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Negotiation and Hybridization: Constructing Immigrant Identities
in Zadie Smith`s *White Teeth* and *Swing Time*

Negociace a hybridizace: Konstrukce přistěhovalecké identity
v románech Zadie Smith *White Teeth* a *Swing Time*

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Hybridity: Cultural Theories behind the Term	5
2.1. <i>Hybrid</i> : General Misconceptions.....	5
2.2. The <i>Cultural Identity</i> Question.....	7
2.3. Origins of the Term	10
2.4. <i>Hybrid Identity</i> according to Homi K. Bhabha	13
2.5. Criticism.....	16
2.6. Application to Literature	18
3. <i>White Teeth</i>	21
3.1. Publication and Advertising	21
3.2. First Generation.....	23
3.2.1. Samad and Alsana	23
3.2.2. Archie and Clara.....	30
3.3. Second Generation	36
3.3.1. Millat and Magid.....	36
3.3.2. Irie and her baby.....	39
4. Swing Time.....	44
4.1. Childhood – Tracey.....	44
4.2. Adulthood – Aimee	54
5. Conclusion	61
Bibliography	64
Abstract.....	69
Abstrakt.....	70
Keywords	71

1. Introduction

The recent migrant crisis in Europe in 2015 has caused large debates in all spheres of society concerning the possible impact on Europe of large migrations from the East. Despite obvious questions about the economic ability of these countries to accommodate the migrants, the problem of their cultural assimilation has also puzzled scholars. There has been a new wave of anxieties and doubts among the native population about the possibility of a painless cultural accommodation of these immigrants, especially ones with very different traditions, habits and rituals who have been arriving to Europe in large quantities.

However, the situation in Europe in 2015 is not the first, nor the only mass migration in Europe's history. In Great Britain, mass migrations from the East took place in the 1950s and later, changing the "face of the British society", which, by that time, had been primarily white.¹ In the years following the Second World War, immigrants from the Caribbean, South East Asia and Africa arrived and settled in the suburban areas of the country. Undoubtedly, at a time those large migrations caused anxieties in society and the question of the identity and self-determination of the immigrants became a rather significant issue. This era of postcolonial migration in Britain, which started in 1950s, resulted by the end of twentieth century in Britain's acclaimed multiculturalism, characterized by the presence of citizens of different ethnicities, especially those coming from ex-colonial territories.² So it is possible to state that British multiculturalism is an outcome of Britain's colonial past.³

However, starting from the 1980s with the second and third generation

¹ Nick Bentley, *Edinburgh Critical Guides to Literature: Contemporary British Fiction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 17.

² Irene Pérez Fernández, "Exploring Hybridity and Multiculturalism: Intra and Inter Family Relations in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*", *Odisea*, no. 10, ISSN 1578-3820, 2009, 143-154, 144.

³ Bentley, 19-20.

immigrants, the situation was becoming more and more complicated: those people, born and raised in England, those who had never seen the country of their parent's birth – but who were also experiencing discrimination on the basis of their otherness – these people could not easily fit under the term *immigrant* anymore. They did not move, they did not migrate, but they were born in this peculiar place in-between two cultures, in the space between their parents' cultures and the British one. Hence, there was an acute need for a new way of looking at those identities, at the way they construct their inner selves and negotiate their position within society. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity⁴ is one of the most valuable ways to explain and explore the identities of these people. It refers to the way in which two or more cultures combine in colonial and postcolonial relationships, "but in doing so, refuse to privilege any one of the constituent parts."⁵ This is applicable to the children of "mixed-race marriages" who could be described as hybrids in the cultural sense, yet it is also valuable for the children of immigrants who are not a combination of "binary oppositional" cultures, but rather a new form: the mixture of the multiple elements that contributed to their formation.⁶ Those identities and their issues of self-identification are conditioned by and rooted from the context of multiculturalism, which is seen as a way to respond to cultural and religious diversity.

It is safe to state that immigrants, in the harsh realities of their lives, tend to experience a mixture of assimilation and multiculturalism shaped by the context of their migration; individual issues such as class, gender and religion of the immigrants, and the economic and political circumstances of the migration.⁷

The above mentioned concept of hybrid immigrant identities in the context of

⁴ Bentley, 20.

⁵ Bentley, 20.

⁶ Bentley, 20.

⁷ Bentley, 18.

British multiculturalism and in light of Britain's colonial past have been explored in British literature in recent decades, as literature is the cultural space which gives opportunities to "articulate the immigrant experiences."⁸ Novels written within the diasporas by first or second generation immigrants during the last two decades have become a marketing phenomena which "shape[s] global imagination of other cultures as read by global audiences."⁹ They are opening the global audience up to the immigrants' challenges, showing "that literature can become a powerful means of cross-cultural communication between significantly diverse groups."¹⁰ A rather significant number of writers who have immigrated to Britain or who are the children of those immigrants have produced novels which explore the issues of immigrants' identities from the experiences of people who "abandon the home place in search for the new home."¹¹

As a second generation immigrant herself, in 2000 Zadie Smith published the well-received novel *White Teeth*, where the themes of constructing an immigrant identity within the restrictive boundaries of the dominant culture play an enormous role. Caught between cultures, uncertain and confused about their role in the society, those immigrants, the "displaced persons"¹² in *White Teeth*, experience an identity crisis, lose their sense of identity, and through the process of identity negotiation, they construct their new *hybrid identities*. After the first successful publication, the author comes back to the topic of immigrant identities in her latest novel, *Swing Time* (2016), where she continues to explore the topic of identity formation in immigrants, while also playing with the idea of cross-cultural cosmopolitanism as a possible successful cultural hybrid. Hence, the following

⁸ Bentley, 18.

⁹ Hana Waisserová, "Transnationality in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*", *Zlín Proceedings in Humanities* (Zlín: Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, 2012) 270.

¹⁰ Waisserová, 270.

¹¹ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 1-12.

¹² Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1992) 124.

master thesis will examine two novels by Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* and *Swing Time*, addressing the complicated issues of immigrant identities in the context of multiculturalism, especially with regard to the theories on hybrid identities and hybrid cultures.

The immigrants in these books have to reconstruct their identities in accordance with the environment they are living in: on one hand, they need to adapt to the culture to be economically prosperous; on the other hand, they feel the need to come to terms with their ethnic, religious and racial difference because the feeling of dissolution and disappearance is enhanced when they are not in touch with their roots. It can be suggested that, while the first generation immigrants are preoccupied with the idea of survival for themselves and their families, further generations turn to political battles to prove their place in society while ultimately battling with the idea of self-fulfilment, free from the burden of their immigrant past. They usually try to imitate the new culture, yet their imitations seem to be inharmonious – it is a camouflage which produces a strange mixture of experiences of living in Britain together with the “remnants of colonial history and heritage”:¹³ The following thesis will first address the theoretical aspects of the hybrid identity theory. The proceeding two chapters will discuss the novels *White Teeth* and *Swing Time* respectively, providing a close-reading of the immigrant characterizations that are present in the books. It will also try to follow the shift in the immigrant identity formations that is evident through the development of the characters within the books.

¹³ Bc. Marta Dongresová, *Immigrants in the Metropolis*, master thesis, (Prague: Charles University in Prague: 2015), full text available at “Repozitář závěrečných prací” <https://is.cuni.cz>, 58.

2. Hybridity: Cultural Theories behind the Term

2.1. *Hybrid*: General Misconceptions

The term *hybrid* is one of the most oft-covered and widely-used terms in the contemporary academic community. It has its implications in a wide range of sciences: from horticulture and biology to linguistics, politics and cultural studies. Everywhere we can see the term *hybrid* used to refer to certain entities. If one looks at the definition of a *hybrid* in Oxford Dictionary, in the most general sense a *hybrid* is “[a] thing made by combining two different elements”.¹⁴ This extremely broad definition suggests that “hybridization can take many forms.”¹⁵ From a new species, a new breed of animal or plant, to pidgins and creole languages, there is something similar in all the things that are called *hybrids*. In every science, a *hybrid* is a new form created by the mixture of some existing ones.

Even though the term was originally used in life sciences and only later moved to social sciences, for our present research we are going to narrow the idea of a *hybrid* to the field of cultural studies. If someone uses the term *hybrid* or *hybridity* referring to people (peoples) or cultures, there is a tendency towards some conceptual fallacies that usually occur. To be precise, there are two most important misconceptions connected with the word *hybrid* when used in cultural studies. Firstly, there is a clear racial implication of the term.¹⁶ As was argued by Robert J.C. Young, “when talking about hybridity, contemporary cultural discourses cannot escape the connection with racial categories of the past in which

¹⁴ *Oxford Dictionaries Online* can be accessed through [oxforddictionaries.com](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hybrid), stable link to the definition of “hybrid” is <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hybrid>, Feb 6 2017.

¹⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts, Second Edition*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2000), 108.

¹⁶ Ashcroft, 110.

hybridity had such a clear racial meaning”.¹⁷ This is rooted in the “unconscious process of [the] repetition”¹⁸ of the term as it was used when it first appeared to describe the colonial situation. The first mentioning of the term dates back to the 18th century. When the concept of *hybridity* was first coined, it was used in connotation with “contamination [of] white Europeans with the nations they colonized”.¹⁹ The discussion about *hybrids* was initiated from the biological perspective and was trying to “warn” about possible “dangers” of interracial mixtures.²⁰ This “early hybridity discourse”²¹ was, of course, symptomatic of the racism of the time, as those “interracial mixtures” were thought to be “rejected by Nature”.²² However, for the present research it is essential to refuse such limiting and unequivocal subtext of the term.

