



The Construction of Identity in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

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Abstract

Postmodern writers demonstrate the problems of living in a postmodern world. Zadie Smith, as a Black British novelist and immigrant, is dealing with postmodern subjects in her first novel *White Teeth* (2000). The novel focuses on postmodern issues and in particular, the construction of identity of the Bangladeshi (Samad Iqbal) and the Englishman (Archie Jones) who are two close friends, and their children's living in multicultural London.

Obviously, *White Teeth* explores the troubles related to the existence in a diverse culture with the space between the migrants of the first and second generations. The characters are linked to their past, also they are unsatisfied with their life in a contemporary society. Smith portrays the second generation migrants and believes that they are totally different from Western societies in the way of raising up, living, thinking, etc. Some of the characters see themselves as strangers in a strange world; they even spent most of their life in London. Some other characters intend to connect to fundamental groups so as to construct their identity and achieve their social status.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the construction of identity through the lens of the theories of postmodern; specifically those of Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard and Fredric Jameson and these theories will then be applied to the novel practically. Also, this study will examine how the characters construct their identities and how the two different cultures interact on identity formation level in Smith's *White Teeth*. Also, it will demonstrate the role of history and the past of the first generation to construct the second generation's identity.

Keywords: Construction of Identity, Postmodernism, Multiculturalism, London.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, identity becomes the most significant subject on everybody's lips and mind. Literature constantly has a great role in dealing with the problems of identity. According to Culler (2011: 111,113) "identity can be observed to be constructed or given, in the literature, both perspectives are demonstrated". Furthermore, Michel Foucault (Elliott, 2010: 139) claims that identities are formed by the social institutes and doctrines. Before the postmodern period, identities, the individuals' relationships with each other, the individual state relationship, and the communication and expression styles were considered to be more stabilized and permanent, whereas they are now far from being stabilized in the postmodern time. As a result most of postmodern authors started to write about these issues in their writings and one of them is Zadie Smith.

Originally, her name was Sadie Smith but later she changed it into Zadie Smith (Adam Augustyn, 2018). Tracey L. Walters (2008:1) maintains that Smith was born, in 1975, in London where she experienced her childhood in the city's multicultural zone of Willesden. It is precisely in this area of North London where she also places the families in her first novel *White Teeth*. During her formative years, Smith spent time alone reading and watching black and white films. She is one of the most successful and well-known Black and British writers. Smith's blended parenting and being in a diverse society have crucially affected her novel.



In Walter's (2008: 2) view, Smith's bibliography consists of three novels, namely *White Teeth* (2000) *Autograph Man* (2002) and *On Beauty* (2005). Considering the fact that the reception of her first novel *White Teeth* (hereafter *WT*) was positive in Britain and internationally, this leads her to be an international phenomenon. Additionally, critics applauded Smith's ability to address a multiplicity of themes such as cultural hybridity, identity, religious fundamentalism, post-colonialism and multiculturalism in a single novel. Smith's success was also partially the result of the media's interest in her. Moreover, Smith's biracial heritage, age and talent made for an intriguing story about the new face and fresh voice of contemporary British literature. Moreover, According to Matthew Walker Paproth (Walters, 2008: 9), Smith in *WT* demonstrates the problems of living in a postmodern world, as her characters constantly collide with each other in the search of meaning of their lives. Smith's characters, for instance, Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal, struggle in order to find happiness in a fractured and chaotic world. Her characters seek answers, seek meanings, but find themselves caught between various binaries: the religious and the secular (Millat), Eastern and Western values (Samad), the past and the present (Irie).

More importantly, the Anglo- Jamaican author in *WT* portrays the issues centred around the problems of the individual in forming an authentic identity in a multicultural society and constructing a new national identity in postcolonial Britain. Also, she discovers the characters' identity conflicts before the background of their family history. In the novel, almost all the characters settled in London after the colonization of their own country and they were frequently mindful about their postcolonial identity. Accordingly, existing in a multi-ethnic culture causes confusion about their ethnic identity. Likewise, *WT* focuses on two main migrant families living in London namely the Joneses and the Iqbals. In her novel, *WT*, Smith focuses significantly more on the latter in construction their identities.

Furthermore, Zadie Smith's multipart, complicated novel *WT* begins by describing the life of Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal, two WW II friends. As the plot progresses, these families face difficulty pertaining to their heritage during England's inevitable transformation. The prominent changes cause them to question their cultural practices and as well as identities through the characters' ethnicities. The following information account focus on the second generation immigrants of the Iqbals, Millat and Majd, and The Jones, Irie, who attempt to create their identity in multicultural London.

1. The Second Generation of Iqbal's Family

Firstly, the Iqbals' ethnicity plays a great role in the difficulties of yielding family tensions. Samad Iqbal, an injured WWII veteran and Archie's best friend, was born and brought up in Bangladesh. Alsana Belgium, being promised to Samad before she was born, marries him, and they have twin sons, Magid and Millat. Samad has great expectations for their sons and goes great lengths to ensure that they will grow into traditional, Bengali, Muslim men. Unpredictably, his sons, the second generation, feel assimilation to British culture more than that to their father's culture. According to Fernández's (2009: 145) interpretation, the immigrants' offspring are exposed to London's culture, when she utters:

They (Second generation) are not trying to fit into a culture but rather to find their own space by drawing on the culture they have been brought up in and, to some extent, either appropriating or rejecting the culture of their parents. Conflicts between first and second generation immigrants characterize the novel.

