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POSTCOLONIAL NOSTALGIA IN ZADIE SMITH'S *THE FRAUD* (2023)

ZADİE SMİTH'IN *THE FRAUD* (2023) ESERİNDE POSTKOLONYAL
NOSTALJİ

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ABSTRACT

Zadie Smith's first historical novel, *The Fraud*, offers a critical insight into the legacy of the British Empire through the lens of postcolonial nostalgia. The story is set in Victorian England and centres on the infamous Tichborne Trial, which became a national debate questioning identity and class conflict. It highlights how memory and identity are shaped not only by what is remembered but also by what is silenced or forgotten. Smith blends history and fiction to subvert narratives of the past and show how history is constructed. This study suggests that in *The Fraud*, nostalgia works not as a romantic view of the past but as a way to question the legacy of empire. Instead of idealising the imperial past, the novel shows how memory continues to shape contemporary identities, power relations, and social tensions. This study examines how *The Fraud* uses nostalgia not as an emotional return to the past, but as a tool for historical critique. The analysis draws on Boym's concept of nostalgia and is supported by ideas from postcolonial and memory studies. It focuses on how the novel connects personal longing with broader reflections on history and how the past continues to shape the present. The novel is centred on Andrew Bogle and Eliza Touchet, who often feel alienated from society. Their memories and perspectives reveal how injustice and silence are deeply rooted in the way history is told. Ultimately, the novel raises questions about how the empire is remembered and how its legacy continues to influence the present.

Keywords: *Historical Memory, Nostalgia, Postcolonialism, Tichborne Trial, Victorian Era*

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ÖZ

Zadie Smith'in ilk tarihi romanı *The Fraud*, Britanya İmparatorluğu'nun mirasına postkolonyal nostalji perspektifinden eleştirel bir bakış sunar. Hikâye, Viktorya dönemi İngiltere'sinde geçer ve kimlik ile sınıf çatışmasını gündeme getiren kötü şöhretli Tichborne Davası etrafında şekillenir. Roman, hafıza ve kimliğin yalnızca hatırlananlar üzerinden değil, aynı zamanda bastırılanlar ve unutulmuşlar aracılığıyla da nasıl biçimlendiğini vurgular. Smith, tarihi ve kurguyu harmanlayarak geçmişe dair anlatıları sorgular ve tarihin nasıl inşa edildiğini gözler önüne serer. Bu çalışma, *The Fraud* romanında nostaljinin geçmişe romantik bir özlem değil, imparatorluk mirasını sorgulamanın bir yolu olarak işlev gördüğünü öne sürmektedir. Roman, emperyal geçmişe yüceltmek yerine, kolektif belleğin günümüz kimliklerini, güç ilişkilerini ve toplumsal gerilimleri nasıl şekillendirmeye devam ettiğini ortaya koyar. Nostalji, bu bağlamda, duygusal bir geri dönüş değil; tarihsel bir eleştirinin aracı olarak değerlendirilir. Analiz, Svetlana Boym'un nostalji kavramına dayanmakta ve postkolonyal teori ile bellek çalışmaları çerçevesinden destek almaktadır. Romanın, bireysel özlemleri tarih üzerine daha geniş düşünsel sorgulamalarla nasıl ilişkilendirdiği ve geçmişin bugünü nasıl şekillendirmeyi sürdürdüğü incelenmektedir. Romanın merkezinde yer alan Andrew Bogle ve Eliza Touchet, toplumla tam olarak bağ kuramayan karakterlerdir. Onların anıları ve bakış açıları, adaletsizlik ile suskunluğun tarihin anlatılma biçimine ne denli yerleşik olduğunu ortaya koyar. Sonuç olarak, roman, imparatorluğun nasıl hatırlandığına ve bu geçmişin bugün üzerindeki etkilerine dair önemli sorular gündeme getirir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tarihsel Bellek, Nostalji, Postkolonyalizm, Tichborne Davası, Viktorya Dönemi

Introduction

Postcolonial literature often reflects struggles to deal with a painful past while imagining a more just future. Within the decolonisation process and afterwards, colonised people, or subjects in a colonial tongue, started to be noticed by the rest of the world. This, of course, was not due to the noble sense of forgiveness of the West, which held the power. Instead, it was the success of the oppressed ones who eventually managed to challenge the Occidental supremacy both domestically and abroad. The shift from colonialism to postcolonialism was not a smooth transition that meant the end of the problems. Rather, it was the starting point of entirely new problems. Just as the prefix “post” does not always mean “after”, postcolonialism does not refer to the end of colonial practices; it has just been reshaped. The aftermath of the abolition of traditional slavery and the formation of modern slavery cannot be seen as two distinct practices of the colonial mind. The form of repression evolved from physical oppression to more subtle, systemic constraints. As Homi Bhabha observes, the end of the direct colonial rule has not eradicated its influence. Colonialism reappears in new forms, which shows that postcolonial is not a break from the colonial past.