The second important misconception about the term lies in the presupposition of the equality of the elements²³ creating the *hybrid*. In other words, *hybridity* in a plenty of cases in modern cultural sciences is used just to mean “cross-cultural exchange”.²⁴ This exchange implies an approximately similar influence of the two cultures on one another. This was one of the points on which the term was heavily criticized.²⁵ It was suggested that the whole idea of *hybridity* (as with many other underlying theories,²⁶ for example, theories of cultural syncretism, synergy and transculturation) “negat[es] and neglect[s] the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references”.²⁷ It is important to note and

¹⁷ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire, Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 27, Quoted in Ashcroft, 110.

¹⁸ Young, 27, quoted in Ashcroft, 110.

¹⁹ Kraidy M.M., “Hybridity in Cultural Globalization”, *Communication Theory* 12 (3), 316-339, full text available at https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1334&context=asc_papers, Nov 5 2017, 5.

²⁰ Kraidy M.M., 5.

²¹ Kraidy M.M., 5.

²² Kraidy M.M., 5.

²³ Ashcroft, 108-109.

²⁴ Ashcroft, 109.

²⁵ Ashcroft, 109.

²⁶ Ashcroft, 109.

²⁷ Ashcroft, 109.

accept for the present research that, contrary to the widely-accepted notion, there is nothing in the very term *hybrid* that implies the equality of the framing elements.

As one can see from those two basic misconceptions mentioned above, *hybridity* is still a highly controversial term; controversial even within cultural studies. There are opposing groups of scholars who continue to argue about the possible “political potential” and application of the term, its “epistemological usefulness”²⁸ and general “usefulness” for cultural studies. There is a constant “intense swirling controversy”²⁹ surrounding this term. However, this paper will try to outline some main features of the term in order to apply this concept to the novels of Zadie Smith. In order to explore the construction of *hybrid identities* in the oeuvre of Smith in later chapters, this chapter will initiate the discussion with some theoretical framework. First, it is going to address the issue of cultural identity; then the origins, core and criticism of the *hybridization* theory itself, and, finally, some ways of applying this complex issue to literature.

2.2. The *Cultural Identity* Question

The concept of *hybrids* was discussed very generally when the main misconceptions of the term were mentioned. So this subchapter is going to explore briefly one of the main concepts that is relevant for the present discussion that also needs special attention: the notion of *cultural identity*.

If we look at the definition of the word *identity* in Oxford Dictionary, we see that identity is “[t]he fact of being who or what a person or thing is”.³⁰ Notice the present tense of the definition: *identity* seems to be the sense of self that is (logically) more or less

²⁸ Kraidy M.M., 3.

²⁹ Kraidy M.M., 3.

³⁰ *Oxford Dictionaries Online* can be accessed through [oxforddictionaries.com](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/identity), stable link to the definition of “identity” is <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/identity>, Nov 5 2017.

permanent at a given moment of time.³¹ We can reformulate this definition and say that *identity* is “a sense of self” that a person has about himself. So it is logical to presume that *identity* is created out of the experience of the past that the individual has, and the evaluations of everything that has ever happened to an individual up to the present moment. So, *identity* refers to a “unique sense of self ... representing one’s autobiographical narrative with the ever changing actions and reactions experienced in real life”.³² It is logical that this sense of self is essential both for positioning an individual within any society and it is also important for regulating his own “purposeful” actions in present and future moments of life.³³

Furthermore, it is also important to pay attention to the fact that has just been mentioned: *identity* can be both individual (identity of a person, ipse identity³⁴) and collective (idem identity)³⁵. For example, according to Ricoeur,³⁶ who introduced the ipse-idem difference, our ipse identity is closer in meaning to our unchangeable I – to what we think we are, to our core – while idem identity is much more changeable and it can depend on how we see and understand similarities between ourselves and others, thus it is dependent on our perception of ourselves against the world, changing concepts and environment. There are multiple theories and ways to conceptualize identity according to different authors,³⁷ yet, most of them tend to agree that it is important to understand identity as *a sociocultural construct*,³⁸ as it is born “out of a framework of social forces and influences,” and the position of the individual within those influential frameworks. As

³¹ Christina-Georgiana Voicu, “Crossing Borders: Journey into Otherness”, *Cultural and Linguistic Communication, International Journal of Communication Research*, full text available at http://www.ijcr.eu/articole/26_pdfsam_IJCR%204-2011.pdf, Dec 3 2017, 322.

³² Voicu, 322.

³³ Voicu, 323-324.

³⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 78, quoted in Voicu, 322.

³⁵ Ricoeur, 78, quoted in Voicu, 322.

³⁶ Ricoeur, 78.

³⁷ Voicu, 323.

³⁸ Voicu, 323.

was suggested by critics, *cultural identity* is an

[I]ndividual's realization of his or her place in the spectrum of cultures and purposeful behaviour directed on his and her enrolment and acceptance into a particular group, as well as certain characteristic features of a particular group that automatically assign an individual's group membership.³⁹

So, an individual's *cultural identity* is multifaceted;⁴⁰ it is influenced by a large number of social constructs, race, gender, religion, economy, language, profession, and so on. Most of those "categories" are stable⁴¹ (in the broadest sense of the word), or are thought to be stable, as they refer to a certain "specific membership" and a specific social group.⁴² This, of course, raises another important question: is the above-mentioned *sense of self within the society* or *cultural identity* stable too? Or can it change?

Here, it is important to mention the name of one of the leaders of cultural theory, Stuart Hall, in connection with his vision of *cultural identity*. Hall's theory was influential in many ways and was (as we will see later) especially important for a foregrounding of the *hybridity* theory. Hall introduced the idea that *identity* is not a set of features, stable, unmovable; it is not "an already accomplished fact".⁴³ He refused to see *identity* as fixed and represented by cultural practises.⁴⁴ More so, if *identity* is not a set of features, and it is not later represented by cultural practices, identity formation or *construction* is a *process*, which does not have a beginning and an end. According to Hall, *identity* is "a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, the

³⁹ Voicu, 323.

⁴⁰ Voicu, 323.

⁴¹ Voicu, 323.

⁴² Voicu, 323.

⁴³ Voicu, 323.

⁴⁴ Stuart Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean Identities", *New Left Review* 209, Jan-Feb 1996, 145, quoted in Voicu, 323.

representation”.⁴⁵

In addition, Hall partially refuses the theories that claim the existence of some sort of collective identity that can be re-discovered in the shared past of a group of individuals. Stuart Hall rather suggests that the above-mentioned constant production of an individual's identity is an “act of imaginative rediscovery” of an individual's past that is connected to bridging the different “dispersed” and “fragmented” experiences⁴⁶ of that individual. The *cultural identity* of an individual is under constant “play” of different narratives; it is constantly changed and constantly transformed by the individual himself:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. ... [T]hey are subject to a continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. ... [I]dentities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.⁴⁷

In his famous essay on Caribbean identity called “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, Hall proclaimed that fluidity is one of the main features of identity construction.⁴⁸ There are, of course, other theorists, who oppose this notion of cultural identity being fluid, ever-moving and flexible, but for the present research we will ally with the group of theorists aligned with Hall because they move us towards a new concept of *hybridity* which encompasses, in the best way, the ever-changing nature of *cultural identity* and its expression.

2.3. Origins of the Term

Having established some definition of *cultural identity* according to Hall, it is now necessary to move to the terms *hybrid*, and *hybridity* themselves and locate the origins of the terms in cultural discourse. The whole idea of the *hybrid* started in horticulture when it

⁴⁵ Hall, 167.

⁴⁶ Hall, 428, quoted in Voicu, 323.

⁴⁷ Hall, 394.

⁴⁸ Voicu, 333.

was established that some offspring can be created by “breeding plants of different varieties and species”.⁴⁹ The breeding of hybrids spread very quickly, as it was understood that a hybrid plant offspring takes certain characteristics from both parental plants, thus creating a new mixture and set of features that can be used to create a more genetically stable breed. Then this idea spread to other spheres of society, always carrying the idea of mixing some elements into one. The first mentioning of the term is dated to the 18th century “in the context of interracial contact” in the period of Britain’s colonial dominance.⁵⁰ As was mentioned before, at the time the term had clear racial implications. The next stage for the development of the term came with decolonization movements⁵¹ in the beginning of the 19th century. It was an attempt to alleviate the tensions between white colonizers, aboriginal populations, and the mixed children of those groups. Obviously, at the time the concept still had some covert racial implications. It is fair to say that the heyday of the concept came with the emergence of postcolonial studies in the post-war years. Both the previously colonized cultures and diasporic formations came under the scrutiny of cultural studies. Some theorists, such as Paul Gilroy (in his work *The Black Atlantic* (1993)), started theorizing the “invigorating flow” of new cultural formations.⁵² In recent decades, the term *hybridity* was popularized by and discussed in the work of Homi K. Bhabha, an India-born professor of English and American Literature and Language.⁵³ It is difficult to locate Bhabha’s primary area of studies somehow definitely: he is cited in

⁴⁹ Vanessa Richins Myers, “The Intergeneric Hybrid in Horticulture”, *The Spruce*, full text available at <https://www.thespruce.com/what-is-intergeneric-hybrid-3269459>.

⁵⁰ Kraidy M.M., 5.

⁵¹ Kraidy M.M., 5.

⁵² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, 3, quoted in Kraidy M.M., 5.