Moreover, Magid and Millat's identities are constructed according to the British cultures exposed to them during their everyday life. In spite of their confrontation, Samad forces them to maintain a connection with his native cultural practices. With the progress of the novel, Samad is referred to as a "parent governor", and he is arguing with his children's school board that the pagan holidays should be removed to create more availability to celebrate Muslim events; the first event that he suggests should be replaced by a Muslim event is one



that is approaching soon, the Harvest Festival, but the indication is disallowed. His children deceive him by taking part in this festival as they witness him deceive his wife by indulging with their music teacher, Ms. Poppy. This shows that Samad's twins sons' desire to create their identity as English or British rather than Bengali. This proves how postmodern individuals are reduced from their ethical values and customs, and this affirms Lyotard's (Malpas, 2006: 90, 91) theory that human beings are reduced and dehumanized in the postmodern world.

Also, Samad goes to the O'Connell Irish poolroom where he and Archie meet as usual to discuss life. That day, Samad talks about his rebellious sons uttering "Because there's rebellion in them, Archie. I can see it, it is small now but it is growing. I tell you, I don't know what is happening to our children in this country" (WT: 240, 241).

He continues to share his opinion about children who fail to follow their cultural traditions expressing, "They won't go to the mosque, they don't pray, they speak strangely, they dress strangely...People call it assimilation when it's nothing but corruption, CORRUPTION!" (WT: 248). Mistakenly, Samad assumes that he can save his children without saving himself first, and decides to send Magid to India to be raised traditionally and to experience Bengali traditions. However, his wish is not fulfilled, because the real experience, of being Bangali, is no longer logic for Iqbal's twins. This proves Fredric Jameson's theory, Schizophrenia, in which the postmodern individuals experience a reality where it is no longer coherent as a whole (Sarup, 1993: 146, 147). It can be seen that Samad is nervous by his twins, by his place in the multicultural Britain and by his inability to be the kind of good Muslim. In addition to the family tensions between the twin boys and their father caused by Samad's desire for them to follow the traditions of their Indian ethnicity and background, the Bowdens' ethnicity and culture irritate conflicts within their family as well.

Magid Iqbal has an interesting name, but he does not think that of his name. His friends from school would refer to him as "Mark Smith instead of Magid. His parents were not aware of this change, so when his peers would come to the Iqbal home, Alsana Iqbal, his mother, would greet them and inform them that they must be at the wrong house because there was not a "Mark" that lived there. To her dismay, "Before she had finished the sentence, Magid dashed to the door, ushering his mother out of view" (WT: 197). After greeting his friends, he told his mother where he was headed, and the narrator notes that Alsana was "close to tears" (WT: 198). His dad yells at him when he returns home that afternoon: "I GIVE YOU A GLORIOUS NAME LIKE MAGID MAHFOOZ MURSHED MUBTASIM IQBAL . . . AND YOU WANT TO BE CALLED MARK SMITH" (ibid). Not only does Magid want to be more like the mass majority of children in London that he attends school with, but he also wants to participate in the activities that they participate in like the Harvest Festival. He expresses to his father how badly he wants to participate and justifies it by saying that the festival is a tradition. His dad responds, "Whose tradition?", and he continues saying, "Dammit, you are a Muslim, not a wood sprite" (WT: 199). To prevent Magid from becoming more corrupt than of what Samad already thinks he is, he sends him to be raised traditionally in Bangladesh. As a result, Magid decides to be a Londoner more than a Bengali.

Moreover, Iqbal's family is observed to be a part of the lower-working class. Samad Iqbal, the head of their family, "trained as an engineer in Bengal, has to settle for a low-paid job as a waiter in London" (WT: 76). In spite of his social position, he takes pride in his job and who he is, but his twins, are ashamed of who they are, which is why they strive to reconstruct themselves. Furthermore, when Magid's parents notice that he has changed his name, Smith proclaims that "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 his father to be a doctor, not a one-handed waiter" (WT: 198). Magid's perception of his family's



lifestyle shows how the dissatisfaction and dislike of one's social class can raise difficulties within families and different generations.

Noticeably, both, Magid and Millat, have experienced the instability of their lower-working class and have perceived the happiness of higher-class families. Therefore, they are vulnerable to growing away from their family traditions and becoming more modernized.

3- The Second Generation of Jones' Family

The main reason behind Clara's marriage to Archie Jones, an Englishman, is related to her need to be free from her authentically religious Jamaican mother, Hortense. Additionally, the couple has a little girl called Irie, as her parents perceive that Irie does not have a place in English culture; also she does not accept her identity as a Jamaican. Irie's school sorts out an activity for her and Millat, which is paying a visit to the Chalfen family frequently to Joyce Chalfens, Irie's mother. Irie, in a challenge between Bowdenism and Chalfenism, attempts to explore a space among English society for herself. Moreover, the Chalfens are from a white upper class family and they trust themselves to be very liberal, while Bowdenism refers to Hortense's method for living, which is significantly impacted by her Jamaican roots and religion. The following paragraphs demonstrate Irie's clash and examine the impact of Hortense Bowden and Joyce Chalfen on her and on the construction of her identity among these two families.

When Alsana Iqbal finds out that she is pregnant, she asks Archie "what the child will resemble, half blacky-white?" (WT: 61). Furthermore, when Clara tells her husband about the probability of the child's blue eyes, then Archie guesses this possibility will happen after that minute ahead. The precedents display how Irie does not satisfy her family's desire since she is not "half white and half black", and "her blue eyes changed to black after two weeks of her born" (WT: 89-90). Irie, as a biased young lady, has a response to everything because of her low-mindedness. Even so, during her pre-adulthood, this manner changes fundamentally. Moreover, Irie believes that she is wrong if she regards herself as the 'Other' in London, because she thinks that she belongs to the English society (WT: 351). Irie acknowledges her ugliness in every place because of her big size, her buck teeth, glasses, braces and her Afro-dark skin (WT: 351). Moreover, she intends to create her identity as an English girl rather than a Jamaican, this is why she performs as an English lady. This shows how the self is reduced to mere simulacra, in the postmodern British society, so that it confirms Baudrillard's theory that "we are simulators, we are simulacra" (Kellner, 1989: 61), which means she is aware that she is empty inside; she is always haunted by feelings of barrenness and inauthenticity. When Irie desires to resemble English Roses: "a slender, delicate thing not made for the hot suns, a surfboard rippled by the wave" (WT: 349) rather than the "Jamaican hourglass". Likewise, she cannot resemble the beauty of English delicate ladies, she feels as "a stranger in a strange land", this proves that she is aware of her emptiness inside, she is always haunted by feelings of barrenness and inauthenticity.

