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Multiculturalism and Identity Erosion in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

Zadie Smith'in *İnci Gibi Dişler* Adlı Romanında Çokkültürlülük ve Kimlik Aşınımı

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ABSTRACT
While multiculturalism is widely accepted in numerous nations, it may be regarded as a threat to an individual's national, cultural, and personal identity, irrespective of their place of birth. This negating property is further exacerbated when one resides in countries governed by imperial administrations. In her novel White Teeth, Zadie Smith explores the ramifications of diversity in imperial Britain by analysing the themes of segregation and categorization, encompassing distinctions predicated on race, gender, cultural sophistication, and religious convictions, including categories such as black and white, male and female, cultivated and primordial, as well as secular and religious. This article endeavours to evaluate the impact of diversity on national, cultural, and individual identity through an analysis of the dispersed identities of different generations depicted in Zadie Smith's novel, *White Teeth*, a narrative replete with binary oppositions and bipolarities that underscore the pervasive authority of standardized English classifications within a multicultural society.

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Introduction

Zadie Smith, born in 1975 in north-west London to a multicultural household, has established herself as a highly prolific author. Her exceptional mastery of language, coupled with her capacity to illustrate complex details and create vivid representations of events, characters, and settings, significantly enhances her prolific body of work. Smith, who has an English father and a Jamaican mother, demonstrates a significant degree of proficiency in the articulation of the processes and outcomes associated with multiculturalism. Although she maintains a strong connection to her Jamaican heritage, she is keenly cognizant of the substantial detriment that multiculturalism can inflict on individuals, especially within urban environments. Irrespective of an individual's place of birth, immigration status, or ancestral heritage, multiculturalism diminishes one's national, cultural, and personal identity. Moreover, this burden is exacerbated when people reside in a predominant nation such as Britain or France. Multicultural people, or those living within a multicultural society, exist in a state of ambiguity, facing the intrinsic challenges that such an environment entails. This observation is further exemplified by the characters portrayed in Smith's debut novel, *White Teeth*, which was first published in 2000. The novel significantly and swiftly enhanced Smith's reputation by adeptly depicting the characters' profound and arduous

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experiences, as well as the overpowering challenges they face due to the total obliteration of their identities, a consequence of multicultural ideologies and lifestyles. Furthermore, Smith "conveys the sense of dislocation of immigrants torn between their cultural allegiances and the exigencies of their new environment" (Curry 2007, p. 279). The societal categorization of individuals predicated on factors such as ethnicity, gender, developmental status, and religious beliefs perpetuates an ongoing cycle of segregation, resulting in a disconnection from one's national and cultural heritage, as well as a potential denial of one's own identity. In other words, life in a foreign country is a tough endeavour to deal with the constant making and unmaking of individual, national, and cultural identity. This is because dislocation involves a double exposure to longing and negligence, regardless of whether it is consensual or compelled (Hamil 2019, p. 141). *White Teeth* presents a sharply critical examination of the facets of British multiculturalism that compel individuals to adopt an identity that is perceived as "more English than the English" (Smith 2000, p. 307), thereby highlighting that the characters' origins reflect not merely a blend of distinct ethnicities but rather signify that traditional racial categories inadequately represent the ethnic diversity of modern England (Bentley 2007, p. 496).

Framing the central argument within the context of exiled identities, this article seeks to examine multiculturalism as a negator of national, cultural, and individual identity through the lens of Homi Bhabha's theories on culture, as well as diverse interpretations of Zadie Smith's novel, *White Teeth*. The research employs a qualitative methodology based on textual and theoretical analysis. The principal approach entails a meticulous analysis of *White Teeth*, emphasising character evolution, narrative techniques, and thematic portrayals of identity, hybridity, and displacement. The novel is examined through Homi Bhabha's fundamental concepts—specifically hybridity, mimicry, and the third space—to elucidate how Smith's work interacts with the intricacies of multiculturalism in modern Britain. Secondary sources, such as scholarly critiques, journal articles, and theoretical frameworks pertaining to postcolonial studies and identity politics, are utilised to contextualise the analysis. This integrated approach allows the article to delineate the manifestation of multicultural ideologies in literary form and to illustrate how Smith's narrative highlights the tensions between belonging, alienation, and cultural negotiation.

Homi Bhabha on Cultural Diversity and Difference

The precise delineation of cultural diversity and cultural difference within the framework of Bhabhaian scope is crucial in order to elucidate the concept of multiculturalism and its operational mechanisms. Furthermore, it is important to examine the functions that diversity plays in its categorization process as a weapon exploited by the colonizer. Bhabha introduced several terms, including hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry, and difference, to the field of postcolonial studies. He argues that cultural difference and cultural diversity are distinct subjects. Moreover, the historical development of critical theory is primarily concerned with cultural differences rather than cultural diversity. Bhabha defines cultural difference as the procedure of the declaration of culture as 'knowledgeable', assertive, competent in the establishment of structures of cultural identification (1995, p. 206). Cultural diversity, on the other hand, refers to the acknowledgement of inherent cultural elements and traditions, situated within a framework of relativism; it engenders benign liberal concepts of multiculturalism, cultural exchange, as well as a universal culture (Bhabha 1995, p. 206).