⁵³ Zlobin S.S., “The Concept of Hybridity in the Works of Indian Culturologist Homi K. Bhabha”, translation mine, full text available at the website of Belarussian State University at http://www.hist.bsu.by/images/stories/files/nauka/izdania/istochnik/9/Zlobin_SS.pdf, Dec 20 2017, 200.

historical, philosophical, and cultural studies.⁵⁴ However, it is safe to say that he is one of the main thinkers in the field of cultural and post-colonial studies.⁵⁵ Bhabha was focused on analysing the relations between the colonizer and the colonized and the types of *hybridity* produced on the borderlines where the aboriginal culture clashes with the European (colonizing) power.⁵⁶ He tried to strip the concept of its nasty racial context and reframe it, focusing on the resilience⁵⁷ of the native cultures. He also highlighted the ability of the colonized to subvert and adjust “the imperial [cultural] domination”.⁵⁸

Bhabha stressed that it is impossible to discuss colonizer/colonized relationships without taking into consideration the unique situation born out of the “colonial presence” of the colonizer, as Bhabha himself calls it.⁵⁹ Bhabha heavily criticized the previously adopted concept of opposing the colonizer to the colonized in terms of power relationships that had been introduced by Edward Said. Very generally, Said suggested that the colonial control over the colonized populations is executed not through “political or economic domination”⁶⁰ but through a complex *representational* domination that is rooted in specific representations of the colonizer to the colonized.⁶¹ Without going into much detail, it is important to note that even though Bhabha never completely rejected these assumptions, he eagerly dismissed the opposition of the colonizer and the colonized that was taken for granted, and the assumption that in the colonizer/colonized relationships’ “constructive” representational power⁶² is exclusively in the hands of the colonizer.

One of the most important suppositions of Bhabha’s work is that the relationship

⁵⁴ Zlobin S.S., 200.

⁵⁵ Zlobin S.S., 200.

⁵⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, “Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse”, (London: Routledge, 1997), 85-92, quoted in Zlobin S.S., 200.

⁵⁷ Kraidy M.M., 5.

⁵⁸ Kraidy M.M., 5.

⁵⁹ Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders” from *The Location of Culture*, 106.

⁶⁰ Bhabha, 19, quoted in Zlobin S.S., 201.

⁶¹ Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory” from *The Location of Culture*, 24, quoted in Zlobin S.S., 201-202.

⁶² Bhabha, “The Other Question” from *The Location of Culture*, 66.

between the colonizer and the colonized is based on mutual interdependence and mutual “construction of their subjectivities”.⁶³ The processes of creating cultural identities of the colonizer and the colonized are very complex and cannot be enclosed into a primitive opposition of the two cultures. The identity constructions of the colonizer and the colonized are based on a constant re-formulation and reiteration of the concepts, stereotypes, and formulations that are taking place within the framing discourse of colonial presence.⁶⁴ So any research carried out in the field of post-colonial theory should take into consideration those complex interplays that are constantly taking place.

Having established that, Bhabha points out the fact that, because of the discursive changes that are taking place during this process of construction, it is not possible to talk about the same notions of the colonizer and the colonized and all their discursive representations. Every discursive element in the colonial context becomes a *version* of itself that is not exactly the same as the original, but it is very close to that. This type of subtle interpretation that is found throughout his discourse allows Bhabha to conceptualize *hybridity* as “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization”.⁶⁵

2.4. Hybrid Identity according to Homi K. Bhabha

As the previous subchapter has established, there is a process of constant identity formation in case of the colonizer and the colonized relationship. These processes of construction, according to Homi K. Bhabha, take place in the “third place of enunciation.”⁶⁶ The existence of a *third place of enunciation*, or a *hybrid space*,⁶⁷ (also

⁶³ Bhabha, “The Other Question” from *The Location of Culture*, 66-67, quoted in Ashcroft, 108.

⁶⁴ Bhabha, “The Other Question” from *The Location of Culture*, 66, quoted in Zlobin S.S., 201-202.

⁶⁵ Ashcroft, 108.

⁶⁶ Zlobin S.S., 202.

⁶⁷ Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory” from *The Location of Culture*, 36.

called the Third Place theory) is a highly discussed and argued about topic. It is said that Bhabha took inspiration from the works of Lev Vygotsky and his “sociocultural tradition in psychology” which was focused on the behavioural characteristics of an individual and the role of culture in the mind’s processes.⁶⁸ Bhabha applies some premises of the theory to the “postcolonial condition”.⁶⁹ He extensively argues that the *third space* is the ambivalent and contradictory place⁷⁰ where the versions of community, the historic memory, and all the known and used concepts are constantly remoulded, re-defined and re-constructed. Of course, this goes against the previously accepted idea of the linearity of history and time as the re-thinking and re-conceptualizing happens simultaneously and is not bound to a linearity timeline. Here, Bhabha’s main premise was an attempt to rethink the linearity of history and time of Western-European thought and replace “[its] temporal linearity with spatial plurality”.⁷¹ According to Bhabha the “willingness to descend into that alien territory” of the *third place of enunciation* “may open the way to conceptualizing ... international culture” without “exoticizing” one culture in the context of another or opposing one culture to another.⁷²

It has already been mentioned that *hybridity* refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization,”⁷³ and one of the main driving forces behind *hybridization* is the willingness of the colonized to *be like* the colonizer in order to elevate his socio-economic position. Bhabha refers to the nature of

⁶⁸ Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory” from *The Location of Culture*, 38, quoted in *Third Space Theory of Postcoloniality. Note Quote*, full text available at <https://altexploit.wordpress.com/tag/third-space-of-enunciation/>, Dec 13 2017.

⁶⁹ Zlobin S.S., 202.

⁷⁰ Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory” from *The Location of Culture*, 36, quoted in Ashcroft, 108.

⁷¹ *Third Space Theory of Postcoloniality. Note Quote*, full text available at <https://altexploit.wordpress.com/tag/third-space-of-enunciation/>, Dec 13 2017.

⁷² Ashcroft, 179.

⁷³ Ashcroft, 108.

this process as *mimicry*.⁷⁴ Bhabha suggests (and it goes along with Said's theory) that this process of "imitation" is initiated by the colonizer and encouraged in the colonized. And the colonized is expected to "adopt the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values".⁷⁵ *Mimicry* had always been encouraged by the colonizer, as its aim was to create a *copy* of the colonizer. This copy should be good enough; it follows the cultural practises of the colonizer, and, consequently, seems less alien (and possibly less daunting) for the colonizer.

However, there are no clear marks or features of the colonizer that should be mimicked⁷⁶ or rather, it is an impossible task to create a set of necessary features that are needed to be mimicked. The colonizer is an empty concept,⁷⁷ it is a sort of vision of the colonizer created by the colonizer himself for the colonized. When trying to apply this empty concept on the colonized, the colonizer has to undergo a certain type of negotiation, suggesting that the colonized is *almost the same, [yet] not quite the same* as the colonizer.⁷⁸ This negotiation is, in its essence, the *hybridization* of any colonial discourse applied to the colonized. The most prominent example is the adjustment of the British educational system to comfort its Indian colonial subjects (the example that was used by Bhabha in his work).⁷⁹ Furthermore, *mimicry* is often one step away from the *mockery*,⁸⁰ which also shows the "crack" in colonial discourse.

So, *hybridity* is understood as the process where colonial subjects "change different

⁷⁴ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", from *The Location of Culture*, 85-86, quoted in Ashcroft, 124.

⁷⁵ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", from *The Location of Culture*, 85-86, quoted in Ashcroft, 125.

⁷⁶ Zlobin S.S., 203.

⁷⁷ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", from *The Location of Culture*, 89-90, quoted in Zlobin S.S., 203.

⁷⁸ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", from *The Location of Culture*, 90, quoted in Ashcroft, 125.

⁷⁹ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", from *The Location of Culture*, 88, quoted in Zlobin, 203.

⁸⁰ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", from *The Location of Culture*, 85, quoted in Ashcroft, 125.

aspects” of their lives in order to fit the “host” culture.⁸¹ In the process of this accommodation and re-figuration, new types of cultures and the new types of *hybrid identities* are born. This rhetoric was used not only in connection with the colonized/colonizer relationship, but in explorations of diasporic identities. There is an important tendency in the use of term in modern “post-colonial condition” to refer to “multiple temporal, spatial and geographical contexts.”⁸² So there is certain tendency now to de-historicize and de-locate cultural phenomena in order to establish “an abstract, globalized concept”⁸³ of *hybridity*.

2.5. Criticism

This subchapter is going to address a couple of issues usually mentioned in connection to *hybridity* theory. Most of the criticism that is aimed at the concept of *hybridity* dwells in the very ambiguous nature of the concept itself. It is true though, as was explained earlier, that not only is the term difficult to conceptualize, it also allows endless possibilities for interpretation and implication.⁸⁴ First, and foremost, it is the very idea of mixture that bothers a lot of opponents of the theory. As mentioned in the first subchapter, the term “mixture” suggests that there are some things that are mixed,⁸⁵ some initial elements that are put together in order to create the *hybrid*. To put it in other words, *hybridity suggests non-hybridity*,⁸⁶ which brings back the idea of pure opposing elements that was so fiercely rejected by the theory itself. Non-hybridity is closely connected with the idea of *purity*: when talking about *hybrids*, there is a certain tendency to understand it

⁸¹ Voicu, 332.

⁸² Ashcroft, 109.

⁸³ Ashcroft, 109.

⁸⁴ Kraidy, 11.

⁸⁵ Voicu, 332.