Temporally, Irie feels confidence for the first time while she examines Shakespeare's works, more precisely when Shakespeare describes "dark lady", but her teacher stops Irie's confidence by claiming that a black or dark woman could not be dark "unless she was a slave of some kind" (WT:350). Because of this racist comment, Irie is constrained once more into her shell immediately and realizes that she is not accepted by the English society. In addition, she is losing her weight persistently to trim her hourglass-formed body and continually she puts a hand on her stomach to conceal it. Trying to fit in the English society Irie goes to a hair dresser to change her hair style. According to her belief, if she cuts off her hair and makes it straight, it will help to look like an English lady "straight straight long black sleek flickable tossable shakeable touchable finger-through-able wind-blowable hair" (WT: 357-358).

Clearly, Smith (WT: 364) expressed in the novel "black lady spend a lot of money on their hair to try to get it straight". In Bhabha's (1994: 122) view it can be regarded as a piece



of the procedure of mimicry to be viewed as the Other in a non-native country when the Other attempts to emulate the predominant groups so as to be equivalent to the predominant group. Furthermore, the issue of hair is a matter of concern for dark ladies rather than for dark men. In *WT*, for example, Smith (*WT*: 360) portrays, "the male section of the hairdresser is all laughter, all talk, all play, whereas the female section was a deathly thing". For the first time, at this specific barber, Irie's hair style is considered beautiful by two ladies who regard it as a "half-caste" hair, in other words, her hair is roughly wiry. In addition, Irie dislikes her hair and wishes to loosen it up in any case. As a result of a misunderstanding between Irie and her hair dresser, all her hair must be cut off because it turns out in extraordinary masses. Irie feels beautiful when she gets a weaved hair. Unfortunately, she is the only person who expects to look nice with her new hair style now. Irie, wishes to see Millat and goes to his house, but he was not at home, his aunt was instead. When Irie enters the house, Neena is not actually restrained in her disgust when she shouts "what the fuck do you resemble! (*WT*: 283) "after observing Irie's new hairstyle. At that point, Neena explains Irie an important moral when she maintains (*WT*: 284) ". . . you're a smart cookie, Irie. But you've been taught all kinds of shit. You've got to re-educate yourself. Realize your value . . . and get a life, Irie. . . . get a guy"

As stated by Millat's grandmother, Neena displays what she thinks about norms, racial speculations and gender in the English world. Despite being the Other in London, she decides to continue her life with her reality without paying attention to English norms. This little inspiration was actually what Irie required; after their speech, she was satisfied with her Afro hair and removed all her fake hair.

Although she gained an important ground in accepting herself paying little respect to a predominant perception of beauty, she is looking for significant part of her identity through the novel. Irie thinks she has only one way to know her identity and her authentic roots which is her connection to the Chalfens and their particular method for living. As the mother of the family, Joyce Chalfen, considers herself as a white feminist and she observes herself as open-minded and open to others, but still she makes racist statements. When Millat and Irie initially meet Joyce, she scorns at both of them. She stares at them abnormally and asks them "where they are from" (*WT*: 420). While both Millat and Irie reply "Willesden," Joyce once again questions "where you are from *originally*" (ibid). She was not aware of the fact that her question is a supremacist one; as a result Millat was confused her by his shameless answer. Besides, the Chalfens do not connect with others (lower than themselves) and they do not have companions (*WT*: 413). This means their social relationship is not created as it would be anticipated from working class people. The Chalfens are not like working-class families because they state whatever they perceive appropriate, without observing their community conventions. Despite the fact that Marcus converses with Irie and describes her as "a big girl" while observing her, Irie was interested, captivated "after five minutes" (*WT*: 418, 420). She considers the Chalfen method for living like the typical one and compares it to her family's method for living. Joyce thinks the class difference has an inseparable tie to the social formation of Irie; she informs Millat and Irie concerning a trial Joyce did, of which, the outcome was that migrant parentages regularly "don't appreciate their children sufficiently" also they continue to struggle with this outcome that have to do through norms (*WT*: 425). Joyce needs to give Irie and Millat an adoration which they have not received before.

Despite the fact that the Chalfens make racist statements and they even depreciate her, Irie wants to resemble them. In this respect, this demonstrates the changes she has experience Irie replies to each affront she faces and comments truly, but now she is sufficiently able to suffer them. Irie, for instance, once she pays a visit to the Chalfens, Marcus considers Irie a "big brown goddess". She does not become angry but her main response to him is "Marcus, chill out, man . . ." (*WT*: 434). Straightway after Irie's response he begins to comment on Irie's weight. When Joyce claims that Irie is aware of her bulky weight, but Irie answers that she is not aware of her huge body (*WT*: 434). Moreover, Irie has proceeded onward to be like



English girls and desires an English family that fits in with English social standards. Regarding her advancement, this implies that her emphasis is not only on her individual identity, but also on her family as well. Despite the issues concerning her identity, Irie sees that the more she pretends to be close to Chalfenism, the more Joyce's enthusiasm for her disappear. Thus, she understands her exhibition of an ordinary English lady, and yet, she cannot adapt to the truth of her family. She triumphs over another identity issue when she decides to live with her grandmother, Hortense, for quite a while.