The post-war period has not only had destructive effects on those who lived through it firsthand, but its legacy has also been passed down to the next generations. Postcolonialism may simply be perceived as unpleasant, but it is more complicated than it seems to be. It

evokes various emotions, including resentment, pride, manipulation, and nostalgia. These diverse emotions are often portrayed in literary texts to unearth the nature of postcolonialism. Among them, nostalgia has a distinctive place in comprehending its complexity. Nostalgia contains both the longing and the sorrow stemming from the burden of the past. Postcolonial nostalgia, in particular, adds another layer to this emotional complexity. Despite its general romantic perception, nostalgia also conveys the conflict between the past and present. Nostalgia has versatile approaches which evoke unique emotions about the past for each individual or societal memory. Because it is about perception, it depends on how it is interpreted from different perspectives. That makes nostalgia relatively a subjective phenomenon. This subjectivity does not overshadow its significance; rather, it contributes to historical consciousness. Through nostalgia, postcolonial subjects can create a bridge between their past and present by which they can reshape their identities.

Zadie Smith, a British-Jamaican author, reflects this complex process of nostalgia in her first historical novel, *The Fraud* (2023). The novel is set in Victorian England, and it blends historical and fictional characters. *The Fraud* tells about the infamous Tichborne trial, which was an important and sensational event in the 19th century. Through the sceptical and objective character of Eliza Touchet's observations and the formerly enslaved man Andrew Bogle's experiences, the novel scrutinises the legal, racial and imperial dynamics of the era. This blending of historical fact and fiction situates the novel within the historical novel, as Georg Lukács argues that "What is lacking in the so-called historical novel before Sir Walter Scott is precisely the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age" (Lukács, 1962, p. 19). Smith's use of real and fictional characters, therefore, allows her to narrate the imperial legacy not just as distant history, but as a structure of feeling that continues to affect present identities. This shows that *The Fraud* is not just set in the past, but it also deals with the ideas, tensions, and power structures of that time. In this way, the novel fits the tradition of the historical novel. At the same time, it offers a new way of looking at history through a postcolonial lens.

Postcolonial nostalgia is central to Smith's *The Fraud*. Rather than accepting nostalgia as a simple and painful longing for the past, Smith explores how nostalgia both hides and unearths the truths of imperial history. The novel reflects how colonisers and colonised are shaped by memories that are lost or never existed. *The Fraud* illustrates that postcolonial nostalgia is not only an emotional response to the past, but also a critique of it. Indeed, Smith's narrative aims to remove imperial praise as Kaur states it "unsettles the nation's delusions about race, imperialism and the transatlantic slave trade" (Kaur, 2023, para. 2). Smith contributes to a better understanding of how the imperial past continues to echo in the present. As Ulin observes, the novel is "smartly rendered, true to its own time while also deeply reflective of ours", showing how a Victorian story can be echoed in modern realities (Ulin, 2023, para. 3). This paper will explore how *The Fraud* engages with nostalgia to examine imperial history and its marks on today's identities and memories. To

frame this exploration, the paper focuses on postcolonial nostalgia as a way of understanding how people make sense of the past marked by loss, silence, and displacement. Rather than treating nostalgia as a single emotion, the study acknowledges its complexity and highlights its centrality in understanding imperial memory. These versatile approaches help reveal how imperial history continues to shape the present in lasting ways. In this context, Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia provides a useful framework to analyse how *The Fraud* engages with different attitudes toward imperial memory. The study argues that *The Fraud* uses postcolonial nostalgia not to glorify the past but to question the imperial legacy and its lasting effects on memory and identity. To support this argument, the paper examines how characters challenge or reinterpret the past and how nostalgia becomes a tool for reshaping identity.

Historical Background and Narrative Structure of *The Fraud*

Zadie Smith's *The Fraud* (2023) is a historical novel that goes back to Victorian England's one of the most sensational cases: The Tichborne Case in 1873. Arthur Orton, a butcher from Wagga Wagga, Australia, claims to be Sir Roger Tichborne, the lost heir of the Tichborne family. The real Roger Tichborne was lost in a shipwreck almost twenty years before this case. It was a shock for both the family and society. One of the believers of the claimant was Roger's mother. She believed Arthur Orton, even though French was Roger's first language, which Orton could not speak. The novel's title, *The Fraud*, refers to this case, but it has multiple layers, including the themes of social deception and identity crises. These layers allow the novel to show how national stories are built and how personal identities are shaped by cultural roles. By focusing on the Tichborne case, Smith invites readers to reflect not only on what is accepted as legal truth but also on how history and identity are shaped and questioned over time.

The novel primarily focuses on two characters' points of view, and each of them offers windows to different worlds. The storyteller is Mrs Eliza Touchet, a widow who works for her cousin-in-law, William Harrison Ainsworth. Ainsworth is a real historical figure who lived in the Victorian Era as a once-famous writer, mostly with his *Jack Sheppard* (1839). Mrs Touchet is a careful observer and often sceptical of the incidents. She is interested in the Tichborne case and follows the courts by observing the crowd's expectations. The other central character is Andrew Bogle, whose life story is narrated in the second half of the book. He is a black Jamaican man enslaved on a sugar plantation. He worked for the Tichborne family for years after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834. Bogle plays a key role in the trial as his testimony supports the claimant's identity as the real Roger Tichborne. Through Bogle's memories, Smith portrays the experiences of the enslaved people and their descendants to highlight the trauma inherited from colonialism. The contrast between Touchet's sharp observations and Bogle's personal pain helps the novel move between telling a social story and raising questions about colonial history.