⁸⁶ Voicu, 332.

as a mixture of some clean or authentic concepts.⁸⁷ Paul Gilroy notes on this subject as follows: "... the idea of hybridity, of intermixture, presupposes two anterior purities ... I think there isn't any purity ... That's why I try not to use the word hybrid ... Cultural production is not like mixing cocktails." It is somehow frustrating to see the fact that the "language" of the theory of *hybridization* somehow brings back the rhetoric of the colonial "Victorian racial theory".⁸⁸

However, there is one crucial point mentioned by some critics: "purified identities are constructed through ... the territorial boundaries and frontiers."⁸⁹ They are created in the opposition between "the heart of the empire",⁹⁰ the centre, and its margins. In this sense, it might be more relevant to focus, not on the centre (or in this case on the implied notion of purity), but to speak about *hybridity* as a tool to explore the experience of those in-between cultures, those who are "in the margins".⁹¹ Thus, we are talking about positioning: dislocation and relocation of subjects and their perceptions of their displaced cultural identity. In this sense, both the colonized and the diasporic identities are a perfect example of such marginalized groups. As Stuart Hall said:

"You have to be familiar enough with 'the centre' to know how to move in it. But you have to be sufficiently outside it, so you can examine and critically interrogate it. And it is this double move, or ... the double consciousness of the exile, of the migrant, of the stranger who moves to another place, who has this double way of seeing it, from the inside and the outside".⁹²

When talking about *hybrid identities*, it is important to acknowledge who exactly we are talking about. Both diasporic and colonized identity formations are tightly connected with

⁸⁷ Voicu, 332.

⁸⁸ Voicu, 333.

⁸⁹ Voicu, 333.

⁹⁰ Voicu, 333.

⁹¹ Voicu, 332.

⁹² Voicu, 332.

resistance, appropriation, and re-appropriation of cultures and cultural practices that are sometimes alien and *implanted*. There is a large amount of negotiation that takes place within this identity construction. *Hybridization* can and should be seen as a celebration of difference that takes place on a cultural level.

Another very common strain of criticism comes from *hybridity*'s uselessness.⁹³ When the concept is so large and open, when it can be applied to so many disciplines, it raises the question of whether there is any practical use in creating such a concept. This point was expressed by Werbner:

All cultures are always hybrid. . . . Hybridity is meaningless as a description of 'culture,' because this 'museumizes' culture as a 'thing.' . . . Culture as an analytic concept is always hybrid . . . since it can be understood properly only as the historically negotiated creation of more or less coherent symbolic and social worlds.⁹⁴

All of these points of view are undoubtedly valuable. Yet, most of the academics seem to agree that, despite its wide connotations, *hybridity* is a necessary tool to tackle some rather new emerging concepts in our globalized world.

2.6. Application to Literature

Having roughly established what we are talking about in terms of *hybrid identities* it is now necessary to see how it is related to literature in general. Literature has always been a medium to "articulate" immigrant experiences, and the novels written within diasporas have become a marketing phenomenon, attracting attention and shaping "the perception of

⁹³ Kraidy, 7.

⁹⁴ Pnina Werbner, *Debating cultural hybridity: Multicultural identities and the politics of anti-racism*, (London: Zed Books, 1997) 15, quoted in Kraidy M.M., 7.

the minority group by the dominant cultures.”⁹⁵ Those experiences are undoubtedly connected with the issues discussed above: the confusion, adjustment, negotiation, and the constant search for your cultural identity in the circumstances of immigration and diaspora. One of the most well-advertised and well-known British authors, who is a second-generation immigrant herself, is Zadie Smith. Her 2001 novel *White Teeth* was an immense success, placing her alongside renowned authors such as Hanif Kureishi and Salman Rushdie. Zadie was said to be an “editor’s dream”: a young, good-looking lady with exotic ancestry and a witty style of writing, she was heavily visually advertised. The fact that her first novel, *White Teeth*, was characterized as “the epitome of hybridity and cultural diversity”, perfectly suited the advertising campaigns. The novel provided a large-scale survey of immigrant identities in a plenitude of social contexts and, most importantly, throughout two generations of immigrants in Britain. In comic fashion, Smith tells the story of individuals who experience all the hardships of settling down, adjusting, and searching for the answer to the question “who are we?” While her second novel, *The Autograph Man* (2002), is thematically rather different, Smith returns to the topic of mixed-race families and their social stratification in her third novel, *On Beauty* (2005), where outer and inner beauty is dealt with, again, by two generations of immigrants. Several years later, and after publishing a rather experimental novel, *NW* (2012), Zadie Smith returns to the topic of self-identification with her latest novel, *Swing Time* (2016). Even though the latest novel is primarily about friendship and fame, there is definitely a subtext of immigration, race, and self-identification. One of the main features of all of Smith’s novels is the wide scope of characters. This is particularly fascinating when exploring the difference between generations of immigrants as, undoubtedly, there is a certain shift in perception of the world and themselves between said generations. The following chapters will try to follow

⁹⁵ Voicu, 322.

the shift in self-identification that happens between the first and second-generation immigrants.

3. *White Teeth*

3.1. Publication and Advertising

For Zadie Smith, everything started before the turn of the millennium, when *White Teeth* was published. Rumours say that when she was only 21 and fresh out of Cambridge University (where she had acquired her BA degree) she sold the first 80 pages of her future novel for an advance of around £250,000,⁹⁶ three years before the publication of the book. From that point onwards, she has been one of the most fascinating writers both for literary critics and general audiences alike.⁹⁷ Initial reaction to Smith was positive, as the press celebrated not only her “promising writing career”, but also her youth and mixed-race background.

However, as the publication of the novel approached and the advertising campaigns were taking place, some critics noticed a certain duality when it came to her photos for the advertisements. In some of them she was presented as a “young but serious” author with “a sleek hairdo and glasses”.⁹⁸ But another image of the writer quickly emerged: a colourful picture in which you see a rather exotic-looking woman with unruly hair, darker skin and an occasional turban on her head. It was seen as an attempt to target completely different audiences, who could “inscribe their own conceptions of identity” onto the two completely different pictures.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Smith was not ascribed to one particular identity; she was showing “different faces”,¹⁰⁰ she was “projected as a cosmopolitan, chameleon-like

⁹⁶ “She’s young, black, British – and the first publishing sensation of the millennium”, *The Guardian*, full text available at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jan/16/fiction.zadiesmith>

⁹⁷ “The Reception of *White Teeth*”, *Cambridge Authors: Zadie Smith*, full text available at <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/cambridgeauthors/the-reception-of-white-teeth/>

⁹⁸ Jeremy David Scott, “Shared and Told Tales: Multiculturalism and Participatory Narrative Identities in Zadie Smith’s ‘*White Teeth*’”, *The International Journal of the Humanities*, Vol.5 No10, 2008, 207.

⁹⁹ Scott, 207.

¹⁰⁰ Scott, 207.

everywoman””.¹⁰¹

It is fair to say that this marketing technique was a success, as Zadie Smith became the voice (and the face) of multicultural society in the early 2000. *White Teeth* received a lot of prizes in the coming years, for example, the Whitbread First Novel Award and the Guardian First Book Award.¹⁰² Born in London, a daughter of a Jamaican mother and an English father, Smith herself was the epitome of the duality and hybridity that she was exploring in her novel. Just as she negotiated and created two rather different versions of herself in the advertising photos, she was exploring and negotiating different, sometimes completely opposite aspects of the life of immigrants. It is sometimes suggested that she was specifically “singled out and marketed as an epitome of multicultural London”¹⁰³ at that time both because of her heritage and her “multifocal fiction”.

Her first novel, *White Teeth*, is difficult to be described and categorized. Not only does it range in topics from the immigrant experience to underage sex and religious obsession, it also covers a lot of characters and a rather large time span from the Second World War to the 31st of December, Not only does it say what happens to the characters, it also gives constant insight into the characters’ minds. The omnipresent narrator switches between the thoughts of the characters to prove and explain their, often very unique, perspectives. Smith’s style is often described as a mixture of Kureishi and Rushdie – a hybrid of its own. What is relevant for the present discussion is Smith’s ability to show the very problematic, extremely sensitive, and amazingly complex topic of the relationships between two generations of immigrants in England, and especially their gradual change in the context of their new home.

¹⁰¹ Scott, 207.

¹⁰² “She’s young, black, British – and the first publishing sensation of the millennium”, *The Guardian*, full text available at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/jan/16/fiction.zadiesmith>

¹⁰³ Scott, 207.

Structurally, the novel is divided into four big blocks, named after the characters and the timeframes that are important for their development: *Archie 1974,1945*; *Samad 1984,1857*; *Irie 1990,1907*; *Magid, Millat and Marcus 1992, 1999*. This is important for the present discussion as it anchors the characters to a certain context of time and space, as the “body and the space is a primary location of one’s identity”.¹⁰⁴ The years that accompany every character’s block also refer to some important date in the past, where there was some identity-forming event that represents a certain historical past of the character and his/her roots, or the origin.¹⁰⁵ It becomes clear, for example, in the case of Irie – who was not even alive in 1907 – that the identity of a character is not somehow “fixed” or attached only to their contemporary context and experience – it can and always is affected by some past events, historical turmoil, and personal connection to people of the past. However, for the structural purposes of the present research, we’ll follow the characters in a somehow linear fashion of the first and then second generation of immigrants.

3.2. First Generation

3.2.1. Samad and Alsana

It is usually suggested that the three main families in the novel – the Iqbals (Bangladeshi), the Jones (Anglo-Jamaican) and the Chalfens (White-Jewish) – represent the three main waves of immigration in England: Asian, Afro-Caribbean and European, respectively.¹⁰⁶ So their lives are very typical in many ways, as they are the epitomes of immigrants from their countries. The first two waves of immigrants were usually seen as a

¹⁰⁴ Perez, 146.

