouse"* (on the same page 432), which is, probably, a similitude for an optimal English resident. Obviously, a lot of people are both disturbed and involved in this project. Irie is involved, on the grounds that she assists Marcus with his administrative work and answers his telephone to put something aside for her excursion to Jamaica. Occupied to continue ahead with her own life, she barely cares about it:

"I haven't got time for this. Marcus Chalfen is simply trying to come up with some answers to shit like - shit like - cancer. OK?"

She is tired of constantly having to talk through things and solving problems and wants to finally pursue her own life and career. Magid arrives in Britain to aid Marcus as his closest assistant and spokesperson, charmed by playing the God and the certainty the project promises:

"No other roads, no missed opportunities, no parallel possibilities. No second-guessing, no what-ifs, no might-have-beens. Just certainty. Just certainty in its purest form" (ibid 490).

Multiculturalism is a widespread modern day phenomenon with no ready-made solution. It cannot be projected, controlled or wiped out, it evolves. And although the mouse is genetically modified, its nature fumbled with and its fate made unpredictable, it has – as Britain has taken its chance to live and make the best out of it.

Identity Crises of Smith's Characters in *White Teeth*

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) illustrates the struggles of immigrants and their descendants in navigating postcolonial English society. The novel explores how cultural hybridity, mimicry, and racial prejudice shape identities, focusing on the Iqbal and Jones families. Using Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial concepts, the narrative highlights the "in-between" space where immigrants attempt to reconcile their heritage with the demands of Western culture, often resulting in alienation and inner conflict.

Samad Iqbal and Alsana, Bangladeshi immigrants, embody the first generation's difficulties in adapting to English society. Despite Samad's credentials as "a student, a scientist [and] a soldier" (ibid. 58), he finds himself waiting tables in a pseudo-Indian restaurant, enduring humiliation and downward mobility. This degradation reflects postwar Britain's tendency to undervalue immigrants' skills:

"They would require something other than merely having fought in a war" (ibid. 14).



Smith highlights the irony that Commonwealth migrants, invited to fill labor shortages, often faced unemployment or low-paying jobs. Their living conditions mirror this economic hardship. The narrator bluntly states,

“The matter was what the matter was? The house was the matter.”

Apart from experiencing the cultural trauma, immigrants were also subjected to lodging problems in that period. Smith also portrays insufficient living conditions of the immigrants, struggling with poverty and lack of their needs being met. In the novel, Alsana quarrels with Samad because of their poverty and their struggle to make a living as immigrants in English society. Her worries about their situation in the foreign land can be recognized in her dialogue with Samad:

“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...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?”

Bhabha’s notion of hybridity reimagines *“the borders...between colonizer and colonized, East and West, self and other.”* He views hybridity as productive, challenging ideas of cultural purity. Yet *White Teeth* complicates this optimism: hybridity does not guarantee harmony but often deepens cultural divides. Samad resists assimilation, clinging to his traditions and religious values. He forbids his son Magid from participating in the school’s Harvest Festival, asking, *“Why are you always trying to be somebody you are not?”* This protest exposes the first generation’s anxiety over losing cultural heritage in a Western environment that privileges its own norms.

The novel’s second generation Magid and Millat Iqbal, and Irie Jones illustrates the tension between heritage and assimilation. Though born in England, they remain outsiders due to skin color and cultural background. Their response is mimicry, imitating English customs to gain acceptance, even at the cost of erasing origins. Magid epitomizes mimicry. He anglicizes his name to “Mark Smith” to fit in with peers, prompting Alsana’s sharp rebuke: *“Mark? No Mark here. You have the wrong house.”* Samad, outraged, protests:

“I give you a glorious name like Magid Mahfooz Murshed Mubtasim Iqbal! [...] and you want to be called Mark Smith.”