The historical background of England is essential to the themes of the novel. The Tichborne trial took place in an era in which the British Empire was witnessing moral questions and challenges, including class inequalities, reforms, and the ruins of slavery and colonialism. *The Fraud* puts the Tichborne trial at the centre of focus to touch upon broader contexts. The public was excited about the idea of challenging the aristocratic privileges by advocating for the claimant against them. Besides, the black servant's central role in the trial is rather an uncomfortable case for Victorian society. Smith blends fact and fiction by integrating real historical events into her narrative. For instance, Smith refers to the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 and the bloody suppression by the British government. (Smith, 2023a, p. 78). This rebellion, led by Paul Bogle, caused the death of hundreds of black Jamaicans who were against injustice and poverty. The martial law declared by Governor Eyre was a call to hunt the rebels. The rebellion and the law are discussed by William, Fanny and Mrs Touchet. While Fanny and William claim that martial law is not murder, Mrs Touchet thinks it is. When William Ainsworth advocates that "We really cannot murder a man for saving a colony"; Mrs Touchet responds "Three hundred and fifty Jamaicans hanged in the public square! Villages burned to the ground, families murdered, women dishonoured, discovered in their beds with their throats—" (Smith, 2023a, p. 79). These scenes show how the story moves back and forth between real history and fictional details, challenging the usual way the era is remembered. By referencing the riot and Governor Eyre in controversial perspectives, Smith reflects the real moral conflicts of the Victorian Era. Smith, in her interview with Terry Gross, explains her aim of shocking readers: "So the whole purpose of the novel, in my mind, was that you're reading what seems to be a cozy, charming, funny Victorian novel until it isn't suddenly, because that's the structure of British society in the 19th century" (Smith, 2023b). Hence, the novel's blending of comedy and tragic reality shows how the Victorian Era was covered with illusion and manipulation. Thus, *The Fraud*'s plot, which seemingly focuses on the Tichborne trial, becomes a tool for exploring deeper questions about the truth and the fraud.

The Concept Of Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a complex and multifaceted emotion. It is rooted in both longing and pain. Its etymology suggests what dilemmas lie beneath the seemingly romantic and harmless concept of nostalgia. Etymologically derived from Greek, nostalgia consists of "nostos" (homecoming) and "algos" (pain, longing). Thus, it means the pain of homecoming or, as Boym states, "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (Boym, 1959, p. xiii). The longing for home in these two circumstances hosts their unique sorrows. One pain is not superior to the other. The miss of an existing home may seem more endurable, but it is not less complex for a soldier at war dreaming of his beloved country. Mason also emphasises that nostalgia always causes suffering regardless of the existence of the missed home: "Nostalgia is the suffering caused by our unappeased yearning to return. Whether or not, he said, the home we long for ever existed" (Mason, 2020, p. 116). Whether it exists or not, being far from home causes a deep feeling of nostalgia. Nostalgia is not only a personal experience but is also strongly tied to a collective memory and

trauma. Understanding the multi-layered formation of nostalgia for both individuals and societies is crucial for interpreting the postcolonial texts in terms of longing for home, as these texts show the echoes of the past on the present.

Nostalgia, in the postcolonial context, does not only serve as an individual yearning, but at the same time, it represents a collective expression of cultural dislocation. The homecoming desire combines with the identity clashes. Postcolonial subjects live far from their homes to gain what they believe they cannot have in their homes. This seems like a volunteer move for these individuals, but why they cannot find peace in their own homes should be the question behind these moves. For some, however, the idea of returning home evokes a feeling of anxiety rather than peace. This is called nostophobia, which means “an abnormal fear or dislike of home” (Davis, 1979, p. 15). Nostalgia is not only about longing for a place in the past, rather, it is a longing for this place at another time. They become lost in the time and place in which they cannot separate themselves from what they used to be. Their perception of the past and the future blur, perception of time and place disappears. Lefebvre argues that the “apparent stability” of space is only temporary (qtd in Cornelius, 2019, p. 23). This temporal space makes it harder for postcolonial subjects to reconnect with their past. Their monachopsis, the feeling of being out of place, is mostly represented through nostalgia in literary works in which they do not belong to a specific time or place. As Boym states, the feeling of displacement and being out of time is strongly felt in nostalgia:

Nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes nostalgia is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways. The nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space. (Boym, 1959, p. xiv)

Boym suggests that nostalgia moves sideways, rather than following a straight way of longing for an idealised past. This refers to the multiple perceptions of time instead of a linear progression within a single moment. Boym's perception of nostalgia finds its place in literary texts within Bakhtin's *chronotope*. According to Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, time and space should be interconnected in a literary text. The nostalgic subject, feeling “stifled within the conventional confines of time and space” (Boym, 1959, p. xiv), experiences a *threshold chronotope*, a liminal space that is neither fully past nor the future but a moment of change. Migrants or displaced subjects exist in this threshold place, staying in-between their homes and exile. As Stuart Hall puts it, “The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual ‘past’ [...] it is always constituted through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are [...] not an essence but a positioning” (qtd. in Kral, 2009, p. 16). In *The Fraud*, characters like Andrew Bogle live within this threshold chronotope. He is caught between the past of slavery and the present of imperial Britain. His story does not just recall history, but it shows how personal memory and national forgetting clash in the same space. This suggests that nostalgia is not simply a retrospective longing but a reconstruction of time itself.