Bhabha posits that culture functions as an epistemic construct concerning cultural diversity. The categorization of cultural phenomena using labels such as modern, primitive, authoritative, cultured, and knowledgeable perpetuates cultural differences. Moreover, the exploitation of cultural diversity by colonizers or imperialists enables the regulation of individuals through surveillance techniques. Exploiting cultural differences facilitates the division of individuals and communities by leveraging established values and customs that characterize a specific culture.

This facilitates the advancement of concepts such as "multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity" (Bhabha 1995, p. 206). Bhabha underscores the significance of acknowledging the profound relationship between the past and the present, as their dynamic interplay shapes cultural distinctions. Practices or values from the past should not be uncritically accepted as valid solely due to their endorsement by preceding generations. Thus, the transmission of particular values and customs to the present may lead to the perpetuation of a traditional lifestyle, hindering societal progress. Interrupting the continuity between the past and the present is a formidable undertaking, as there are no established criteria to direct this process. Nevertheless, treating the past as the definitive authority and uncritically adhering to it due to its antiquated nature is merely a strategy that diminishes individuals' comprehension of how cultural symbols and icons can foster unity. It contests our faith in the comprehensive authority of cultural synthesis (Bhabha 1995, p. 207). This is why transferring and relocating the past to the present cannot authentically reflect individuals' current circumstances.

Bhabha asserts that the establishment of the Third Space is attainable, as it is enabled by the ambiguous nature of symbolic meanings across various cultures. He maintains that every symbol or meaning can be translated, interpreted, adapted, and recontextualized in various manners, irrespective of the imitative characteristics of language. Symbols inherently embody ambiguity, thereby reinforcing authority while diminishing the power of those subjected to it. Bhabha asserts that the establishment of the Third Space necessitates the dismantling of dominant Western discourse, thereby enabling individuals to eradicate prevailing remnants of authority wherein cultural knowledge is perpetually disclosed as a cohesive, open, and evolving code; thus, the meanings and symbols of culture lack any inherent unity or permanence (Bhabha 1995, p. 208).

Bhabha further contends that the Algerian populace exemplifies people who deliberately sever the ties between their history and contemporary existence to prevent the entrenchment of a stagnant nationalist culture. Nonetheless, Algerians must integrate Western ideas and concepts to formulate and define their own cultural norms. Bhabha characterizes this phenomenon as hybridity, defined as the convergence of a minimum of two distinct value systems. Furthermore, the intrinsic ambivalence of symbols and meanings in the Third Space necessitates engagement with the interaction of diverse cultures and their norms in the pursuit of hybridity. According to Bhabha (1995), it is within this space that we discover the language to articulate our identities and those of others. By investigating this hybridity, this "Third Space," we can circumvent the ideology of dualism and become the alternate versions of ourselves (p. 209). As such, multiculturalism, which is actually rooted to and strengthened by differences, ambivalence and mimicries, is created by cultural diversity. A hybrid identity comes up as a result of the intersections and performances, as exemplified by the characters in *White Teeth*.

Multiculturalism and its Unending Effects in *White Teeth*

The novel's first-generation characters, Clara, Alsana, and Samad, are less adaptable and willing to change than the second-generation characters because the former group is able to reside in their Third Space. However, the existence of their preserved Third Space should not imply that these characters are immovable in their surroundings and that they remain unchanged across time. While it may be challenging to assess their transformation on a large scale, it would be incorrect to assert that there is absolutely no alteration in their value judgements or cognitive processes. Therefore, it may be argued that the creation of the Third Space by first-generation characters enables them to establish a zone in which they can resist assimilating into the indigenous culture, while yet engaging with both present and previous traditions. However, Irie, Millat, and Magid, the second-generation characters in the novel, do not exhibit any resistance towards the native culture that surrounds them as they are all integral components of the hybrid amalgamation of multi-Britain (Moss 2008, p. 14). This is because they are born into British culture, which already

embraces the philosophy of cultural diversity. As Smith also puts it, it is very natural for these characters to do things in their own different ways (2000, p. 289), which comply with the indigenous values around them, but at the same time clash with the values of the first-generation. Correspondingly, the second-generation characters are not only alienated to their origins and first-generation traditions but also assimilated by the various cultural impositions surrounding them in their new homeland. Both Magid and Irie, for instance, are complete hybrid selves, for they explicitly seek assimilation, and harmonising old world norms with the exigencies of urban life occurs more instinctively (McMann 2012, p. 625) whereas Millat fluctuates between the Asian and the European self throughout the novel.

Prior to examining the characters' attributes and encounters in the novel, it is crucial to highlight the importance of the locations utilized by Smith in her work. The Whitechapel district, where the Iqbal family initially resides in the novel, is notable for its lack of luxury, modernization, and civilization. The district's inherent characteristics align with the circumstances of the immigrant family, as if it were their destined and assimilated fate. Although the Iqbal family, as well as Clara and her daughter Irie, are not physically subjected to colonization like the people in colonized countries, they are still influenced and dominated by England's imperialist system of appraisal and vilification. In other words, the suburb for Smith transforms into a vibrant nexus of multicultural and multigenerational communication. Her research elucidates the suburb's transformation under the profound influence of global migration and the dislocating impacts of postmodern cultural and societal dynamics. This represents a departure from the oppressive, confining suburb typical of much suburban literature. Her work emphasises the significant contemporary issues of identity and origin, with a focus now situated in the suburbs (Pope 2015, p. 168).