Samad, is against Western norms, it is clear that he does not want to lose his personal identity. As a result, he is against adopting all western ideas to overcome adaptation issues. His concern of cultural suppression is shown in his inability to accept anglicized forms. When Archie calls him Sam rather than Samad, he becomes enraged and says:

“Don’t call me Sam...My name is Samad Miah Iqbal. Not Sam. Not Sammy. And not – God forbid – Samuel. It is Samad.”

Irie Jones, daughter of Archie (an Englishman) and Clara (a Jamaican immigrant), suffers similar alienation. In school, after hearing Shakespeare’s sonnet “The Dark Lady,” she questions her racial identity. Her teacher insists the Dark Lady “can’t be defined as black” since only slaves could be black in that era a remark that shames Irie and reveals enduring racial prejudices. Irie’s sense of inferiority intensifies as she envies the pale beauty ideal. She attempts to straighten her curly hair to resemble English women, only to be mocked by Neena:

“Irie couldn’t say anything for a moment. She had not considered the possibility that she looked anything less than terrific.”



Since Irie does her best to look like English by changing the originality of her hair, she hopes that she will be respected and admired by the others; however, she merely becomes an interesting topic for the people around herself who would like to make fun of her. The situation shows that Irie feels uncomfortable due to her hybridity and wants to be recognized and accepted by English society, which is the source of superiority and power as stressed in the novel:

“There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land.”

Gender expectations also mark cultural divides. When Alsana suggests Clara name her baby Sarah to please Archie, her niece Neena protests: *“There’s got to be communication between men and women in the West.”* This clash reflects Alsana’s Eastern upbringing, which prioritizes obedience, versus Neena’s Western ideals of equality. Smith uses this dialogue to reveal tensions between traditional and modern gender roles within immigrant families. Samad views English society as morally corrupt, fearing it will lead his family astray:

“I have been corrupted by England, I see that now my children, my wife, they too have been corrupted.”

This perceived “Englishifying” splits their twin sons: Magid becomes atheist, while Millat turns militant. Joyce, a teacher, summarizes their plight:

“The fact is both these boys have serious emotional problems. They’ve been split up by their religions, by their cultures. Can you imagine the trauma?”

Such trauma illustrates Bhabha’s claim that mimicry unsettles colonial power: the colonizer sees “himself in a mirror that subtly and unsettlingly ‘others’ his own identity.” In *White Teeth* (2000), this mimicry manifests not only in immigrant children imitating English norms but also in their rejection of their parents’ traditions, destabilizing both identities. Bhabha describes hybridity as containing “mixed identities” that contradict colonial histories. In *White Teeth*, hybridity produces longing rather than liberation. The second generation, “more English than the English” yet never fully accepted, embodies this contradiction. Their mimicry Magid’s pursuit of English law, Irie’s cosmetic changes reveals the cost of seeking acceptance: the erosion of “pure” identities. Samad laments this transformation:

“Allah knows how I pinned all my hopes on Magid. And now he says he is coming back to study the English law...He wants to enforce the laws of man rather than the laws of God.”

White Teeth (2000) demonstrates that multicultural England, while vibrant, is fraught with psychological and cultural tensions. The first generation clings to origins, fearing corruption by the West; the second generation yearns for English acceptance, often at the expense of heritage. Both suffer alienation caught “in-between” cultures. Smith’s depiction aligns with Bhabha’s theories yet offers a sobering view: hybridity may resist colonial hierarchies, but it also generates new traumas. The novel thus exposes the enduring complexities of identity in a postcolonial, multicultural Britain where belonging remains elusive, and every character, as Irie reflects, is “a stranger in a stranger land.”

Discussion

As indicated in *White Teeth* (2000), the emotional connection that characters experience is not stagnant, but rather complex. The first-generation immigrants like Samad and Alsana often embark on the challenge of assimilating into the British society while preserving the culture. The



conflict between Samad's desire to retain the Malaysian cultural standards and bring up his two sons, Magid and Millat, according to these principles reflects the clash between the traditional and the new world. Thus, the second-generation characters, such as Irie or the Iqbal twins, feel culturally displaced on a certain level, as they are unable to fully embrace their parents' values despite being raised in a multicultural environment of the London. It is important to note that Elliot's characters such as Irie Jones feel a severance from their Jamaican origin as well as the British culture. The assimilation to eventually adopt a mixed of both cultures imply such a complex of belonging rather than a solution. Millat and Magid represent opposing responses to their cultural identities: Millat embraces fundamentalism and on the other end of the spectrum is Magid who poses as the most English of English.