¹⁰⁵ Perez, 146.

¹⁰⁶ Perez, 146.

threat to Britain,¹⁰⁷ so their presence in British society at the time was marked by heavy stereotyping and racism, which was generally aimed at excluding those immigrants from white British society. This is also very obvious in the book, as both the Iqbals and the Joneses have a significantly lower social status (and income) as opposed to the Chalfens, who can be considered educated middle class citizens – especially Marcus Chalfen, who becomes a rather famous scientist towards the end of the novel. This also proves the unfortunate fact that the at the early stages of mass migration, “black migration ... was ... perceived in a different way from European migration”¹⁰⁸ as, for example, Polish and Irish immigrants at the time also received a warmer welcome in Britain than their black equivalents. Another relevant point is that there was a definite societal focus on the notions of family and belonging at the time, as the country was trying to overcome the social instability of the post-war years that was also “fuelled by the economic crisis of late capitalism.”¹⁰⁹ As a result, individuals were constantly pressured to identify themselves in accordance to their family background and ethnicity.

Out of those three families, the main focus of the beginning of the book is on the Iqbals and the Joneses. The Iqbals are Bangladeshi immigrants; they are a family where both the mother and the father came to England and were born abroad. Even before coming to Britain, Samad and Alsana Iqbal were a rather traditional couple in many ways: he was a handsome military officer who was much older than his perspective wife (which was not a problem for the conventional society in which they both lived). They had met only once before they got married. Even though it is mentioned that they wanted to marry after they saw each other, it is fair to state that the marriage was most definitely arranged. As with many arranged marriages, this one is not particularly happy: Samad and Alsana often get

¹⁰⁷ Perez, 146.

¹⁰⁸ Perez, 147.

¹⁰⁹ Perez, 147.

into physical fights¹¹⁰ over their ideological differences and, for many years, they were in open opposition in regards to the situation with their kids that will be addressed later.

As opposed to Alsana, Samad is a very religious man, or at least he tries to be. He is a practicing Muslim. It is not, however, easy for him to be the “truly good Muslim” he aspires to be. He is constantly tempted to break his religious rules: prohibited food, sexual pleasures, and blasphemous ideas are everywhere in Britain. And, more often than expected, he actually breaks the rules, which causes him constant frustration and dissatisfaction. Deep down he knows that it is almost impossible for him to be true to his religious practices, yet he cannot admit it because otherwise, in his mind, he would lose his heritage, his belonging to the line of his Bangladeshi ancestors. He even states that: “I am a Muslim, but Allah has forsaken me or I have forsaken Allah, I’m not sure”.¹¹¹ Throughout the whole book, his main driving force is to be a good Muslim and a good person, otherwise he feels empty and lost.

His connection to his roots and his religion plays the central role in his self-identification. He is not a fundamentalist though, he is rather a follower of “pure” Islam – something that his parents had taught him. He follows the tradition that has been in his family for generations – he wants to be part of his family succession. This can also explain his preoccupation with the past, especially his ancestral link to Mangal Pande, an Indian soldier and a leading figure in the 1957 Indian rebellion. Samad sees his past as something sacred, important, and extremely significant and tries to incorporate it as much into his British life as possible: he even asks to put a picture of Pande in the O’Connell’s Pool house where he spends a lot of his time. Even though the events of the Indian Mutiny can be seen from different perspectives and the character of Pande is a rather controversial one,

¹¹⁰ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, London: Penguin Books, 2001, 448.

¹¹¹ Smith, *White Teeth*, 58.

Samad retells and refigures history in order to feel somehow more important because of his famous ancestor. This historical uncertainty lets him contextualize his own identity. Samad is a great example of a character who exists in this constant *transition* state:¹¹² between his old culture and the new one he is constantly reassessing his currently low position in society through a past that seems to be glorious.

This rather strong obsession with tradition and the past is not at all unusual for the first generation of immigrants. On a very basic level, in the completely alien environment of a new country, especially in the context of aforementioned societal exclusion, Samad identifies himself as Indian, rather than English, trying to establish a certain feeling of safety within his family in an alien environment. It is also true that he was brought up in Bangladesh, not in Britain, where he was not an immigrant, thus he tries to recreate a sense of stability through maintaining a traditional way of living.

Back in India, he was a high rank military officer with all the respect and power that this position could bring. However, he was injured and one of his arms does not work. This resulted in him serving in the British Army at a very low position – at a position that didn't equal his Indian one. This past experience of a high military rank that echoes Pande's military achievements makes it even more painful for Samad to be a disabled waiter in Britain. When, after the war, he decided to stay in England, he did not have any other choice other than to work in a rather bad Indian restaurant that is owned by some distant relative of his. He is definitely overqualified for the job, yet the job possibilities for him are quite limited. This situation was true for many first generation immigrants of the time: upwards social mobility was basically unattainable. Samad gets so frustrated at his workplace that he wants to wear a sign on himself at all times saying:

"I AM NOT A WAITER. I HAVE BEEN A STUDENT, A SCIENTIST, A

¹¹² Scott, 208.

SOLDIER, MY WIFE IS CALLED ALSANA, WE LIVE IN EAST LONDON BUT WE WOULD LIKE TO MOVE NORTH.”

This Indian restaurant where Samad works mirrors very well the general tendency of eroticizing Indian culture in Britain at a time. “Going for Indian” has become one of the most prominent aspects of British social life since the 60s, when Indian food was perceived to embody the “multicultural essence” of modern Britain.¹¹³ On a daily basis Samad deals with the ignorance of his customers. The “curry culture”¹¹⁴ has been incorporated into the life of Britons in a peculiar way. On the surface, the “multicultural” part of the concept was widely celebrated, but in reality, Indian cuisine was inevitably connected to racism, cultural intolerance and ignorance.¹¹⁵ As his boss constantly reminds him, Samad just needs to “shut up and take orders”, listen to customers butchering the names of his national dishes, and treating him in a very disrespectful way.¹¹⁶

Another very indicative moment in the book is when Samad describes the type of people coming to their restaurant on Saturday: there are mostly people who come to the place after a performance at a nearby theatre.¹¹⁷ Presumably they are middle class, average customers, and they are, indeed, nice people, the waiters think. However, there is this omnipresent ignorance as those customers ask for some information about the dish, while young waiters just make up stories because they were born in London and do not know anything specific about the food.¹¹⁸ Exoticizing the food and the whole dining experience is obviously beneficial when it comes to making money in the restaurant, yet it does not help dismantle any stereotypes about Indian food and, therefore, Indian immigrant society.

¹¹³ Elizabeth Buettner, “‘Going for an Indian’ South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain”, *Curried cultures: Globalization, Food and South Asia*, University of California Press, ed. Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas, 142.

¹¹⁴ Buettner, 143.

¹¹⁵ Buettner, 143.

¹¹⁶ Smith, *White Teeth*, 55-56.

¹¹⁷ Smith, *White Teeth*, 203-204.

¹¹⁸ Smith, *White Teeth*, 203.

The Indian culture is seen as exotic; different, but also inferior, marginalized. This creates very important and detrimental opposition between the British and the other, exotic (Indian) culture. This, inevitably, leads to a feeling of marginalization and rejection of the immigrants – a certain type of ghettoization.¹¹⁹ Not only is this restaurant marketed as “Indian” but, in reality, is run by Samad’s family who come from Bangladesh, the food that is served there is also a certain hybrid – and stereotypical “Indian” food that can be found everywhere in Britain.

The aforementioned sign that Samad wishes to put on himself also states that: “*WE LIVE IN EAST LONDON BUT WE WOULD LIKE TO MOVE NORTH.*” Most critics agree that this refers to the strong racism that was prevalent in those areas, which fuelled Samad’s decision to move to the imagined area of Willesden, a less racist part of London. Unable to solve his own identity issues, Samad projects his own troubles onto his children and sends one of his sons back to Bangladesh to live and study in the traditional community. This can be interpreted as a reflection of his own inner desire to move back home. However, their family income does not allow the move back to happen for both twins and Samad is left constantly frustrated, stating that his whole immigration path was a “devil’s pact when you walked into this country ... never welcomed, only tolerated”.¹²⁰

Interestingly enough, Samad’s wife, Alsana, is a slightly different case. As mentioned before, she is a rather traditional lady herself. She takes care of the household while also working as a seamstress to help her husband make ends meet. She follows the traditions when it comes to their household, for example, usually choosing to make traditional food for her family.¹²¹ She is also a Muslim woman and she wears a sari. However, she is much more flexible than her husband when it comes to adjusting the

¹¹⁹ Scott, 208.

¹²⁰ Smith, *White Teeth*, 407.

¹²¹ Smith, *White Teeth*, 74.

traditional ways of living to the contemporary world. For example, she prefers to wear sneakers with her sari, as it is much more comfortable, and also uses pre-cooked food for her dishes as it cuts down on the cooking time. The latter instance is actually something she argues about a lot with her husband. At a certain moment in the book, Samad gets angry because “[h]is mother did not ... spend the household money, as Alsana [does], on prepared meals, yoghurts and tinned spaghetti”. To which Alsana rightfully parries: “Samad Iqbal, the traditionalist! Why don't I just squat in the street over a bucket and wash clothes? Eh?”¹²² These fights can be very indicative of the type of painful adaptation and change that comes with being in a foreign culture. However, Alsana is much more open to *negotiating* her identity, trying to establish new or unexpected connections with British society. It is also important that this process is constant and endless, partially because of her husband traditionalist’s pressure, partially because of her own in-between position. This negotiation is also seen in her attitude towards other minority cultures:

Black people are often friendly, thought Alsana, ... From every minority she disliked, Alsana liked to single out one specimen for spiritual forgiveness. ... Mr. Van, the Chinese chiropodist, Mr. Segal, a Jewish carpenter, Rosie, a Dominican woman...¹²³

On one hand, however, Samad’s claim to traditionalism is justified because he wants to maintain traditional values in his household, he wants the chores of the household to be done in the most traditional (and cheapest) way. Thus, he mentions the family tradition of cooking a certain way that goes back to generations of Iqbals. On the other hand, Alsana is the one who actually has to adjust to new conditions. Not only is she working full time, she probably has a different range of ingredients and techniques available to her. It’s no

¹²² Smith, *White Teeth*, 62.