Therefore, especially the Iqbal family endeavors a lot to move from the uncivilized, scary and dangerous district to a more sophisticated and more secure place where – interestingly – there are more white people than black. As such, they want to move from "the wrong side of the Whitechapel" (Smith 2000, p. 55) to the relatively better Willesden district, for the Iqbal family are "not *those* kinds of Indians" (Smith 2000, p. 54). After all, Whitechapel is "where that madman E-knock someoneoranother gave a speech that forced them [the Iqbal family] into the basement while kids broke the windows with their steel-capped boots. Rivers of blood silly-billy nonsense" (Smith 2000, pp. 62-63). The portrayal of Whitechapel not only influences the Iqbal family's desire to flee the region but also suggests that immigrant-populated places are characterized by disorder, turmoil, and peril. Considering this, Frantz Fanon (1963) provides an invaluable and detailed comparison of the native land and the colonizer's land. The colonisers' town is a robustly constructed settlement, entirely composed of stone and steel. The town is well-illuminated; the streets are paved with asphalt, and the trash receptacles discreetly consume all refuse, unnoticed, unacknowledged, and seldom contemplated. The streets of his town are pristine and level, devoid of potholes or debris. The settler's town is prosperous and relaxed, consistently abundant in resources. The town inhabited by the colonised individuals is notorious, populated by individuals of disreputable character. It is a world devoid of spaciousness; individuals reside in close proximity, with their huts constructed atop one another. The indigenous town is deprived of sustenance, lacking bread, meat, footwear, coal, and illumination. The colonised town is a prostrate village, a town in submission, a town immersed in the mire. The gaze that the indigenous person casts upon the settler's town is one of desire and envy; it conveys his aspirations for ownership—various forms of ownership: to dine at the settler's table, to rest in the settler's bed, and, if feasible, with his spouse. The colonised individual is a resentful individual (1963, p. 39). Based on Fanon's analysis, it is evident that the concept of home is defined in relation to an individual's racial identity. To achieve upward social mobility, the Iqbal family strives to surpass their current status by exerting maximum effort both physically and economically. They believe it is their inherent entitlement to attain the same level of equality as the *native* English population. The relentless

subconscious of Samad Iqbal, the patriarch, continuously reminds him that they are distinct from *other* Indians, compelling him to strive for a more favorable identity in England. Undoubtedly, doing this is solely feasible by progressively distancing oneself from their initial origins, ultimately resulting in a feeling of assimilation and alienation. Furthermore, this outcome is unavoidable due to the assimilationist philosophy of England's imperialist culture. Samad's aspiration for residing in a more favorable location does not imply that he distinguishes himself and his family from the Indians, or more specifically, the Bengalis. Instead, he just recognizes the importance of living in an improved and safer setting. He consistently acknowledges the same worth of Asians and Africans in relation to Europeans. Simultaneously, he appreciates his cultural heritage while disparaging the English way of life.

Standardized English discourses, characterized by bipolarities and binary oppositions such as beauty and ugliness, right and wrong, primitive and cultivated, as well as modern and anachronistic, play a significant role in the construction or reconstruction of identities. These identities are shaped forcefully or deliberately in accordance with the individual's ideology. Clara Jones, for example, is a woman of mixed Jamaican and English heritage, specifically half black. She enters into matrimony with Archibald Jones, an Englishman who is considerably older than her. The marriage becomes a grandiose conflict between her mother, Hortense, and herself. Nevertheless, the discussion does not revolve around Jones's age but rather pertains to his race. Years after her daughter's marriage to Archibald Jones, Hortense manifests her thoughts to her grandchild Irie as follows:

> Black and white never come to no good. De Lord Jesus never meant us to mix it up. Dat's why he made a hol' heap a fuss about de children of men building de tower of Babel. 'Im want everybody to keep things separate. *And the Lord did confound the language of all the earth and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.* Genesis II:9. When you mix it up, nuttin' good can come. It wasn't *intended*. (Smith 2000, pp. 384-385)

Clara Jones, thus, breaks the word of God and opposes the separate nature of races and colors according to her mother. What makes this intermingling of races so significant is Clara's obsessive struggle of a whitish way of life, for she is not accepted in her husband's occupational circle due to her color and race. Clara "was beautiful in all senses, except maybe, by virtue of being black, the classical" (Smith 2000, p. 23). Though she is married to an Englishman now, this does not mean that she has as pure an identity as an English has. Because of her, Archibald Jones is excluded from the meetings at work, which is what Clara is also aware of. The previous meeting they attended as a couple was "awkward … it was unpleasant" (Smith 2000, p. 72), making Archibald's attitude "*strange*" (Smith 2000, p. 72) while the same attitude causes "people to begin uncomfortable" (Smith 2000, p. 72). Therefore, she is after finding whitish items in life, which can make her one of *those* English people. She "was in night school three days a week (courses: British Imperialism 1765 to present; Medieval Welsh Literature; Black Feminism" (Smith 2000, pp. 342 - 343) and she is also a secret book lender of Neena's library "through which she reads, in a few short months, Greer's *Female Eunuch*, Jong's *Fear of Flying* and *The Second Sex*, all in a clandestine attempt, on Neena's part, to rid Clara of her 'false consciousness'" (Smith 2000, p. 78). In other words, Clara is in an attempt of trespassing the racial borders and having another identity – a more cultivated one – in order to be accepted within the white society she lives in. Because of her self-awareness as a black woman in a white society, she does not want her baby to be another victim of her own race. Therefore, she is crammed between her genes and the dream of a baby, who, in parallel with Clara's ambition, will turn out to be a whitish one rather than a baby who is as brown as chocolate. This is why Clara Jones "arks de doctor what it will look like, half black an' half white an' all dat bizness. And 'im say anything could happen. Dere's even a chance it may be blue-eyed" (Smith 2000, p. 67).