Multiculturalism in London is reflected and illustrated in detail in *White Teeth* (2000), detailing different communities and the dynamics between them. The novel simply portrays relationship between people in multicultural society, where characters have to balance between different cultures in which they are raised. They still demonstrate that multiculturalism shapes identity through focusing on the characters of different levels of cultural mixing. For instance, Irie feels torn between her skin color and, therefore, between her Jamaican roots and the British context in which she grows up. The Iqbal twins, Magid and Millat, show different responses to their multicultural identities: Magid starts to become more Anglicized than before and, on the other hand, Millat becomes completely Islamic. London, in the works of Smith, serves as the backdrop that forms the basis of cultural conflicts and integration. Just as with the previous themes, multiculturalism is framed as primarily an asset but also a problem for the society depicted in the novel.

The novel concisely depicts the postcolonial anxiety, or confusion within individual identities, among *White Teeth*'s characters, particularly those from immigrant origin. The novel shows how the characters are lost sometimes due to the clash of cultural values or sometimes the society pressure and outside world unfamiliarity of who they are. First generation immigrant Gerlad's son Samad Iqbal compounds an identity crisis as prudish old world ethics clash with the new age requirements of living in Britain. His efforts to make his sons accept cultural norms that he had grown up with as a cultural norm in the new country proves difficult for him, showing that even though everyone wants to embrace cultural traditions in the new country they find it difficult. Just like the second precodic characters Irie Jones and the Iqbal twins, their second-generation characters are primarily depicted struggling with identity issues associated with racially mixed identities. Irie feels she does not fit the beauty standard and is embarrassed of her half-caste background; Millat and Magid fight with their identity crises and "burying their heads in the sand" in accord with their father's expectations. It is also revealed how the novel portrays the characters' major struggle with their own identity, as informed by their social and racial environment, class, and colonial history. These aspects contribute to discontent and isolation, and put formal and stable identities beyond the characters' reach. According to Bhabha's hybridity, which entails the argument that cultural identities are complex and shift constantly, the identity crises portrayed by *White Teeth* (2000) are fit to this theory. This means that the characters' conflict in the assumption of cultural identity is due to the conflict between the cultural retention of the parents and immigrants' assimilation into a multiracial society.



Conclusion

Through the investigation of the interrelated topics of multiculturalism, the desire for belonging, and the resulting identity issues, this research has analyzed the representation of these concepts in *White Teeth* (2000) by Zadie Smith and the potential implications for the comprehension of identity issues in today's multicultural society. Multiculturalism, which is presented in *White Teeth* (2000), is depicted as being enriching as well as complex, in reference to the lives of first and second generation immigrants in London. The social identities of the characters represent conflicts of personal identity within the given multicultural society together with featuring historical influences, social and cultural disparities and the general cultural paradigm which influence the individual's personal identity. Smith's representations of these themes are compatible with current theoretical perspectives on multiculturalism to offer insightful reflection on the role of multiculturalism in shaping people's identity and inclusion in modern societies. In conclusion, the study supports the idea that Smith's work in *White Teeth* (2000) provides a hopeless yet profound commentary on the state of multiculturalism in the contemporary world and further emphasizes the significance of defining one's identity in society.

Recommendations

The researchers may look into the communal, monetary and religious background of author's life instead of solely focusing on the characters of this plays. The researchers may adopt a research approach that focuses on the application of psychoanalytical historical approach on the characters. Instead of focusing on all the characters present in the play, future researchers may conform to focusing on actions of one character only.



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