¹²³ Smith, *White Teeth*, 65.

surprise that her cooking has started to differ from the “traditional” version of cooking that Samad has in mind. This adjustment inevitably creates a new type of “hybrid” when it comes to their household – traditional and authentic, yet adjusted to new conditions. This hybridization and adjustment starts to happen in all other spheres of life: language, culture, and daily routines. Alsana definitely chooses practicality over tradition.

The identity constructions of both Samad and Alsana are based on their belonging to Bangladeshi culture, to their homeland, and yet they are constantly negotiating with their new environment. Born and raised in the culture of their origin and only later moving to England, they both oppose full cultural assimilation. They definitely would like to preserve, not only their culture and tradition, but also the physical difference of their children. Even though Alsana is a little bit more flexible when it comes to practicality, when it comes to mixing their genes

“[e]ven the unflappable Alsana Iqbal would regularly wake up in a puddle of her own sweat after a night visited by visions of Millat ... marrying someone called Sarah ... resulting in a child called Michael ... who in turn marries somebody called Lucy ... Leaving Alsana with a legacy of unrecognizable great-grandchildren ..., their Bengali-ness thoroughly diluted, genotype hidden by phenotype”.¹²⁴

The biggest fear of the immigrant of the first generation is not some illness or poverty – it is the idea of “dissolution, disappearance”.¹²⁵ Faced with their own otherness and exclusion, a lot of first generation immigrants feel the need to resist, to preserve their uniqueness, their culture and language by not mixing into the British society.

3.2.2. Archie and Clara

One cannot probably imagine more different people than Samad Iqbal and his best

¹²⁴ Smith, *White Teeth*, 327.

¹²⁵ Smith, *White Teeth*, 327.

friend, Archie Jones. Archie is a very typical white Englishman who is rather fond of his position in the paper folding business¹²⁶ and seems to be a very boring person. He is one of very few characters in the book who has a rather simple attitude towards his identity:

I'm a Jones, you see. 'S like a 'Smith.' We're nobody . . . My father used to say: 'We're the chaff, boy, we're the chaff.' Not that I've ever been much bothered, mind. Proud all the same, you know. Good honest English stock.¹²⁷

This laid-back, passive white father is a very typical character for Smith's writing and this subject is developed later in her work. He definitely loves his wife and his daughter, yet his passivity virtually separates him from his family; he is never in the midst of any discussion or argument, preferring to be a peace maker. The friendship of Archie and Samad started in a rather unconventional way: they both were in the Second World War. However, they did not actually fight (to the great dissatisfaction of Samad), they were in the group of people who ensured the war went smoothly, "laying bridges, creating passages for battle, creating routs where routs had been destroyed".¹²⁸ It is also important to note that their friendship started with a cultural clash: Archie was staring at Samad for too long, which made the latter angry but also made him notice Archie for the first time.¹²⁹ It is, peculiarly, one of very rare occasions when Archie did something outstanding, even if it was just staring at someone. They were stuck in one tank for a while together, and later they were the only two people who survived the bloody attack on their tank – that is why their friendship flourished, even though they were completely different people. Interestingly enough, the narrator describes their friendship as such:

It was precisely the kind of friendship an Englishman makes on holiday, that he can

¹²⁶ Smith, *White Teeth*, 325.

¹²⁷ Smith, *White Teeth*, 99.

¹²⁸ Smith, *White Teeth*, 86.

¹²⁹ Smith, *White Teeth*, 83-84.

make only on holiday. A friendship that crosses class and colour, a friendship that takes as its basis physical proximity and survives because the Englishman assumes the physical proximity will not continue.¹³⁰

So both Archie and Samad were put into the physically confined space of a tank and in a small division where their class and racial status did not really matter, especially in the context of war. During the war years, soldiers are perceived *only* as soldiers – their skills and physical strength are their principal features. So Samad and Archie were put into this “Buggered Battalion” as the outcasts of society: Archie, because he was an uneducated man (he did not even attend grammar school) and Samad, because of his crippled arm. Somehow these differences, which excluded them from the society in a normal environment, “cemented” their friendship in this military context.¹³¹ The same tendency is reflected in the relationships of their families: because of the context of immigration and exclusion from society, both the wives of Samad and Archie and their children feel a certain connection to each other, still remaining friends throughout the years.

Even though Archie is white and British, he also “acquires mixed identity”¹³² after marrying Clara. There is a very indicative moment in the book when Archie is not allowed to participate in the company dinner because his wife is black, even though the boss tries to say that it is not a racial issue.¹³³ Instead of attending that corporate dinner, Archie spends the complementary Luncheon Vouchers in the O’Connel’s Pool House with Samad. Again, as passivity is one of the key features of the character, he does not try to do anything about the situation – he simply accepts it as it is and takes the vouchers. This bar, the O’Connel’s Pool House, is, however, an essential part of the lives of Samad and Archie. It is their place

¹³⁰ Smith, *White Teeth*, 96.

¹³¹ Perez, 148.

¹³² Perez, 150.

¹³³ Smith, *White Teeth*, 71-73.

where the wives cannot come; it is their Mecca, their escape. Interestingly, this bar becomes one of the safe spaces for cultural hybridization to happen. It seems that Bhabha was describing O’Connel’s Pool House when he wrote:

This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structure[s] of authority ... which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. ... The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.¹³⁴

The name of the bar is Irish, however, it is run by an Arab family. They do not serve any pork, not because of some religious doctrine, but because of the family’s story that the first owner of the bar died from bad pork meat. The regulars of the bar consist of all different types of people, including Samad and Archie. And the whole hierarchy of the place is based on some common denominators but those denominators are purely social, not cultural: how often you go, how much money you spend there, and so on. In O’Connel’s Pool House, you have to “*earn* one’s position in the community”.¹³⁵ You have to be an active participant of the community, regardless of your skin colour or religion. The Pool House is a very rare place. It is a safe space for the characters for many reasons, but firstly because there is no otherness there based on race. The community in the Pool House is somehow monolithic, even though it is constructed from many diverse identities.¹³⁶ Cultural hybridization cannot happen without those third places, where different cultures can interconnect without the binary opposition that has been imposed on them. As mentioned before, at a certain moment Samad insists on putting a picture of his great ancestor on the wall near the kitchen, which seems to be important only for him and

¹³⁴ Perez, 150.

¹³⁵ Smith, *White Teeth*, 183.

¹³⁶ Perez, 151.

nobody else.¹³⁷ Yet the whole thing can happen because Samad convinces everybody of the importance of this character, describing the whole historical event from a very enthusiastic perspective. This re-telling and reconstructing of history can safely take place only in the Pool House.

And Archie, a white Englishman, earns his place in this diverse Pool House. If he is the example of “the colonizer” of this storyline, he and his identity are also changed due to close contact with “the colonized” in a very broad sense. The binary opposition and hierarchy is disrupted, yet the whole situation is still coherent. This redefinition of Archie in society is also very indicative of the hybridization process.

The reason for Archie’s changed identity is his wife Clara – a beautiful black lady, who is much younger than he is and deserves special mention because of her rather unusual neutrality. As explained later in the book, Clara was an atheist, and while her mother was into religious practices, Clara decided to run away and start a life of her own. She does not really want her daughter, Irie, to be under the influence of her grandmother. This is why Irie had not seen her granny Hortense until she herself ran away. Clara is not really into talking much about her ancestry and roots. She seems to be rather happy without the religious pressure of her mother and, even though she does not really love her husband Archie, he was her only possibility to settle in this country, so she settled with him and married him when she was only 19. Again, the main driving source for Clara was the need to find a place, shelter, and safety in this new country. Even more than the Iqbals, she faces racism and exclusion, yet she is even more open to negotiation: she avoids straightforward opposition as much as she can and she wears fake white teeth in order to be less noticeable.

The last important family worth mentioning is the Chalfens. Even though both Joyce

¹³⁷ Smith, *White Teeth*, 183-184.

and Marcus Chalfen are of the German-Polish descend (third generation)¹³⁸, they consider themselves to be British, as they are generally integrated into the British society. It is very evident in the moment when Joyce meets the children of the Joneses and the Iqbals for the first time:

‘You look very exotic. Where are you from, if you don’t mind me asking?’