The dream of a blue-eyed baby is a profound obsession, suggesting that Clara harbors regrets about her genetic lineage and heritage. It appears she seeks a child who embodies more English traits than Jamaican, or one who is lighter-skinned than darker-skinned, or a child who will not be compelled to face the severe dichotomies of multicultural England. All of these factors contribute to Clara increasingly distancing herself from her national and cultural identity. She is unable to comprehend that she will perpetually be an outcast within the established system; however, she is in an incessant pursuit of a new identity rather than embracing the somewhat humiliating identity she currently possesses.

Irie Jones is another character who is entrapped within the enforcements of the standardized English attributions. Her self-perception as unattractive and flawed stems from her failure to adhere to the conventional, restricted standards of beauty that envelop her (McMann 2012, p. 630). In terms of national, cultural and individual identity, moreover, she is farther away from her roots in comparison to her mother, Clara. As previously stated, she belongs to the second generation and possesses a hybrid identity. She feels remorseful because of her physical appearance resulting from her genetic makeup. "Irie Jones, aged fifteen, was big, […] the girl had weight; big tits, big butt, big hips, big thighs, big teeth. She was 182 pounds and had thirteen pounds in her savings account" (Smith 2000, p. 265). Compared to her mother's body, which is so beautiful that Archie's boss cannot help complimenting on her legs constantly, Irie is more of a Jamaican rather than of an English. She had "mountainous curves, buckteeth and thick metal retainer, impossible Afro hair, and to top it off mole-ish eyesight that in turn required Coke-bottle spectacles in a light shade of pink" (Smith 2000, p. 268). Consequently, she is perpetually dissatisfied with her physical appearance, indicating a regression over her ethnic heritage. Furthermore, she hates her hair, for it is like "black wires" (Smith 2000, p. 269) and because of which she receives notes like "By William Shakespeare: ODE TO LETITIA AND ALL MY KINKY-HAIRED BIG-ASS BITCHEZ" (Smith 2000, p. 272) from her friends at school. Bitterness is a trait she inherits from her genetic lineage. Consequently, she seeks to liberate herself from her biological heritage by straightening her hair. She is "intent upon transformation, intent upon fighting her genes, a headscarf disguising the bird's nest of her hair, her right hand carefully placed upon her stomach" (Smith 2000, p. 273). Transformation, thus, becomes the very symbol of making something new and more desirable out of something old and intolerable. She hates being made fun of; she cannot endure being unattractive due to her difference from the *normal* English girls out there. Hence, she passionately desires for "straight hair. Straight, straight long black sleek flickable tossable shakable touchable fingerthrough-able wind-blowable hair. With bangs" (Smith 2000, p. 273). Irie appears to be more than just a teenager seeking minor alterations to her physical appearance; she resembles a determined warrior driven by a desire to seek retribution against her genetic makeup. Had she been born and reared in Jamaica, she would not be experiencing these emotions, as she would find herself surrounded by individuals in a similar situation. She would experience a sense of *normalcy* comparable to that of English girls currently residing in England. Nevertheless, because she is in minority and that the attribution of beauty is adhered to girls who are white in skin, blonde in hair, and skinnier in appearance, Irie is strongly for breaking the ties with her genes. She does not only look for straight hair but also for dark red colored hair, which is another trait of white English girls. She is longing for a cure to her disease, which is being an Afro. After all, the women in P. K.'s, the hairdresser's, are "not customers they [the workers] were dealing with but desperate wretched *patients*" (Smith 2000, p. 275). Irie, therefore, is dying for the loss of her identity.

Irie experiences complete hair loss as a result of ammonia after providing false information about her hair to the hairdresser. At this particular moment, she experiences a sense of despair over her hair. However, her distress stems not from the loss of a connection to the past, but rather from the absence of any hair at all. When she substitutes her own hair with that of another woman, who is

forced to sell it due to poverty, she lacks any sense of empathy towards the woman. Contrarily, she experiences joy in altering her identity by adopting the Pakistani woman's straight hair. She discards her black wires. Neena's protest over Irie's haircut brings to the forefront Irie's loss of national and cultural identity: "What have you done? You had *beautiful hair,* man. All curly and wild. It was gorgeous. […] [T]hat's not *your* hair, for fuck's sake, that's some poor oppressed Pakistani woman who needs the cash for her kids" (Smith 2000, p. 283). The bipolarities, therefore, are closely related to the perspective where one is looking from. According to Irie, she is beautiful at least for *now* – though temporarily –; however, in Neena's words, Irie has already lost her beauty, for Neena evaluates the case from the African gaze. Thus, it is possible to claim that Irie's national and cultural identity has evaded through the transformation process at the hairdresser's and she is one step closer to her hybrid identity. On the whole, "[s]ometimes you want to be different. And sometimes you'd give the hair on your head to be the same as everybody else" (Smith 2000, p. 284). That she is different is undeniable; nonetheless, she is not different from the English. On the contrary, she is different from what her roots suggest. Irie, now, is as everybody else in England, the multicultural cosmopolitan imperialist country.