Nostalgia is not the sole form of homesickness. Rather, it has multiple dimensions and forms that have unique implications. Boym coined two distinguished forms of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. He distinguishes these two concepts of nostalgia as “Restorative nostalgia stresses nostos and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in algia, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming-wistfully, ironically, desperately” (Boym, 1959, p. xviii) and goes on “Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time” (p. 41). As can be understood from the explanations of the concepts, restorative nostalgia focuses on reconstructing the past. The restorative nostalgia concept coincides with David’s First Order (Simple Order) Nostalgia, which also involves a longing for the past without any opposing questions. Davis states that “Simple Nostalgia is that subjective state which harbors the largely unexamined belief that THINGS WERE BETTER (MORE BEAUTIFUL) (HEALTHIER) (HAPPIER) (MORE CIVILIZED) (MORE EXCITING) THEN THAN NOW” (Davis, 1979, p.18). On the other hand, reflective nostalgia is the longing feeling itself without the intention of homecoming. This concept aligns with Davis’s Second Order Nostalgia in which “the person does more than sentimentalize some past and censure, if only implicitly, some present” (Davis, 1979, p. 21). Here, the nostalgic subject not only longs for the past but also critically examines this sentiment. In short, reflective nostalgia remembers, while restorative nostalgia rebuilds. Both Boym and Davis show that nostalgia is not a simple feeling. It can hold different meanings, from emotional longing to political ideas about the past. This distinction is significant for having a deeper insight into how nostalgia functions in different contexts. This distinction is especially helpful for analysing postcolonial literature, where nostalgia often expresses both a sense of loss and a deeper questioning of what that loss signifies today.

Restorative nostalgia can be seen in nationalist movements whose aim is to turn back to the good old days. On the other hand, reflective nostalgia does not idealise the past, and there is no strong hope or intention to turn back home. Most of the postcolonial and diasporic works include reflective nostalgia. Characters inwardly feel the impossibility of turning back and trying to get used to their new identities. Cornelius points out the place of nostalgia in literary texts, stating, “As a literary tool for the writer, nostalgia can be used to facilitate the integration of traumatic versions of the past, to nudge dormant memory, and to hint persistently at current dissatisfactions” (Cornelius, 2019, p. 12). This makes nostalgia an effective strategic narration tool for exploring the complicated nature of postcolonial memory. Nostalgia becomes an indispensable part of postcolonial theory with its contribution to understanding various individual and societal longings and doubts for home. Each individual or society lives their nostalgia, which makes it rather a subjective concept. That means that “Postcolonial nostalgia is a biased and subjective perspective” (Cornelius, 1979, p. 11) and “while the longing is universal, nostalgia can be divisive” (Boym, 1959, p. xiii). Rasch offers a different perspective on postcolonial nostalgia as he claims it “focuses our attention on the way in which contemporary recollections of empire orient themselves toward a postcolonial discourse in the present” (Rasch, 2018, p. 150).

This suggests that postcolonial nostalgia is not only a tool of remembrance; instead, it shapes the way we perceive and interpret colonialism in the present. It reflects how the past continues to influence the modern. In this sense, postcolonial nostalgia is concerned with how the loss of home in the past continues to affect contemporary societies and individuals. In literary works like *The Fraud*, postcolonial nostalgia appears through characters like Andrew Bogle, whose memories illustrate how the colonial past is remembered and resisted. Kral's concept of liminality further enhances this view by indicating that postcolonial subjects are often torn between the past and the present, which leaves them in the interstitial space as a negotiation area. These liminal spaces, as described by Levi and Weingrod, are "arenas for the creative melding of cultures, 'on the cutting edge' of new cultural and other formations" (qtd. in Kral, 2009, p. 14). These liminal spaces emphasise the existence of the hybrid nature of postcolonial subjects. In these spaces, the boundaries between the past and the present get blurred, and this results in a more complex understanding of home and exile.

In conclusion, different approaches to nostalgia deepen the discussions about the past's heritage and its reflections on today. Postcolonial nostalgia expresses a longing for the past, but it also leads to a critical examination of it. It highlights the complexities of home, exile, and identity. This in-betweenness which blends the past and the present, the home and the exile, the longing and the hatred, creates a dynamic space where new expressions of nostalgia emerge. By acknowledging the versatile aspects of postcolonial nostalgia, how the past continues to shape today can be understood via different perspectives.

Postcolonial Nostalgia In *The Fraud* (2023)

Zadie Smith's *The Fraud* (2023) offers a rich insight into what Astrid Rasch calls postcolonial nostalgia which is "Rather than simply rosy images of the past, we find many examples of texts that criticise empire on the surface, yet also perpetuate discourses from the colonial era and lament its passing in subtler ways" (Rasch, 2018, p. 148). This ambivalence recalls Paul Gilroy's notion of *postcolonial melancholia*, which is an unconscious nostalgia that complicates Britain's ability to move on from its colonial past. As mentioned in the back cover of his book *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Gilroy adapts the concept of melancholia from its Freudian origins and applies it not to individual grief but to the social pathology of neoimperialist politics" (Gilroy, 2005, back cover). In this sense, the longing for empire becomes a collective refusal to colonial violence rather than a romantic nostalgia. Smith approaches this painful longing critically. *The Fraud* deals with nostalgia on multiple layers, including politics, narrative, and emotions, by both mocking and criticising. By doing so, the novel bridges Victorian colonial history and contemporary postcolonial reflections by portraying how past experiences shape present attitudes. It reflects the duality by simultaneously embracing and subverting Victorian nostalgia. Although this paper centres on postcolonial nostalgia as its main analytical lens, it is also important to recognise how Smith interacts with the conventions of the historical novel. Without directly following the classical model, she uses historical fiction not to glorify the