Obviously Irie is enchanted by Hortense's lifestyle (WT: 528,530) ; Hortense Bowden is depicted as an extremely strong, pious lady. She attempts to activate the same sort of self-assurance in Irie. Hortense shows her gender without paying attention to societal standards, she is a giant and has Afro hair, yet she does not think about that by any means. This indicates that she is not involved in emulating English attractive standards and attempt to dispose of her place as the 'Other': therefore, she is content with her identity and accepts herself as she is. Bowden is a religious lady and reads the Bible in manners, but Irie considers it as an absurd. Moreover, Clara, Irie's mother, is frightened that Irie will be instructed by Bowden's religion and her belief, as a faithful Jehovah's Witness. However, she is unaware that Irie is an atheist lady and no one influences her even her grandmother. Irie perceives the significance of her stay at Bowden's, which helps her to know her roots and identity. While the Chalfens convinced Irie for accepting that she does not have a place, but Bowden's tales which talks about Jamaican principles guide Irie to think that she has a place. Hence, Irie thinks she belongs to Jamaica and it turns into new fixation for her. Furthermore, she no longer pays attention to English culture; instead she cares about her Jamaican roots. Irie's mother ensures Irie to move from London to their homeland, Jamaica, after the world ends in seven years' time according to Jehovah's Witnesses' calendar.

In the novel, Hortense is the only person who encourages and guarantees Irie to find a sense of harmony with her Jamaican ground. Although the Chalfen's family made Irie feel her Jamaican culture and heritage which was of a lesser significance than her English culture, her grandmother instructs her that her Jamaican culture is similarly as significant.

4- Smith's *WT* in Multicultural London

WT, can be regarded as a prominent novel of the postmodern London, in which a mixture of diverse nations progressively connect into a very unique multiple of the traditional East and the unconventional West. In addition, Smith, as a second generation Jamaican migrant, clarifies the second half of twentieth century London. The first generation of migrants have found themselves in a struggle with their own children, in London, who are now paving the way to create an entirely new society

In Walters's (2008: 99, 100) perspective, a multicultural society contains more than one nation. In recent times, there are original propensities to defend these sub-national collections particularly since their ethnic culture has influences on modern nations. Each culture is viewed as a gathering of authentic norms, for example, habit faith, language and different perspectives, all are worth conserving. Multicultural society makes an atmosphere wherein various societies are commonly powerful compared to one another. Profitably, multicultural society can influence many fields of life positively, mainly in grounds of literature, art, music, clothes and it could bring a new wave of ideas and motivation. On the other hand, the diversity of cultures may have negative influences in which they lead to struggles and tensions. However, in both cases, identity is a matter of alteration and hardly stays fixed. Furthermore, identity can alter due to the circumstances and perspectives of each one observing his/her identity in a different way.

Smith's *WT* describes the combination of diverse culture, religious beliefs and ethnic groups in Britain. In addition, London is described as a multicultural city in the twentieth century, after the colonization of Britain. Temperately, society is considered to be as a multi-ethnic home because it is created by more than two dissimilar languages, values cultures and



religions, this can be recognized in *WT*. Smith in her novel connects two different families, the migrants of Iqbal's family and the Joneses; although they have dissimilar national identities, they also have different perspectives towards religious and cultural values. In spite of the fact that the characters settle in London and have been integrated and assimilated, some of them attempt to maintain their beliefs, religious cultural values and rituals so as to keep their ethnical identity and roots from outside impacts. Though, the integration and assimilation appears to be difficult for the first generation immigrants, where the values and norms of English societies have effects on the immigrants of the second generation. Strangers or immigrants along with native people need enough time to understand one another to live peacefully together. Occasionally, Muslims find interesting points of multi-ethnic society. Majority of the Muslims, in London, consider that multiculturalism celebrates variety in food, music or clothes, but it offshoots human equality and human rights (*WT*:326,327) as Samad highlights this trend in this paragraph:

This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow, and white, this has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. . . . and Irie Jones humming a tune. It is only this late in the day, and possibly only in Willesden, that you can find best friends, Sita and Sharon, constantly mistaken for each other because Sita is white . . . and Sharon is Pakistani ... all the mixing up, . . . we have finally slipped into each other's lives with reasonable comfort . . . it is still hard to admit that . . . no one more English than the Indian and no one more Indian than the English.

This above quote displays the outlook on multiculturalism in London. On one side, it is common to be motivated by unknown states in Britain and offer British ladies interesting names. On the other side, the notion of multiculturalism, in which it contains numerous societies shoulder to shoulder, and still many people do not agree with the idea of multiculturalism also they reject to live with immigrants in their lands. Accordingly, many immigrant parents, in order to be far from discrimination, attempt to take English names for their children. This confirms Baudrillard's theory in which the parents prefer to choose English names, they are simulated and live in an imaginary world (Kellner, 1989: 61). Irie is undoubtedly unsatisfied with her past as a second generation of migrant. Since Clara, her mother, denied to utter any information about her family's roots, they had forbidden Irie from their certain social convention in order to not follow. Conversely, Irie keeps attempting to discover her origin and who she is; therefore, she plans to look for her grandmother and her roots as well. On the other hand, the Chalfens have a vital role in Irie's life. Moreover, Irie is located in between the present and the future worlds because the partners of Chalfens, Joyce and Marcus, concentrate more on these two different worlds. At last, even though she is firmly associated with her family customs, she is similarly mindful of her past and her social norms which confuse her present. She also complains against the Iqbals and Joneses for their close association with their past, for gathering things and setting them in the loft and for repeating similar ancient anecdotes on Pande,. More importantly, in the next passage, Irie makes a comparison between the manner in which kids are raised in Asian families contrary to British ones as Smith describes (*WT*: 515) "They [British families] don't mind what their kids do in life as long as they're reasonably . . . healthy. Happy . . . every day is not this huge battle between which they are and who they should be . . . what they were and what they will be. Go on, ask them. And they'll tell you. No mosque. Maybe a little church. Hardly any sin. Plenty of forgiveness."