The Chalfen family constitute another binary opposition, the pre-Newtonian and the post-Newtonian society, for the Iqbal and Jones families. The underdeveloped or developing countries are those which have not passed through the Newtonian process of enlightenment. Therefore, they lack the faculty of empirical knowledge. The fact, then, turns out to be the very idea of a mission of the countries, which have accomplished the epistemological transformation through the Newtonian thinking[1], to enlighten and to civilize the former. As Said, too, argues it, the developed nations, or more accurately those that have undergone a Newtonian revolution, perceive cultural differences primarily as a divisive battleground and secondarily as an invitation for the West to dominate, regulate, and govern the Other through greater wisdom and accommodating power (2003, pp. 47-48). As a mirror to Iqbal and Jones family, thus, the Chalfens become the embodiment of the empirical, enlightened, and scientific England, who aims to cultivate and save the pre-Newtonian people from their ignorance. After all, "[i]n the Chalfen lexicon the middle classes were the inheritors of the enlightenment, the creators of the welfare state, the intellectual elite, and the source of all culture" (Smith 2000, p. 435). Not surprisingly, then, both Irie and Magid, the twin brother of Millat, are highly fond of Chalfenism and their way of life as well as their empiricism, whereas Millat approaches the family with suspicion and fluctuates between his Muslim self and the Englishness. When Irie, Millat and Joshua are caught smoking at school, they are forced to spend six months with Joyce Chalfen, the mother and the horticulturalist, Marcus Chalfen, the father and the scientist, and their kids. This, the principal usually repeats, is not a punishment but an arrangement. According to him "[i]t's people helping people […] This kind of thing is very much in the history, the spirit, the whole *ethos* of Glenard Oak, ever since Sir Glenard himself" (Smith 2000, p. 303). As a confession, the principal's words are like the reflection of the imperialist enterprise for centuries. The Asian and the African are going to be assisted by the English, who, actually, are not purely English but other immigrants from Germany and Poland. On a closer look at the incidence, it is possible to evaluate the case as a success of England since the Chalfen family, too, have been converted to the spirit of Englishness, which, therefore, highlights the idea that as generations keep changing, the entity of pure race will evade. Encapsulating the same ambition, the principal recommends that this arrangement is useful because "[t]his way Joshua's strengths can be shared equally among [Irie and Millat], and the two of [them] can go to a stable environment, and one with the added advantage of keeping [them] both off the streets" (Smith 2000, p. 303). As a result of the interaction with the knowledgeable and the ignorant, both

[1] See Kissinger, Henry A. "Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy." *Daedalus*, Spring 1966, Vol. 95, No. 2, Conditions of World Order, pp. 503-529.

obscurantism will be wiped off and the transformation from the pre-Newtonian selves to post-Newtonian identities will be completed successfully, thereby creating new English people rather than Asians or Africans in England.

Irie's keen interest in the Chalfen family is worth consideration since as soon as she sees them and experiences their way of life, she is fascinated and spelled.

> She'd never been so close to this strange and beautiful thing, the middle class, and experienced the kind of embarrassment that is actually intrigue, fascination. It was both strange and wondrous. She felt like the prude who walks through a nudist beach, examining the sand. She felt like Columbus meeting the exposed arawaks, not knowing where to look. (Smith 2000, p. 321)

Staggeringly different from her own family, Irie is definitely into these people because of the middle class experience they promise and due to their entrancing empirical speeches. In order to be one of these people, Irie begins spending more and more time in their house, helping Marcus organize his files as well as some other secretarial stuff. This gives her the opportunity to observe and internalize all the epistemological and practical information she will use in the future in order to *seem like* a real English woman rather than an ignorant African.

> It wasn't that she intended to mate with the Chalfens … but the instinct was the same. She had a nebulous fifteen-year-old's passion for them, overwhelming, yet with no real direction or object. She just wanted to […] merge with them. She wanted their Englishness. (Smith 2000, p. 328)

The word, merge, therefore becomes the very key point of what Irie is looking for. She does not want to be a friend of these people or someone they know; on the contrary, she intends to be like a homogenous chemical mixture, which cannot be resolved by any scientific attempt.