past but to question its narratives and power structures. Her focus is not on heroic individuals, but on how historical events influence the lives of ordinary people. In this sense, *The Fraud* reflects what Lukács describes as the social and ideological potential of the historical novel, where history is not a static background but a force shaping human experience. This allows nostalgia in the novel to function not only emotionally, but also as a tool for uncovering historical contradictions.

One of the efficient ways of portraying nostalgia is the tone of the novel. Smith draws a successful portrayal of the Victorian world. As a Dickensian author, Smith offers a panoramic view of 19th century England, exploring gender issues, households, social inequalities, and racism in a humorous manner. The class distinction is apparent during the story. The working class and the bourgeois oppose each other because of immense social and economic distinctions. This is also reflected in the Tichborne trial, in which two opposite views are advocated by those groups. While working-class citizens are on the side of the Claimant, the bourgeois thinks he is a fraud. This is not about a fanaticism of Arthur Orton but about an effort to overcome the other. Smith describes the trial hall as being full of “no-name” people supporting the Claimant, holding a banner that reads, “NO OPPRESSION! FAIR PLAY FOR EVERY MAN!” (Smith, 2023a, p. 107). Particularly, a working-class man in the courtroom screams to advocate Bogle, the witness of the Claimant:

BOGLE SPEAKS TRUTH screamed a man, very close to the left eardrum of Mrs Touchet, spraying spittle on her shoe. She looked down to examine the screamer, one poor man among many, in a flat cap and a worn pair of trousers, with hands blackened by his labour. How had Mr Bogle managed to so captivate this inarticulate stranger? Why did Mrs Touchet – with all her good intentions, her facility with language, her capacious imagination – still struggle to make herself understood? (Smith, 2023a, p. 344)

This evokes nostalgia for an imagined and idealised Britain, which is purified by social hierarchies, a longing for a past of equality. In this sense, the working-class support for the Claimant does not reflect a sympathy for the Claimant, but a collective yearning for overthrowing the oppressive system maintained by the bourgeois. The collective yearning of the working-class crowd reflects what Boym calls restorative nostalgia. Their desire is not just to support the Claimant, but to revive an imagined past of fairness and equality. This is a national and political form of nostalgia, shaped by social frustration. In contrast, postcolonial nostalgia, as explored through characters like Bogle or Mrs. Touchet, is more inward and reflective. It does not aim to rebuild the past, but to make sense of it. The demand for “fair play” shared on the banner is a desire to turn back to Britain, where every man, regardless of class, had a more equal place. This is an imagined and idealised purer past in contrast to present-day Britain. Here, it should also be taken into consideration that British citizens also long for a historically accurate past, but for a symbolic one. In this

way, their yearning aligns with postcolonial nostalgia, which similarly desires a purified national past without imperial exploitation. By this, they construct an idealised past to criticise the present.

This collective support for the Claimant was reinforced with the creation of the Tichborne Defence Fund, which “was organized, and bonds sold based on his chance of coming into his estates. In this way about £60000 was raised” (Kinsley, 1911, p. 567). Thousands of working-class citizens donated money to help the Claimant. Helping a man who is probably a fraud reflects the desire to be against English elites who silenced them in every aspect of life. This fund became a way of challenging the system rather than defending a person whom they do not know well. In this sense, their support for the Claimant reflects what Boym calls *restorative nostalgia*, which is a longing for a purer and imagined past in which justice was available to every person. As Davis explains:

Just as the phasing of the life cycle periodically entails status transitions that in their perceived discontinuity and attendant anxiety evoke nostalgic reactions from individuals, so do untoward major historic events and abrupt social changes pose a similar threat and evoke a similar response from people in the aggregate. (Davis, 1979, p. 101-102)

According to Davis, personal change causes nostalgia in individuals, and historical changes cause nostalgia in whole societies. Smith states about the fund in *The Fraud* by sharing the Claimant's plea: “To appeal to the British public' for fund for my defence, and in doing so I appeal to every British soul who is inspired by a love of justice and fair play, and who is willing to defend the weak against the strong” (Smith, 2023a, p. 338). The Tichborne Trial became a reunion opportunity for working-class citizens in England. This kind of union against the authority was seen in the Chartist Movement on a larger scale. Workers signed petitions for political reforms. There was a call for equality and justice for every man. John Ball's famous question, “When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?” became the slogan of this movement. This cry is echoed in the courtroom in the form of “fair play for every man”. These slogans reflect a longing for a fairer social order. This form of nostalgia, often found in the working class, does not necessarily seek historical accuracy but reveals dissatisfaction with the present.