‘Willesden’ said Irie and Millat simultaneously. ‘Yes, yes, of course, but where *originally?*’ ... ‘Whitechapel’ said Millat.¹³⁹

The Chalfens are definitely the “insiders” of society. They are very proud of their “good genes” – the fact that many of the family members were scientists, mathematicians and psychiatrists.¹⁴⁰ They are the family Irie and Millat are sent to by the school after class to “[bring] children of disadvantaged minority backgrounds into contact with kids who might have something to offer them,”¹⁴¹ as the headmaster puts it. Interestingly enough, the Chalfens are not very different from the Iqbals and the Joneses – they live in the same neighbourhood, their children go to the same school, and generally speaking, they belong to the same working class layer of society. Yet, when crossing the threshold of the Chalfen’s house, Irie felt that she was “crossing borders, sneaking into England”.¹⁴²

So to sum up, both the Iqbals and the Joneses, as first generation immigrants and mixed-race families, are in very unstable situation. Being almost overtly rejected by society (as opposed to white European immigrants), unable to access good working and living conditions, they are primarily concerned with the survival of their families on new soil. They prefer to either follow the traditional ways of living within their homes, which brings them the feeling of safety within their house (the Iqbals), or they prefer to assimilate

¹³⁸ Smith, *White Teeth*, 328.

¹³⁹ Smith, *White Teeth*, 319.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *White Teeth*, 314.

¹⁴¹ Smith, *White Teeth*, 308.

¹⁴² Smith, *White Teeth*, 328.

into the environment to the extent that their otherness does not trigger any extra violence or dissatisfaction (Clara). There are, still, the first indications of identity hybridization and negotiation in the most practical aspects of their lives, as they have already created some ground and entered a physical space for cultural interconnection and further identity negotiation.

3.3. Second Generation

3.3.1. Millat and Magid

All the aforementioned families of immigrants have their children around the same time. The Iqbals have their twins, Millat and Magid; The Joneses have their daughter Irie; and The Chalfens have 4 children, one of them being Joshua, who is the most important for the present discussion. All of the children are born in London, thus they have a very vague idea of their original country, the birthplace of their parents. They also go to the same school which accommodates all different children from different backgrounds:

Children with first and last names on the collision course ... [O]nly in Willesden ... you can find best friends Sita and Sharon, constantly mistaken for each other because Sita is white (her mother liked the name) and Sharon is Pakistani (her mother thought it best – less trouble).¹⁴³

So even though the school is very multi-ethnic and multicultural the children still, just as their parents, suffer from exclusion and racism – offensive nicknames and racial comments follow the children everywhere.

The most important and defining moment in the lives of Magid and Millat happens when their father, Samad, decides to send one of the twins back to Bangladesh to

¹⁴³ Smith, *White Teeth*, 327.

strengthen his connection to his roots and Muslim religion.¹⁴⁴ Not only is it detrimental for the children because they are twins and they are separated now, it is also puts an interesting twist on their identities.

From that time on, Millat, the one who is left in England, feels very unsure of his own position. “Bangladeshi by family and British by birth”¹⁴⁵ Millat does not feel any strong connection to his parents’ lifestyle and religion, but he also cannot easily blend into British society, which is still torn by racial prejudices because his skin is rather dark. However, his natural beauty (that he probably inherited from his father, who was very handsome when younger), makes him really attractive for all the ladies around him. Using his charming appearance, he first embarks on the journey of a rebellious heart-throb; changing lovers, smoking weed, and leading a fast life. Later, however, he gets under the influence of a fundamentalist organization, where he becomes one of the most active members.

This duality of Millat is indicative of the constant fight between “the old” and “the new” that every second generation immigrant goes through:

“Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, English or Bengali; he lived for the in-between, he lived up to his middle name, Zulfikar, the clashing of two swords”.¹⁴⁶

It is interesting, though, that he never aimed at belonging to one particular group – something that was very important for his parents. He rather pitied his inability to achieve a higher place in society due to his mixed heritage. He thought, “that he smelt of curry; [and] ... that he could be a dentist or a shop-owner or a curry-shifter, but not a footballer or a film-maker; that he should go back to his own country; or stay here and earn his bloody

¹⁴⁴ Smith, *White Teeth*, 196.

¹⁴⁵ Perez, 152.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *White Teeth*, 351.

keep”.¹⁴⁷ This inability to make something important of himself, this painful realization of his marginalized position, is one of the driving forces behind his religious fundamentalism. When, by some unexpected coincidence, the physical attack of the KEVIN organization is changed into a preaching event, Millat takes revenge into his own hands and tries to shoot Dr. Perret in front of the audience at the conference: “Because no one else will do it. ... You desert. But I stand firm.”¹⁴⁸ This act might be seen as the ultimate confirmation of Millat’s fundamentalism, yet his religious beliefs are not that strong at the time. He tries to follow the religious doctrines but not really successfully. The main driving force for his participation in KEVIN is “to take action”.¹⁴⁹ He is not satisfied with preaching and spreading brochures. He wants to fight, he wants to be seen, he wants to be noticed. There is a certain shift of focus with his identification: for Millat it does not really matter to which rather binary and artificial ethnical group he belongs – all he wants is to belong to some active, prominent, important formation.

It might also be argued that a similar shift happens with Magid, the twin that was sent to Bangladesh. Instead of becoming a “true Muslim” as his father wishes, he becomes a bright student, a lawyer, “more English than the English”.¹⁵⁰ However, Magid’s Englishness is condemned by his father, who still thinks in terms of the binary opposition of central (British) and marginal (immigrant) groups. Magid comes back home as a firm believer in science. It might be suggested that this is one of the outcomes of colonization: upon return to India, Magid is under the influence of the necessity of education, which was heavily promoted by the colonizers. As Irie realizes after living in close proximity to him, he saw “*prophecy*”¹⁵¹ in science. His revelation was the Future Mouse experiment that

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *White Teeth*, 234.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, *White Teeth*, 500.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, *White Teeth*, 502.

¹⁵⁰ Smith, *White Teeth*, 406.

¹⁵¹ Smith, *White Teeth*, 430.

might change people's lives by curing a lot of chronic illnesses. Yet again, the self-identification of Magid is very closely related to his purpose, or to something he sees as his purpose.

3.3.2. Irie and her baby

Out of all the second-generation children in the novel, Irie is the most typical example of a mixed race child. She is half British, half Jamaican. She struggles against racism at school because she is dark skinned, but she is also mocked and commented upon because of her voluptuous figure.¹⁵² As mentioned before, her mother, Clara, escaped her religious mother and that is why the connection that Irie could have with her extended family, especially with her grandmother, is very limited – they could only call each on a rare occasion.¹⁵³ This also means that plenty of things that are connected to family history are concealed, hidden, or not talked about. Irie was very much detached both from her mother's and her father's side of the family. Her father, Archie, is very passive and uninterested in her life and Clara associates her family with religious obsession and, thus, is also unwilling to go into much detail. This situation is highlighted when Irie cannot really create a family tree, as opposed to the Chalfens:

Archie could give no longer records of his family than his father's own haphazard appearance on the planet ... Clara Bowden knew little about her grandmother ... [she] could only definitely state [when] her own mother was born"¹⁵⁴

Irie, very much like Millat, struggles to find her identity in the context of her mixed heritage. However, as opposed to Millat, she wants to find more information about the black part of her family. It is a very typical behaviour for second and third generation

¹⁵² Smith, *White Teeth*, 265.

¹⁵³ Smith, *White Teeth*, 381-382.

¹⁵⁴ Smith, *White Teeth*, 338.

immigrants: the second generation very often goes on a journey of exploration of the family history, especially its foreign part, in order to explore this part of the self. However, in the case of Irie, the family has lost a huge part of its history – primarily due to the shameful matter of the presence of a white, colonizing grandfather in their bloodline. The absence of any history from the parents (which might be helpful in Millat’s case) is, for Irie, definitely detrimental, as she “lacks black referents from her mother’s side to value her hybridity”.¹⁵⁵ That is why, for example, her relationship with her mother sours after Irie’s failed attempt to relax her black, curly hair. Because there was certain detachment between Irie and her mother Clara to begin with, Irie tries to submit to the typical white standards of beauty and get her hair chemically straightened. Wigs, hair extensions, and chemical straightening play an enormous cultural role in the black community as an Afro hairdo for a long time was considered ugly and unacceptable and black girls were told to “discipline” their hair by relaxing them. Influenced by that notion, Irie dreams about long and wavy hair that can blow in the wind: “Straight hair. Straight straight long black sleek flickable tossable shakeable touchable finger-through-able wind-blowable hair. With a fringe.”¹⁵⁶

She gets the hairdo all wrong and spoils her natural curls, so she gets some extensions instead. She feels that with this long, straight hair she is much more beautiful, desirable. It's one less thing about her appearance that is different. However, everybody around her tells her that this look is not hers, that she lost some part of her identity when she changed her hair so drastically: “I mean, what was the grand plan [with the hair]? [To look like] the Negro Meryl Streep?”¹⁵⁷ She takes the extensions out, but later on, when she learns that her mother hid the fact that the latter has fake white teeth, she feels betrayed and

¹⁵⁵ Perez, 149.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, *White Teeth*, 273.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, *White Teeth*, 283.

lost, lacking the black parental figure to communicate with and navigate her way in between all those different beauty standards.

While Irie is researching her family past, she also does not put much emphasis on belonging to a certain group – she rather wants to explore her past, to get educated, to know. This is primarily fuelled by the desire to know herself. She learns some bits and pieces; that her name means “everything okay” in the native language, or that physically she takes after her great grandmother. However, those pieces are not enough for her to fully learn and embrace her past. Still feeling lost, she decides to choose a career path instead. That is why she both decides to enter university to pursue the career of a dentist¹⁵⁸ and, before studying, she wants to travel to Bangladesh and Jamaica “to see the people of the world”.¹⁵⁹

At a certain point, the inability to get any information about the black part of the family, the family secrets and innuendos, half-forgotten stories of a secret white grandfather, and her mother’s fake white teeth make Irie frustrated to the extent that she starts almost hating family history and its consequences:

Millat was right: these parents were damaged people, missing hands, missing teeth.