> [Therefore] Irie uses the Chalfens as a refuge, to get away from the stifling, insular atmosphere of her home. She has a hard time dealing with her hybridity. It appears that visiting the Chalfens is a way to avoid addressing it. She prefers living in the illusion that she is pure. (Curry 2007, p. 288)

Irie experiences increasing happiness and fulfilment as the Chalfens exert their supposed prestigious empiricism over her. By doing so, moreover, she is also intellectually farfetched from her identity. The English education she acquires through Chalfens reconstructs her identity in the way to be one of the English in the metropolitan city. Marcus's experiment, FutureMouse©, which is about changing the genomes of the animal in order to find answers about cancer and death, could possibly be taken as an analogy of Irie's transformation, for she is also like the very epitome of the experiment. Though it is not her genes that Marcus plays with, it is her cultural identity. He achieves this through scientific information which is actually excessively difficult for Irie to comprehend. After all, "[t]here was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land" (Smith 2000, p. 266). This is why Irie is fond of the Chalfens; she expects seeing her reflection in the gigantic mirror by way of identifying herself *with* the Chalfens rather than being identified *by* the other English people.

Magid is also encapsulated by the Chalfens through the end of the novel. Before dwelling on his interactions with Marcus Chalfen, his progress both as a Bengali and an Anglicized boy should be sketched in a nutshell. Sharing a dualistic nature with his twin brother like Edmund and Edgar in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Magid has always been a very intellectual and smart boy since his childhood, whereas Millat has been a "good-for-nothing" (Smith 2000, p. 135) throughout the novel. The process of his Anglicization begins during his childhood. He is never into his Bengali culture; on the contrary, he hates his national and cultural roots. This is why he endeavors to be

like the other white English children. He triggers his conversion to English culture by way of changing his name from Magid to Mark Smith on his ninth birthday (Smith 2000, pp. 150-151). His regression from his cultural roots is so obvious that he leaves his original name aside and longs for being accepted by the white boys through imitating their manners and identities. Furthermore, although Alsana has always been his "amma," on seeing his friends, he changes it into "mum," which bursts his mother into tears. Not very different from that of Irie's, Magid's regression is also about his family since he acknowledges the fact that there is an enormous cultural gap between his family and himself. Because of this reason,

> Magid really wanted to be in some other family. He wanted to own cats and not cockroaches, he wanted his mother to make the music of the cello, not the sound of the sewing machine; he wanted to have a trellis of flowers growing up one side of the house instead of the ever-growing pile of other people's rubbish; he wanted a piano in the hallway in place of the broken door off cousin Kurshed's car; he wanted to go on biking holidays to France, not day trips to Blackpool to visit aunties; he wanted the floor of his room to be shiny wood, not the orange-and-green swirled carpet left over from the restaurant; he wanted his father to be a doctor, not a one-handed waiter. (Smith 2000, p. 151)

All his ideas about cockroaches, the sound of the sewing machine, rubbish, the broken door, visiting his aunties, the carpet left from the restaurant, and his father's occupation as a waiter remind him of the primitive and undesirable nature of his national and cultural roots whereas having cats, the music of cello, trellis of flowers, the piano, biking holidays in France, a shiny wood floor and his dream of his father's job as a doctor, which are also associations in parallel with the English way of life, make him feel more modern and they also set him free of his original identity, as the ambivalence and fluidity of one's national identification influence their perception of national identity, thereby subsequently affecting self-identity (Pinto-Bailey 2014, p. 204).

Due to Magid's aptitude for Anglicization, his father, Samad, chooses to send him back to Bangladesh to receive an education that is fundamentally different from the English education system. This is because the standardized and structured nature of English schooling has influenced Magid to aspire to become more like the English people. However, beginning his life in London, Magid has already moved away from his cultural and national heritage. The immigrant Muslim children in multicultural England "won't go to mosque, they don't pray, they speak strangely, they dress strangely, they eat all kinds of rubbish, they have intercourse with God knows who. No respect for tradition" (Smith 2000, p. 190). Magid's arrival back to England demonstrates how he has not been transformed into his indigenous Bengali culture despite his father's ambitious attempts. McMann maintains that the disintegration of the children's Bengali and Caribbean connections commences with their birth in Britain, attendance at British schools, and exposure to British and American cultural influences (2012, p. 626). This is why the steps for shaping Magid's mind since his birth in accordance with the English way of life and Anglicization due to the metropolitan multiculturalism are highly successful. When he comes back, his father says "this is some clone, this is not an Iqbal. One hardly likes to touch him. His teeth, he brushes them six times a day. His underwear, he irons them. It is like sitting down to breakfast with David Niven" (Smith 2000, p. 424), who, not surprisingly, is a British actor. Furthermore, his life in Bangladesh is so ineffective in transforming him into a Bangladeshi boy that he loses his faith in Allah, too, and he returns to England as an atheist. In other words, multiculturalism functions not as a solution to the issues stemming from England's colonial history, but rather as a diversion from the persistent repercussions of colonialism that still affect individuals today (Bentley 2007, p. 499).