It can be inferred that postcolonial nostalgia is not only about a racial issue. It is rather a common sense of humankind. In *The Fraud*, Bogle recalls his hometown, Hope and his father. There is a similar social hierarchy in Africa. High-born men are called *oh-zo*. He confesses, “We kidnapped these Arrow and made them low. We owned them, and they laboured for us, and the name for them was *oh-hoo*. But even the *oh-hoo* were higher than Peachey” (Smith, 2023a, p. 240). This suggests that postcolonial nostalgia is not solely about racial injustice but about a more universal human desire for a domination-free world. Both the British working class and African communities are shaped by a rigid social hierarchy. As Smith expresses in her interview, “And that's not a Black issue. That's not a

white issue. I don't think in those terms. That is a human issue" (Smith 2023b). This shows that postcolonial nostalgia reflects a collective memory that transcends racial or national boundaries and reflects a shared human need for justice. This shared longing for justice is also apparent in Mrs Touchet's symbolic reflection of the continents. She observes that:

Europe looked like Athena, with one hand open, in expectation of payment. Asia had a box of tea on one side, a barrel of spice on the other, and treasures in her lap. She, like Europe, was fully dressed. America was half-naked, barbarous. [...] But on this topic Africa was silent. Like America, she had misplaced her clothes, and around her bare feet was gathered the bounty she had provided to the world. Ivory, lions, grapes, some exotic fruits which Mrs Touchet could not identify, ostrich feathers, pots and carpets. Nothing else. (Smith, 2023a, p. 355)

Mrs Touche's discomfort with colonial history shows that postcolonial nostalgia is not a desire to turn back to the empire days; in fact, it is to understand and criticise the past. In this sense, *The Fraud* portrays postcolonial nostalgia as a human issue rather than a racist one and reflects a more equal world.

This critical approach to the past in *The Fraud* is echoed by former reformers who challenged the dominant imperialism. Elizabeth Heyrick, for example, was one of the first advocates of the abolition of slavery. She was an activist who aimed to stop buying sugar from slave plantations. Smith describes this movement in the novel: "... they are knocking on every door in Leicester to persuade the ladies to take sugar off their household lists, and after she has finished in Leicester she means to go to Birmingham! A boycott, you see." (Smith, 2023a, p. 97). In Heyrick's own words, "The perpetuation of slavery in our West India colonies, is not an abstract question, to be settled between the Government and the Planters, we are all guilty, of supporting and perpetuating slavery" (Heyrick, 1836, p. 4) and she adds "ABSTINENCE FROM THE USE of West Indian productions sugar especially, [...] would, at once, give the death blow to West Indian slavery" (Heyrick, 1836, p. 7). With the voice of Heyrick, *The Fraud* does not romanticise the colonial past but instead criticises both its historical and contemporary heritage. Smith deepens the historical background of the trade policies in the 18th and 19th centuries. She mentions the West Indian Interest and the opposition to this collaboration by stating:

the West Indian Interest are in a state of extreme anxiety. Who can blame them? Abolitionists and Whigs in one ear, a lot of damned Baptists and Methodists in the other. [...] But you must understand: the name of "Grenville" can hardly be pleasant to them. (Smith, 2023a, p. 281)

The opposition to the West India Interest is not surprising for those advocating the rights of slaves. It was a powerful lobby that made a profit from the colonies in the West Indies. As stated by Heijer, "This lobby group managed to keep foreign plantation products from the British market via the parliament" (Heijer, 2014, p. 159). They, for sure, advocated for

the maintenance of slavery for their financial considerations. But as Smith also shares, it is strictly opposed by anti-slavery activists and politicians. In this sense, the novel's postcolonial nostalgia reflects not a longing to rebuild the empire, but a yearning to confront injustices and overcome them. This perspective shows that *The Fraud* does not embrace restorative nostalgia, which seeks to reconstruct the idealised past. Instead, it aligns more with reflective nostalgia. The nostalgia in the novel is neither about celebrating imperial power nor about forgetting injustices. It draws attention to resistance to these inequalities and injustices, such as Heyrick's sugar boycott. This kind of nostalgic resistance, like Heyrick's boycott, is not about going back to the past, but about imagining what justice might have looked like. As Boym writes, "Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (Boym, 2002, p. xiii). In this case, the longing is not for the empire itself, but for an imagined version of fairness and moral action that never fully existed. Smith uses this idea to show how past dreams of justice still shape present demands for change.

Smith observes that "One of the complications of managing decline was nostalgia", which indicates how a longing for the past can make moving forward harder and more complicated (Smith, 2023a, p. 413). In *The Fraud*, the concept of nostalgia is not about glorifying the empire, but about revealing its immoral aspects. This search for an equal and moral society was articulated by British politician William Wilberforce, whose efforts against the slave trade are also notable for their reflections on nostalgia. He states that "it is the true duty of every man to promote the happiness of his fellow-creatures to the utmost of his power" (Wilberforce, 1996, p. xxx). Rather than advocating a return to the imperial past, such reflections, even from the view of a British politician, highlight the missed opportunities for social equality and justice. Smith refers to Wilberforce in *The Fraud* by stating, "Look, it's a horrid business. Unholy and inhumane, as Wilberforce demonstrated twenty years ago. And so the trade was ended, thank God" (Smith, 2023a, p. 129). Along with these official voices, some radicals like Robert Wedderburn, son of an enslaved black woman and a Scottish sugar planter, also opposed inequality and slavery. He, with his mixed heritage, was a strict defender of slavery abolition as Smith refers to his words "The slaves should murder their masters soon as they please!" (Smith, 2023a, p. 273). Wedderburn was not welcomed just like other radical voices in those times and was imprisoned. Smith remarks his being lucky for not being killed in a time of high governmental oppression by stating "But Wedderburn, who had many prior dealings with the condemned men, happened to be already safely in gaol on the night in question imprisoned for 'seditious writings' – and so still had a head on his shoulders" (Smith 293) and adds that this revolt against the imperial system would never end in any part of the world: "and no doubt England was full of Wedderburns and Thistlewoods as Jamaica was of Cudjoes and Pompeys" (Smith, 2023a, p. 294). Through these historical and literary perspectives, it can be observed that the novel's nostalgia is less about rebuilding an old empire of oppression and more about acknowledging past miseries and faults to enhance the present.