Irie has protests against the manner in which parents are driving their children to live as indicated by their desires and need them to pursue their religious convictions and social traditions. She accepts that she is not going to attempt to be another person and live according to another person's thoughts. She proposes that there ought to be more tolerance and respect among children and their parents. Smith calls attention to the significance of identity in multicultural social orders and migrants' failure to escape from their history that is controlled



by the impacts of their forerunners. Thus Smith shows that the instability of time and space among the first and second generations can be regarded as a central theme of the novel. Moreover, the characters in *WT* are the essence of cultural diversity and hybridity of London which is the central city to the novel.

5- The Importance of History in the Construction of Identity

It is clear that history cannot be overlooked for creating identity. Smith, in *WT*, portrays a clash between individuals in their society as far as the first and second generation migrants in multi-ethnic Britain. Besides, those migrants attempt to connect with the societies in which they do not share their standard values and regional beliefs because they feel they are estranged and different.

Despite the fact that the parents of immigrants experience many difficulties in a multicultural society, it can be seen that their children face difficulties twice. Smith, in order to solve this struggle in her novel, touches upon the problem of root and culture in the migrant families' life who settle in a multiracial London. Carefully, she focuses on the significance of history in her novel, *WT*, where she starts with engraving the so-called statue Washington museum "What is past is a prologue" (*WT*: iv). Moreover, Smith changes the matter of root and history into personal history and racial history. Despite those two histories being intertwined, in *WT*, their racial history is essentially mirrored by the first generation immigrants while the personal history and historical records are reflected by the immigrants of the second generation who struggle to construct their personal identity and history. The next details concentrate on the personal history of the second generation immigrants, and how it helps them to form their personal identity. It can be noticed that the second generation immigrants who grow up in another country are not acquainted with their past, ancestral culture and their motherland.

Likewise, historical memory and history are very important because no one has a healthy identity if s/he does not know about her/his ancestral history and background, as Arthur M. Schlesinger (1992: 45, 46) claims, "For history is to the nation rather as memory is to the individual and an individual deprived from memory becomes disoriented and lost, not knowing where he has been or where he is going." Therefore, the family's origin and history seems to be an important subject for constructing an individual's identity and to tackle the struggles of mixture identities in multicultural societies. Smith demonstrates that the second generation children Magid, Millat and Irie are unsatisfied because they do not have any information on their past which can help them to belong to their ethnical roots. Therefore, Irie, Clara's mix daughter, perceives her mother as a hypocrite because of hiding much information about her past and her parents are occupied by several facts that are still untold and, as Smith maintains it is, "sacred to hear" (*WT*: 498, 499)

More importantly, Irie wishes to know all about her parent's history, the facts, stories and all happenings of her private background. Still, she knows that many stories about her past remain untold and secured by her parents. She realizes that there is a space between her and her mother, only the historical bridge will connect them. Additionally, Millat and Irie are hurt by the effects of the huge break in their historical memory and this leads to struggle in their internal identities and their families too. Usually, when Irie asks her mother to know about their past suddenly she gets angry and replies "for other individuals every single fucking day is not this huge battle between who they are and who they should be, what they were and what they will be" (*WT*: 515). Now, Irie realizes that most of the problems are the result of her uninformed personal history. Nicholas (2001: 64), in this mode, claims "half Jamaican, half-Anglo Irie Jones searches for something 'real', eventually developing an interest in her Jamaican grandmother, and her roots". Therefore, Irie chooses to settle in Jamaica which is the place of Hortense and she wishes to remain beside her for a while. This effort is a start to inform Irie about her familial history; she goes into a remarkable procedure by digging



knowledge about her root and her familial past. According to Smith's (*WT*: 526, 527) view Irie:

She laid claim to the past –her version of the past aggressively as if retrieving misdirected mail. So this was where she came from. This all belonged to her, her birthright, like a pair of pearl earrings or a post office bond. X marks the spot, and Irie put an X on everything she found, collecting bits and bobs (birth certificates, maps, army reports, news articles).

This shows that Irie laid claim to the past, moves in solving her conflict by understanding about her origins and history. With her mother, consequently, she agrees to stay in Jamaica, her mother country. Smith (*WT*: 529) describes Jamaica like a new world to Irie and there is “No fictions, no myths, no lies, no tangled webs, this is how Irie imagined her homeland. Because homeland is one of the magical fantasy words like unicorn and soul and infinity that have now passed into the language”.

According to Paproth, the characters frequently try to overcome their interface with history in *WT*, but they cannot achieve this interaction because of its difficulty (qtd. In Walters, 2008: 15). This proves Fredric Jameson's (Sarup, 1993: 146, 147) theory. Millat, for instance, does not have any knowledge on his past, therefore, he is anxious and unsure about what his origin is and to where he belongs. Millat, like Irie, lives in a society which is deprived of any information related to history and his root. Therefore, because of his unawareness about his historical memory and historical consciousness in Bangladesh, Millat faces some conflicts. It can be seen that history has a great role in a multicultural society, and Walters (2008: 15) believes that it is incredible to make a new beginning without knowing the past. Moreover, Millat does not find a link between him and his familial history; as a result, he finds out another link of belonging and joins a major Islamic group named KEVIN.