As a result of all these interactions of him with the multicultural society, Magid finds the true happiness in the Chalfens. On a letter to Marcus Chalfen, Magid manifests his mesmerized mind by saying "*I am in awe of visionary ideas and visionaries. I am in awe of such a man as Marcus Chalfen.*

I call it an honor to be able to call him friend" (Smith 2000, pp. 366-367). As an emblem of English empiricism, Marcus Chalfen becomes the identity that Magid uses in order to be identified as the *modern* man, who is completely different from his family and their customs as well as their ways of life. Although his idea with the Chalfens is not in parallel with Irie's notion of merging with them, Magid, too, is liable to be a possession of the English epistemological culture. He "attain[s] some sense of [the] cultural capital—a life of the mind—through his intellectual mentor and epistolary father figure, Marcus Chalfen" (McMann 2012, p. 627). Marcus, who tries to alter the genome of the mouse, is like the God to his subjects; therefore, Magid feels like he is serving to his own god, the one who is disguised in the form of an outstanding scientist, who, as a result of his worshipping, tears Magid apart from his original identity. In Kissinger's and Said's terms, then, Magid is entranced with the mesmerizing tune of Chalfen's empiricism, which reinvents the ignorance of the Asian.

Having an inherent opposition to all these empirical impositions, Millat does not have a complete hybrid identity. He, too, is affected by the popular cultural items of the time; nevertheless, he does not show any single sign of transformation into the English man in parallel with his twin brother, Magid. During his childhood, for instance, Millat is a strict follower of popular clothes, constituted of "red-stripe Nikes, OshKosh B'Gosh, and strange jumpers that had patterns on the inside and the out" (Smith 2000, p. 134). As a very little boy, Millat is poisoned by the English way of life and he has his own taste of wearing, which is in complete contradiction with his Asian roots. Therefore, it is possible to claim that Millat prefers to be an English boy rather than a Paki – or a Bengali, or an Indian since he, too, cannot decide which one he actually is – from the very beginning of his life in England. Another connotation that manifests Millat's interaction with the English popular culture is his stuff he takes with him while the Iqbal family run away from a hurricane: "*Born to Run* (album)—Springsteen, Poster of De Niro in 'You talkin' to me' scene from *Taxi Driver*, Betamax copy of *Purple Rain* (rock movie), Shrink-to-fit Levi's 501 (red tab), Pair of black Converse baseball shoes, *A Clockwork Orange* (book)" (Smith 2000, p. 222). Instead of adopting one of the most important identifications of his religion, which is Quran, Millat packs every English thing and puts them into the trunk of the car. The case is highly significant, for Millat does not feel like one of *those* Muslims at the beginning of the novel. He does not follow the path of Allah, nor does he practice the Islamic requirements. All these, therefore, could be interpreted as signs of an individual's annihilation by way of multicultural elements in his society through alienation to his roots and assimilation in the melting pot, for Millat perceives no issue or conflict in venerating the Englishman, who bears no resemblance to his own existence (McMann 2012, p. 628).

What makes Millat's case even more incomprehensible and almost impossible to understand is the fact that he is never a decisive and self-assured boy during his puberty, either. As a boy from the Asian roots, who has never been into Islam so far, Millat feels the necessity of sacrificing himself to converting people from the wrong way to the more sacred one, to Allah's, via the fundamentalist group KEVIN. What is so striking to the eye, nonetheless, is the fact that Millat is not a true follower of the group, either, since he does not know anything about Quran and he is still reluctant in learning something about it. Furthermore, most of the times, he does not even read the leaflets that KEVIN gives him. Smith's principal argument appears to convey the concept of 'roots' as opposed to 'routes' discourse, in both religious and non-religious contexts, is fundamentally irreconcilable; what is of greater significance is humanity's persistent ability to transcend recurrence while exercising a measure of local autonomy over the global circumstances that shape societal transformation (Huggan 2010, p. 763). This is the reason why Millat is never satisfied with the route he chooses to follow; he is always trying to assert his local roots into a more sophisticated and more alien culture, which, as a result, creates an enormous dilemma in his identity. Therefore, he is always in between the two clashing religions, Christianity and Islam. "Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali; he lived for the in

between, he lived up to his middle name, *Zulfikar,* the clashing of two swords" (Smith 2000, p. 351). Once compared to the first-generation and the other second-generation characters, it is possible to claim that Millat is a confused identity within the system. He neither has a hybrid identity, nor does he have his Third Space. He is a real waste of the inherent multicultural system. In capable of choosing and constructing one of the identities; therefore, he is selective and he adopts one from the Asian culture and another from the English culture, which, in the end, cannot be united as a whole and complete self. One day Millat has intercourses with a girl and the other day he warns his girlfriend about her clothes and nudity. "One day he's Allah this, Allah that. Next minute it's big busty blondes, Russian gymnasts, and a smoke of the sinsemilla. He doesn't know his arse from his elbow. Just like his father. He doesn't know who he is" (Smith 2000, p. 284).

Crammed between his original roots and the present popular culture, Millat is totally against the institutionalized education of England. He does not protest it because he is smart enough to understand what this kind of education does to the immigrant children; on the contrary, it is because he is not into being educated. Nevertheless, his lack of a successful education works when he is with the Chalfens. He considers them as a source for money. Furthermore, he is never affected by their empiricism, nor does he feel any affection for anyone in the family. This is probably why Oscar Chalfen, the youngest of the Chalfen family, is always a sort of reminder to Millat about his ignorance and race since Oscar protests Millat's and Irie's presence in his house by saying that "I hate brown strangers" (Smith 2000, p. 326). He is like the magnificent and authoritative reflection of the English, always reminding these people of their state of being parts of an impure race. Brown, after all, is a really big and important word; it is neither black nor white. It is in between as it is also the case with Millat. Considering all these, Oscar, as the authoritative figure of England, names his new monkey as "*Millat the Monkey*. Because monkeys are mischievous and Millat's *just as bad*" (Smith 2000, p. 329). As a brown stranger in England, therefore, Millat is nothing but a troublemaker from the perspective of the Englishman just because he is not as dark as black or as pure as white. He is just the undesirable brown in England.