This reflective sense of nostalgia is also deeply felt by Mrs Touchet while wandering around Kilburn. As she walks, she observes how much it has changed: “Mapesbury House was sold, and a little further on, so was The Grange [...] lamp posts where elms had been” and she thinks that she is still the same Eliza, but she asks herself that “What was this place?” (Smith, 2023a, p. 188-189). Her discomfort is rooted in her yearning for the past when people were “more human” and her inability to adapt to the new era of industry. She feels lost in this new modern city when she is away from her home. Her feeling about England leads her to coin a theory about it: “England was not a real place at all. England was an elaborate alibi. Nothing real happened in England. Everything the English really did and really wanted... they did elsewhere” (Smith, 2023a, p. 408). Mrs Touchet’s idea of an unreal England stems from its colonial background as it is built beyond its natural orders. This feeling of alienation evokes the feeling of escaping from modern life. She says, “We have decided to live like the Llangollen women, only in white cottons rather than black worsted” (Smith 207). By choosing white cotton over black worsted, Mrs Touchet describes a longing for the peace and simplicity of the past, being free from the heavy black worsted, a textile here symbolising the rigid and perhaps stifling aspects of Victorian society. This includes its hidden links to imperial exploitation. As Boym explains, reflective nostalgia “lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history” and resists the urge to reconstruct the past (Boym, 2001, p. 41). This aligns with Mrs. Touchet’s quiet resistance to the world around her. This tension between outer simplicity and hidden violence also appears in earlier imperial texts, such as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. This use of worsted connects to a similar, unsettling moment in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In that novel, a Black man wears “a bit of white worsted round his neck...It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas” (Conrad, 1899, p. 17). This connection between the two texts makes the symbol deeper. Mrs. Touchet's choice of 'white cottons' shows a personal wish for a simpler, idealised past. This is a form of reflective nostalgia, a desire for a kind of freedom. Yet, the 'black worsted' implicitly carries the weight of a society built on colonial systems. These systems created symbols of actual captivity in other parts of the empire. So, worsted becomes a small but strong symbol. It clearly shows how Mrs. Touchet's personal wish for a softer life is tied to a critique of Victorian history. This critique also applies to the political forms of nostalgia for an empire built on power. By connecting personal longing with imperial history, Smith shows how nostalgia becomes a political force that can either mask or expose historical injustices.

While Mrs Touchet longs for the simple and quiet nature of good-old England, her views also shed light on those who are still on the side of traditional English authority. Onslow, who is described as “a red-faced walrus of a man”, resembles the traditional national image of John Bull, a masculine, strong, and red-faced man (Smith, 2023a, p. 353). But rather than symbolising strength and morality, now he represents the failure of English values. He is morally empty and reflects the disappearance of national ideals. In contrast, Bogle becomes closer to Mrs Touchet as Smith writes, “She felt she would always choose Bogle’s breed of conviction and belief over the cynicism and venality of a man like Onslow” (Smith, 2023a, p. 353). Her views, as a neutral observer, suggest a rejection of the

traditional figure of Englishness and an embrace of an outsider. This choice reflects that a black man with morality better represents the roots of Englishness than a white man who does not. Her shift does not reflect a personal change but a deeper longing to recover and bring English values back. As Boym notes, restorative nostalgia “puts emphasis on nostos and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps” (Boym, 2001, p. 41). Mrs. Touchet’s discomfort with modern England reflects a more personal, reflective nostalgia. She does not want to rebuild the past, but she mourns what has been lost. This makes her nostalgia inward, shaped by her own memories rather than collective emotions. This is also echoed in Little Johanna’s dream: “Everything taken from us I WILL RESTORE” (Smith, 2023a, p. 298). Both moments reflect a restorative nostalgia that longs to bring back dignity, fairness, and truth, rather than restore the empire itself. This point matters because it shows how restorative nostalgia can focus on moral values instead of wanting to bring back the old national power. Besides Mrs Touchet’s longing for a simpler and relatively better past of England, deeper moral contradictions of imperial England also appear. Mrs Touchet struggles to distinguish between reality and illusion. As Smith writes,

It was time for Mrs Touchet to decide what she really believed. To separate fact from fiction once and for all [...] She had worried that ‘the law’ needed a theory of law. Eighty-five court days later, she was having similar trouble with ‘the truth’. Did the truth require a theory of truth? (Smith, 2023a, p. 386).