Walters (2008: 13, 16) believes that the more children, of the second generation, get information about their familial or ethnic history, the less they face the difficulties of identity catastrophes and in the construction of their identity. Though, most of the characters cannot achieve their familial or cultural history in the novel, because of the lack of information about their past, and thus they degenerate their original culture in migrant or multicultural families. In a multi-ethnic society, it is difficult to live due to one's original belief or culture and being deprived of other standard values. Especially, for the second generation offspring of the families of Iqbal and Jones, a separated way of life that is completely identified with the original culture cannot be permitted so easily. Certainly, the multiplicity of beliefs adds productivity to a person's personal identity; nonetheless, if someone behaves contrary to his/her cultural standards, the dilemmas and struggles are extra probable to happen. Additionally, those second generation immigrants who intend to practice the process of identity construction face the degeneration of their ethnical culture because of living in a hybrid society. In *WT*, Smith Walters (2008: 167) demonstrates the notion of “degeneration” which is represented by a metaphor of ‘white teeth’. Therefore, white teeth can be regarded as one of the best features of black people; however, the cigarette habit of the second generation immigrants turns white teeth into yellow. Metaphorically, although the white colour represents purity and innocence, here it represents the degeneration of that wisdom because of its turning into yellow.

The idea of degeneration among migrant society is highlighted mainly in Iqbals' family. Although, the degeneration of Iqbal's values reflects itself in the lives of Samad's twins at the beginning of their youth, still Samad as a conventional Muslim Bengladeshi wants to perceive his children as real Bengladeshi and Muslim as well. Furthermore, he believes that he is in a great trouble because both his sons have no sense of belonging to their culture and tradition when he utters : “... Millat aged thirteen, who farted in a mosque, chased blondes and smelt of tobacco, and not just Millat but all the children. Mujib (fourteen, criminal record for joyriding)” (*WT*: 286,287).



Samad thinks those children are mostly grown up as opposed to Muslim ethical quality and convention. As indicated by Samad, every one of those deeds is absolutely opposite to their realities and conventions; however, the second generation migrants are walking on those mistaken acts. The other parents, as Samad, know about the way that the disintegration of their ethnical culture procedure is heading for some place that is increasingly unsafe for their children. Also the parents cannot get “what had gone wrong with these first descendants of the great ocean-crossing experiment” (WT: 287). Samad Iqbal who represents those parents that are truly stressed over the disintegration, maintains that the Second generation has no sense of belonging to their roots, history and/or culture.

Millat's instructor asks him what kind of music he likes and listens to at home and she expects that he make reference to some traditional melodies or artists from Bangladesh, but Millat offers the appropriate response of Michael Jackson and Bruce Springsteen; it demonstrates that there is nothing from their unique culture. Again, this confirms Baudrillard's theory in which Millat lives in an imaginary world. The presence of that second generation, their activities and different performances can be acknowledged as an alteration to the current way of life of other individuals. Therefore, due to the contradicted manners of those deeds of the second generation with their original culture, this strategy can be viewed as ‘the degeneration’ era by the parents. At that point, Samad marks the wrongdoings of his sons, and he calls attention to an unexpected condition. As he questions:

Didn't they have everything they could want? Was there not a substantial garden area, regular meals, clean clothes from Marks 'n' Sparks, A-class top-notch education? Hadn't the elders done their best? . . . Weren't they safe? (WT: 287).

Samad notes that usually parents attempt their best in order to provide a comfortable life for their children. As indicated by Samad, nothing can be criticized, but yet he cannot comprehend what the reason is behind his displeased sons. Indeed, there is a hidden answer to those inquiries. Each one of those migrant parents travels to London motivated by the desire for a superior time for their offspring, but when the days pass, what they confront is nothing but disappointment. Also, their descendants had ended up being reverse of what they anticipated. The children are not secure any longer in London since they have been corrupted due to their parents' perspective.

According to Paproth's (Walters, 2008: 15) view “Magid is essentially uprooted from his family and from his history, and he tries to construct an identity entirely separate from it.” Actually, Samad sends Magid to Bangladesh anticipating that he should grow up as indicated by his own social principles, he does not consider that Bangladesh is still a social settlement of London in recent times even the English way of life and English perspectives have critical impacts on Bangladeshi individuals. In this regard, both Magid and Millat experience the contrary lifestyles in the novel. On the word of Head (2002: 184) “Magid's willingness to defend genetic engineering -established somewhat archly as the millennial symbol of Western culture locates him within a four-square secular Englishness, and brings him into direct conflict with his brother Millat, whose adolescent fascination with clans, especially ‘clans at war’, draws him into a militant Islamic group”.

Smith, in WT, manages the matters of “root” and “history” connecting these issues to the familial, racial, individual and national dimensions. She portrays the history of colonized nations with taking care of the history of the first migrants. The colonial history which is covered up and secured is informed as redemption for certain characters, for example, Samad Iqbal.

As a postmodern novelist, Smith shows going back to roots and discover about familial history or racial history as a deliverer and positive elements helps the characters to construct their identity. In this regard, she credits a critical status to root and history in the description. Still, it can be seen that she never appreciates the conflict of societies in multiracial England. According to Kathleen O'Grady's view (Walters, 2008: 15) “WT capers through this



minefield of ‘origins’, satirizing equally the most earnest efforts of those who seek a return to their roots and those desperate for Western homogenization, but with deep sympathy and understanding”.

6- The Issues of Identity Construction in Postmodern and Multicultural London

Smith deals with issues associated with the surviving in a multi-ethnic society; also she deals with a space between the migrant of the first and second generation. In addition, *WT* has been analysed as the multicultural society of the present-day city of London. Notably, the history and roots of the first generation immigrants have made identity problems for their children in *WT*. The central focus in the novel is on the Bangladeshi family, Iqbal, who faces many dilemmas in searching for his identity.