In addition to all above, there are some significant symbols in the novel such as the title of the book and Irie's revenge by way of Magid for Millat, and her illegitimate baby daughter. On a closer glimpse at the title of the novel, it is vividly clear that the only thing which all people share is the color of their teeth. Although cultural, national, sexual, religious, and individual identities are represented in a huge variety, everyone's teeth are white. Therefore, white teeth could possibly be interpreted as a strong symbol of opposition to the racial, cultural, sexual, religious, and national segregation in multiculturalist England. It is a kind of unification with every single cog of the wheel without demolishing or patronizing the very things that give people their identities. This unification, however, is not the same type of Irie's or Magid's merging; on the contrary, it is a kind of concurrence of all identities without any kind of vilification.

Irie's revenge by way of Magid for Millat is another motif which is highly considerable since she does this on her bitter remark that Millat is lost in this society without a definite identity and that he will never be able to reconcile with his roots. The only person Irie could challenge is surely no one but Magid. Magid is one of *those* Englishmen, who has a great portion in the engineering process of Millat's confusions. On her remarks that Millat is highly repentant due to their sexual intercourse, Irie runs to Chalfens and she also sleeps with Magid as if she is taking revenge of all these centuries.

> [She] maliciously determined to make Magid the second son for once, this time by twenty five minutes. She grabbed him, kissed him, and made love to him angrily and furiously, without conversation or affection. She rolled him around, tugged at his hair, dug what fingernails she had into his back, and when he came she was gratified to note it was with a little sigh as if something had been taken from him. (Smith 2000, pp. 462-463)

Her rage, violence, and lack of concrete affection for Magid are related to her being focused on her target of avenging, out of which another symbol comes up. Irie's illegitimate baby daughter is one of the most powerful symbols since the baby's father is unidentifiable due to Irie's intercourse with both Magid and Millat. As Curry also puts it "[s]uch an unexpected twist [Irie's pregnancy] in the story is a projection of what English society will be in the future" (2007, p. 295). As such, the infant daughter represents the third generation, and her father's ambiguous identity suggests that the original roots are now obscured, indicating that each immigrant family will inevitably experience the erosion of their cultural, national, and personal identities over time. As Head (2003) contends, all of us all identify as hybridised post-colonials, both biologically and culturally, and that the quest for pure ethnic heritage is a futile endeavour (p. 114).

Conclusion

In summary, *White Teeth* is a novel that has been meticulously crafted, offering a profound and intricate exploration of identity, cultural hybridity, and the inherent tensions that exist within a multicultural society. In conclusion, *White Teeth* describes a novel that has been meticulously crafted. It is filled to the brim with dichotomous oppositions and bipolarities, which serve as the unwavering authority of the standardised English attributions to individuals who are navigating the multifaceted reality of multiculturalism. In the process of grappling with these binary structures, Clara, Irie, Magid, and Millat go through profound psychological and existential struggles. These structures determine their sense of belonging, self-concept, and social positioning. In spite of the fact that multiculturalism is supposed to promote inclusiveness, it simultaneously imposes rigid categorisations that undermine the fluidity of personal and collective identity. Their journeys highlight the paradoxical nature of multiculturalism.

Each individual character, in their own unique way, becomes a demonstration of the disillusionment that is associated with the multiculturalist ideology that England adheres to. They move back and forth between the pre-Newtonian self and the post-Newtonian self, between the melting pot ideology and the persistent markers of difference, between inherited traditions and imposed expectations, between cultural roots and societal assimilation, and between the pre-Newtonian self and the post-Newtonian self. These conflicts are further exacerbated by popular culture, religion, and normative attributions, which makes it increasingly difficult for individuals to reconcile the demands of their present realities with the demands of their histories. The novel provides a powerful illustration of how these tensions manifest across generations, thereby shaping and reshaping the aspirations, anxieties, and discontents of individuals who are situated within the liminal spaces of cultural hybridity.

However, the underlying source of their lamentation remains the same: the dissonance between the promise of multiculturalism and its actual lived experience. Although the degree of suffering experienced by each character may vary depending on their generational position, the source of their lamentation remains the same. The novel demonstrates that multiculturalism, when reduced to a policy or ideological framework, frequently undermines cultural, national, and individual identities, erasing the nuances that give personal and collective histories significance. This is in contrast to the fact that multiculturalism is intended to foster true integration. According to this interpretation, multiculturalism, as it is portrayed in *White Teeth*, is not a celebration of diversity but rather a mechanism of displacement, which makes each character an exile within their own homeland. The struggle that they face is not simply one of adaptation; rather, it is one of survival in a space that acknowledges and erases them at the same time. This leaves them in a perpetual state of belonging to nowhere, which is a paradox that continues to define the postcolonial subject in contemporary Britain.

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