The question of the truth reflects the spirit of the Tichborne trial. Kenealy used the phrase “falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus”, meaning “false in one thing, false in everything” to attack on both witnesses and the justice system itself. He claimed that if someone lied once, they could never be trusted again. At this point, he shouted in the court, “this man hath broken it!”. Jury reminded him that there is no such rule in English law. Still, he became popular with his dramatic speech and people came to the court “enough to fill the court five times over” (Smith, 2023a, p. 387). This shows that the public was not only interested in the result of the legal justice system, but a story in which an ordinary man could win over the aristocracy. The courtroom, in this sense, became a stage for restorative nostalgia, where there is fairness for common men. But as Mrs Touchet’s reflection suggests, the past was never so simple, and the truth may not be fixed; it depends on who is telling it. This final uncertainty shows that postcolonial nostalgia is not about finding one true story, but about showing how truth itself can shift under colonial and postcolonial power.

Conclusion

Zadie Smith’s *The Fraud* provides a re-evaluation of how history, memory and longing are perceived in a postcolonial context within the nostalgia concept. Despite its romanticised understanding, nostalgia serves as a reminder and critique of forgotten values. Smith treats nostalgia as a multi-layered concept rather than a simple longing for imagined and divinised old days. By simultaneously acknowledging and subverting Victorian nostalgia,

The Fraud demonstrates that postcolonial nostalgia can be a tool of expression for criticising and longing. The novel shows that the past has never been a bed of roses, but has been ambiguous and complicated. Smith's work bridges Victorian colonial history with contemporary reflections. This illustrates how the echoes of the past continue to shape the present.

Smith rejects the conventional understanding of history and memory. Rather than presenting history as if it were a fixed record of facts, *The Fraud* unearths history as a collection of opposing and competing narratives shaped by different sides of the coin. The Tichborne trial is at the centre of the story, and it becomes more than a simple case during the Victorian period. It reflects the story of the "truth" and the "fraud". Smith includes people from diverse social classes, ranging from the working class to formerly enslaved individuals, to enrich her narrative about the past and memory. For example, thousands of working-class British people advocate the liar Claimant for a nostalgic longing for a society in which every man was equal. Their aim is not only to support a fraud, but to criticise the current injustices. They try to turn back to a better and purer past, which, in Boym's terms, is a restorative nostalgia. At the same time, the novel mocks and questions the existence of such nostalgia. History, as *The Fraud* suggests, is not stable; it is actively reshaped and reinterpreted through different perspectives and needs.

Smith's reflections of nostalgia enrich the relationship between identity and memory. While nostalgia is a longing for the imagined good past in one hand, it is all about an illusion on the other. Smith's nostalgia is not a full manifestation of returning to Victorian society, but a reflection of what has been lost. Smith's characters, like Mrs Touchet and Bogle, believe that the past will never be restored. As Dominick LaCapra argues,

Working through is an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma (as well as transference relations in general), one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future (LaCapra, 2001, p. 22).

In this way, Smith's novel supports LaCapra's view that memory, when we think about it carefully, can help us reflect on the past in an honest way instead of just getting stuck in sad feelings. In this sense, Bogle's memory of slavery does not trap him in the past, but becomes a means of recognising historical pain while continuing to live in the present. This makes nostalgia in *The Fraud* not only emotional, but also a reflective and critical act. Rather than encouraging a romantic return, *The Fraud* uses nostalgia to uncover historical injustice. In this sense, while there are both restorative and reflective nostalgia elements, the nostalgia in *The Fraud* is mostly reflective rather than restorative. By engaging the past in a multifaceted way, the novel makes a significant contribution to current discussions of postcolonial studies and collective cultural memory. *The Fraud* mirrors Britain's imperial

memory and its effects on both the colonised and the coloniser, and it serves as an effective medium of remembrance and re-evaluation of those times. *The Fraud* is inclusive in the sense that it is a multivocal narrative rather than one-sided subjectivity. It shows that the legacies of imperialism, slavery, and oppression are still echoed. With an open ending, *The Fraud* invites readers to question who the real fraud is: the Claimant with a false identity, or the imperial system that forces him to become one. This detail matters because it shows how restorative nostalgia can focus on moral values instead of just supporting old-fashioned nationalism. *The Fraud* reflects postcolonial nostalgia as a more thoughtful kind of longing and memory, rather than just a painful wish to return to the past. Through its multi-layered historical and fictional characters, the novel pushes the readers to consider what we have inherited from the colonial era and what the reflections of those are in our lives today. Smith's work suggests that we should first struggle with the *frauds* of the past to understand today. This critical side of nostalgia may be a key to understanding the postcolonial today and dreaming of a better and equal future. The novel's message in this sense is that only by confronting the legacies of the colonial empire can we use nostalgia to make progress. In this way, nostalgia is a political tool that can either ruin the past or illuminate the future, depending on how we choose to remember.

In conclusion, *The Fraud* shows that nostalgia is not only a feeling of loss, but also a way to question the past. By focusing on memory, identity, and history, the novel explores how people remember and reshape what came before. Smith does not try to give a final answer. Instead, she encourages the reader to think more deeply about how the past still affects the present. This kind of postcolonial nostalgia does not aim to return to an ideal past, but to understand it better and move forward with greater awareness.

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