Samad Iqbal, who lives in a secular environment, attempts to assimilate to the dominant surrounding to some extent and retain his own identity as a faithful Muslim at the same time. However, Western culture continuously puts his faith to the test and his violation of Islamic rules leads to feelings of guilt and a troubled relationship with his God. The intercultural differences force Samad to change his own life and religion and make negotiations. Samad’s detaching from his tradition and religion, paves the way to him to create his own rules to justify western eating and drinking habits as well as sins in his religion, like adultery. After the adulterous affair with Poppy Burt Jones, Samad realizes that he has lost his morality and failed to lead a moral life as a Muslim family head. Therefore, he sees it as his obligation to pass on his cultural heritage and save his sons from what he deems the Western corruption. However, his attempt to determine the future of his sons also fails.

Moreover, the issue of displacement plays a vital role in the process of the construction of identity for the first generation immigrants. An intact sense of place and belonging is deeply embedded in a person’s tradition, language and history. Moving from the former colonies to the British ‘Motherland’, many Commonwealth migrants felt alienated and displaced. Furthermore, they attempt to reconstruct their identity to assimilate to the dominant society and in many cases, the ethnic diaspora to which they were restricted to, became their new home. As a result, their former home countries were transformed into distorted. Having the possibility of returning to their place of origin, they sense that their motherland became foreign to them. Also, Samad was disillusioned in London because it has a bad effect on his sons, Millat and Magid, and he utters his pessimistic feeling to Irie:

The one I send home (Magid) comes out an Englishman, white-suited, silly wig lawyer. The one I keep here (Millat) is . . . paid-up green bow-tie-wearing fundamentalist terrorist. I sometimes wonder why I bother . . . I really do. . . . In a place where you are never welcomed only tolerated and just tolerated . . . it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable and you belong nowhere (*WT*, *WT*: 407).

The fear, that one’s children will become complete strangers holding onto different beliefs and values is shared by another immigrant character of the novel. Realizing that her daughter is growing up in a predominantly white environment, Clara Jones fears that Irie will become alienated from her black Jamaican heritage and a stranger for her own mother, as Smith describes Clara sees an ocean of pink skins surrounding her daughter and fears that the tide would take her away (*WT*: 328). It can be concerned that the three second generation immigrant children; Millat, Magid and Irie avoid their roots and develop independent identities in different ways. In spite of being identical twins, Millat and Magid express their own individuality from an early age onwards. While Magid is a quiet boy, interested in chess and science, but his brother, Millat is a talkative, visible character with a passion for football and rap music. As a schoolboy, Magid already begins to distance himself from his heritage by constructing his identity as Mark Smith. Despite Samad’s work of having his sons raised and



educated in his home country Bangladesh, Magid rejects his cultural background and develop a Western life, worldly identity.

On the other hand, Millat's identity conflict is similar to his father's, as he struggles to reach a balance between two cultures, faith and secularism. As a youth he becomes the leader among his nobles through his rudeness, his calm looks and his ability of adapting to different circumstances and shifting between several social roles. Smith (*WT*: 285) maintains "Here was where Millat really learned about fathers. Godfathers, bloodbrothers, pacinodeniros, men in black who looked good, who talked fast, who never waited a (mutherfuckin') table, who had two, fully functioning, gun-toting hands".

Moreover, when he grows older, he becomes involved with an Islamic fundamentalist group, Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation. According to KEVIN's rule of living Millat attempts to purify his soul "purge of the taint of the West (*WT*: 587)" and become a strict Muslim. Furthermore, Millat decides to give up smoking, drinking, drug and women as well. He compares his fundamentalist Muslim training with the gangster education of his Hollywood Mafia heroes: "As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a Muslim" (*WT*: 558).

The latent contradiction of embracing and rejecting Western popular culture at the same time renders Millat an unstable character that is still in the process of constructing his identity. Most of all, his racial religious activism is a rebellion against his father Samad who has given him up as a constant trouble maker; by following the rules of the holy Quran and taking pride in his religion, he wants to prove that he is a more faithful Muslim than his father and brother.

Irie, similar to Iqbal twins, does not only suffer from usual teenage angst during puberty, but her identity crisis is also based on a struggle with her mixed heritage. Irie has inherited physical status and hair structure of her Jamaican ancestors. However, influenced by European beauty ideals, she is obsessed with the idea of having straight long hair and a slender figure. More importantly, Irie knows her outer appearance marks her as a "stranger in a stranger land", although this stranger land is her country of birth. She decides to cut off her hair in order to appear less of a stranger; she is drawn towards what she imagines is the Englishness of the Chalfens.

It can be apprehensive that *WT* does not only emphasize on construction of individual identity, but also on constructing collective identities. The migrants wish to make their voice heard in society and share interests form groups in which they develop a strong in group identity. In *WT*, Smith intends to tell her readers how religion or political affiliation can connect people from different ethnicities and social backgrounds. She also warns her readers from the danger of radicalization.

8- Conclusion

Zadie Smith is a postmodern novelist who deals with construction of identity in the West. *WT*, which is one of her debut novel, discovers and illustrates the concept of construction of identity in London. *WT* deals with the matters and difficulties Britain faced after the WWII. With the arrival of immigrants from Jamaica and Bengali to London, after colonized their own country, highlighted questions and concerns about construction of identity. Magid, for instance, as a Bangladeshi son, attempts to resemble English boys even he changed his name, but at last he comes to the fact that accepting his roots supports him to construct a healthy and strong identity in multicultural London. Smith affirms that the second generation immigrants were not allowed to participate in English society. She also illustrates how English society face difficulties in accepting the Other, or the immigrants, as their own. They (English society) were unacquainted with the Other and did not know how to accept the unknown. In the end Smith, through her characters, suggests that a healthy identity can only exist by accepting their cultural history.



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پوخته

نووسه رانی بزوتنه وهی پۆست مۆدێرنیزم باس له گرفته کانی ژبانی جیهانی پۆست مۆدێرن دهکهن. زادی سمیس (له سالی 1970) له دایک بووه، وهک پۆمانووسیکی کۆچبهری رهشپێستی به ریتانی له بهاری بابهته کانی/کیشه کانی پۆست مۆدێرنیزم ده دوو له یه کهم رۆمانی به ناوی (ددانی سپی) پۆمانه که جهخت له سه ر کیشه کانی پۆست مۆدێرنیزم و به تایبهتی دروستبوونی/بنیاتانی ناسنامه ی، به نکلادیشی (سه مه د ئیقبال) و ئینگلیز (ئارکه جۆنس) که دوو هاو پێ نزیکی یه کهن. دهکاته وه ههروهها جهخت له سه ر کیشه کانی دروستبوونی/بنیاتانی ناسنامه ی منداله کانیان که له لهنده نی فرهنهته وه دهژین.

ئاشکرایه رۆمانی (ددانی سپی) لهو کیشه کانی دهکۆلێته وه که په یوه ستن به کۆمه لگایه کی فره کلتور، وه باس لهو بۆشاییانه دهکات که له نیوان کۆچبهری نه وهی یه کهم و نه وهی دووه مدا هه یه. زۆربه ی کاریکته رهکان هیشتا په یوه ستن به رابردو یانه وه، وه نا رازین لهو ژبانه ی که له کۆمه لگای ئیستایاندا هه یه. سمیس وه سه فی کۆچبهری نه وهی دووه م دهکات که به ته واوی جیاوازی له کۆمه لگای رۆژئاوا له رووی گه وره بوونیان، ژبانیان، ههروهها له رووی بیرکردنه و یان، ههتد... هه ندیک له کاریکته رهکان خۆیان به نامۆ ده بین له وولاتی بیگانه ته گه رچی زۆربه ی ژبانیان لهو وولاته به سه ر بردووه. هه ندیک تری کاریکته رهکان هیوا ده خوازی په یوه ندی به گرووی فه نده مینتالست بکه ن بۆ نه وهی ناسنامه یان بنیات بنین وه بیگه ی کۆمه لایه تی به ده ست بنین.

مه به ست له م توێژینه وه یه ته وه یه که له دیدگه ی تیۆره کانی پۆست مۆدێرن به تایبه تی له روانگه ی جین بۆودریلاد، ژین فرانکس لیوتارد ههروهها فریدریک جهیمسن بنیاتانی ناسنامه سه رقه بکات وه ته و تیۆرانه به شیوه یه کی پراکتیکی له رۆمانی (ددانی سپی) سمیس به کار ده هینن. وه ته م توێژینه وه یه باس له هه وله کانی کۆچبهری نه وهی دووه م دهکات بۆ بنیاتانی ناسنامه یان له لهنده نی فرهنهته وه. وه ههروهها ته م توێژینه وه یه له وه دهکۆلێته وه که چۆن کاریکته رهکان ناسنامه کانیان بنیات ده نین. وه چۆن دوو کلتوری جیاوازی کاریک دهکهن له دروستبوونی ناسنامه له رۆمانی (ددانی سپی). وه ته م توێژینه وه یه باس له پۆلی میژوو و رابردووی کۆچبهری نه وهی یه کهم دهکات له بنیاتانی ناسنامه ی هه وله کانی کۆچبهری نه وهی دووه م.

ملخص

کتاب حركة ما بعد الحداثة يتحدثون عن مشاكل عالم ما بعد الحداثة زادي سميت (ولد في عام 1957)، ككاتب اسمر البشرية و المهاجري برينانيا يتكلم عن موضوع مشاكل ما بعد الحداثة في اول رواية بأسم (أسنان بيض). الرواية تؤكد على مشاكل ما بعد الحداثة وعلى وجه الخصوص الحصول على الهوية لاولاد البنغلاديشي (صمد إقبال) والانجليزي (أركة جونز) اللذان هما صديقان مقربان ويعيشان في لندن المتعددة القوميات. واضح إن رواية (اسنان بيض) تبحث عن المشاكل المتعلقة بالمجتمعات المتعددة العادات، وتحدث عن الفراغات الموجودة بين مهاجرين الجيل الاول ومهاجرين الجيل الثاني. اغلب الشخصيات مازالوا متعلقين بماضيهم، و غير راضين عن حياتهم في مجتمعهم الحالي. سميت يصف مهاجري الجيل الثاني على انهم مختلفون تماماً في المجتمع الغربي من ناحية نموهم، حياتهم، و ايضاً من ناحية تفكيرهم و الخ. بعض الشخصيات يعتبرون انفسهم غرباء في تلك المجتمعات الاجنبية مع انهم قضاوا معظم حياتهم في تلك البلدان. بعض آخر من الشخصيات يأملون تكوين علاقات مع الجماعات المتعصبة للحصول على الهوية و موقع اجتماعي. الهدف من هذه الرواية هو النظري نظريات ما بعد الحداثة خصوصاً حسب رأي جين بودريلارد، جين فرانكس ليوتارد وفريدريك جيمسن التي تشرح الحصول على الهوية. وهذه النظريات تستعمل بطريقة عملية في رواية (اسنان بيض) لسميت، و يتكلم هذا البحث عن محاولات مهاجر الجيل الثاني للحصول على الهوية في لندن المتعددة القوميات. ويهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة كيفية حصول هذه الشخصيات على الهوية. و كيف تتفاعل عادتین مختلفتين في الهوية في رواية (اسنان بيض). وهذا البحث يشرح دور التاريخ وماضي مهاجرو الجيل الاول في محاولاتهم للحصول على الهوية للجيل الثاني.