These parents were full of information you wanted to know but were too scared to hear. ... She was sick of never getting the whole truth.¹⁶⁰

So, after that revelation, Irie escapes her parents’ house, first moving to her grandmother’s and then working and living at the Chalfens’ house. Unable to piece together her past, she decides to work towards her future. Irie’s switch from searching for her roots to refusing them in order to create her own life and career path is typical for many second generation immigrants. Irie does not have such a strong connection with the original country as, for

¹⁵⁸ Smith, *White Teeth*, 368.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, *White Teeth*, 377.

¹⁶⁰ Smith, *White Teeth*, 379.

example, Samad and Alsana have – she has never seen it, she did not grow up there. So the historical past can be seen as a certain burden for second generation immigrants – an immediate mark of alienation, difference. Therefore, she wants to refuse her past in order to create her future: that is why she also chooses to go to university and to have a career. Firstly, a stable job with a fixed salary can eliminate a lot of the materialistic anxieties that her parents' generation has. Secondly, she is going to be the first person in her family to get education – it is, finally, a certain possibility of social mobility – the possibility for Irie to do something with her life.

Towards the end of the novel, Irie gets pregnant from one of the Iqbal twins. It is not known which one of them is the actual father: "...she may *never know*. ... No test on Earth would tell her. ... If it was not somebody's child, could it be that it was nobody's child?"¹⁶¹ This baby is a "symbol of ultimate indeterminacy of identity".¹⁶² Not only will this baby's identity problematize traditional ethnic concepts,¹⁶³ it also brings great uncertainty to the relationships between the families, as the child will be brought up by Irie and Joshua Chalfen, who eventually become lovers.¹⁶⁴ However, this type of indeterminacy does not bother Irie – she does not see her future in terms of opposition, migration, and otherness. It is nobody's child in its very essence – his family history is half unknown, his father is undetermined. This baby is the ultimate mixture – the biggest hybrid of all the interaction and tensions between the families.

It is apparent that there is a certain shift in the identity formations of first and second generation immigrants. While their parents, preoccupied with survival in the alien environment, were trying to secure some position in society, negotiating two opposing

¹⁶¹ Smith, *White Teeth*, 515-516.

¹⁶² Perez, 152.

¹⁶³ Perez, 152.

¹⁶⁴ Smith, *White Teeth*, 541.

concepts of their old identities and the new hostile, society, children that were born in England have shifted their focus to their personal achievements. As Millat was thinking, “he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in the country ... and [he] recognized the anger”.¹⁶⁵ Acknowledging their in-between place in the society and their hybrid identity, the children decide to move forward rather than continue internalizing the constant clash of the two cultures. “This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment”.¹⁶⁶ And the most important outcome of this experiment is the ultimate interconnection, fusion, and hybridization of the immigrant identity.

¹⁶⁵ Smith, *White Teeth*, 234.

¹⁶⁶ Smith, *White Teeth*, 326.

4. Swing Time

4.1. Childhood – Tracey

Zadie Smith's latest novel, *Swing Time* (2016), takes off with the same generation that *White Teeth* left the reader with: the unnamed main character is of Irie's age, she is also a "brown girl" who lives in London and has a black mother and white father. Irie's name is even mentioned in the book, as she studied in the same school with the main character, so she makes a tiny appearance: "There was a buck-toothed girl called Irie, always top of the class, whose parents were the same way round as us, but she'd moved out of the estate".¹⁶⁷ The childhood of the main character in *Swing Time* happened in the same imagined area of Willesden where the two novels prior to *Swing Time* (*White Teeth* and *NW*) are set. *NW* is Zadie Smith's fourth novel, published before *Swing Time*, in 2012. It is usually considered to be a much more experimental piece of writing where she explores different narrative techniques to catch the essence of urban, multicultural London. It is fair to say that after *The Autograph Man* (2002) and *On Beauty* (2005), which were set somewhere else, Zadie Smith came "home" to Willesden to continue exploring the topic of immigrants' lives. It is also possible that her exploration will continue, as she is going to publish her next novel, *The Fraud*, sometime this year¹⁶⁸ and, even though it is going to be a historical novel, it will also be set in the area near the real Kilburn part of London.

The main character's name in *Swing Time* is unknown, even though the reader follows her life story, swinging between her present situation and her past memories, always seeing everything through her eyes. It is partially mysterious, as if she does not want to uncover her identity because she was involved, as we learn later, in some scandals

¹⁶⁷ Smith, *Swing Time*, 34.

¹⁶⁸ *The Telegraph*, "Zadie Smith to publish two new books", article, full text available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/news/zadie-smith-publish-two-new-books/>.

with a well-known pop-star. This leaves a partial feeling that she is an observer; even though she is involved in the action she always seems to be a little detached in her mind, going through thoughts of her own. Another very important distinction between novels is from the omnipresent narrator in *White Teeth* to a first-person narrator in *Swing Time*. The previous narrator “could understand and forgive all”,¹⁶⁹ was able to draw conclusions, to add thoughts and link things that are seemingly disconnected and happening on the other side of the world. In contrast, the new narrator is, obviously, limited both by her “circumstance and temperament.”¹⁷⁰ She is evidently, “trapped by the character”,¹⁷¹ unable to achieve the previous novel's flamboyant descriptions and unusual twists. It is a much more plain narrative, more cohesive, and, some suggest, even one-sided,¹⁷² and, as opposed to *White Teeth*, *Swing Time* has a much smaller amount of characters. Furthermore, rather than jumping both through time and space, *Swing Time*'s narrator only goes back and forth on the timeline, while the places are only changed at a rather physical pace when, in the contemporary storyline, she travels to some other city. There are two parallel plotlines in *Swing Time*: one is somewhere around the early 2000 when the main character is a young adult and the other, as mentioned before, is the Willesden of her childhood in the 80s. Even though the “modern” part of the narration happens in London and New York, it seems that the city is not particularly important – it is a big multicultural metropolis and that description seems good enough. As opposed to *White Teeth*, this type of narration is more personal and conflicted, as everything is coloured by the main character's perception. Even though *White Teeth* was also full of retrospection and jumps between past and present, *Swing Time* has much shorter retrospective bits, usually strongly connected with something

¹⁶⁹ Adam Kirsch, “Playing Doubles: The Evolution of Zadie Smith's Liberal Imagination”, *Nation*. 11/21/2016, Vol. 33 Issue 21, p17-19, full text accessed through ukaz.cuni.cz, 18.

¹⁷⁰ Kirsch, 18.

¹⁷¹ Kirsch, 18.

¹⁷² Kirsch, 18.

happening in the present storyline. This impacts the narrative, making the past closer to the present, more important, and much more closely linked.

For the reader who has already been acquainted with Smith's writing, the area of Willesden is known for its racism and difficult social situation that was portrayed in *White Teeth*. The main character of *Swing Time* is of mixed heritage: she has a black Jamaican mother and a white father and her childhood very much resembles Irie's. She is in between two cultures, and it seemed to her that the whole world is constantly asking her which of those cultures she chooses to identify with:

[My parents were asked] How will she choose between your cultures? To the point that sometimes I felt the whole purpose of my childhood was to demonstrate to the less enlightened and that I was not confused and not troubled choosing. ... I was strange to my mother and to my father a changeling belonging to neither of them, and although this is of course true of all children, in the end – we are not our parents and they're not us.¹⁷³

It is important to note here that it is societal pressure that the main character is talking about here – as opposed to the parental expectations that were the main oppressing force in case of Magid and Millat in *White Teeth*, for example. The narrator of *Swing Time* has a good relationship with both of her parents, yet, she is rather detached from both of them, similar to Irie. The narrator's white father is also of a low working class position with some minor criminal activity in the past. The mother also reminds us a bit of the character of Clara Bowden from *White Teeth*. Beautiful "like Nefertiti", with plain make-up and clothes and short Afro,¹⁷⁴ she, however, does not possess Clara's neutrality.

¹⁷³ Smith, *Swing Time*, 157.

¹⁷⁴ Smith, *Swing Time*, 9.

“My mother was a feminist,”¹⁷⁵ is the first description the main character gives of her mother. We do not know much about her past prior to Willesden, we can only piece it together with some little descriptions the narrator sometimes mentions: “She was a young mum ... There were things she wanted to be but she couldn’t, not then – she was trapped. She had to fight for any time for herself.”¹⁷⁶ We know that the grandmother of the main character moved to England with many children and worked as a cleaner for a long time to make ends meet.¹⁷⁷ Having experienced enough hard time and poverty throughout her younger years, having sacrificed her education in order to have a child, the narrator’s mother no longer wanted to be secondary. She wanted to be heard, to change something in society. As opposed to virtually all the first immigration characters in *White Teeth*, the mother here started taking action.

Unlike both Alsana and Clara from *White Teeth*, the narrator’s mother was not content with the typical female housekeeping role that was expected of her. She decided to carve time out from her role as a wife and a mother for herself and for her education, which she also completed, very assertively, using open-university courses and available materials. “[S]he had Saturdays for herself”, recalls the main character, noting that together with her father they had to escape the house to let her mother study in peace. She used the frustrating energy that she had received from her childhood and channelled it into the political and social fight that she was just about to start. Interestingly, the narrator is the only child of hers, while “her mother had birthed seven children, her grandmother, eleven.”¹⁷⁸ The older narrator recalls that she wanted to escape that life because she did not want the same future for her daughters: to be “a child with a child”.¹⁷⁹ She felt that another

¹⁷⁵ Smith, *Swing Time*, 9.

¹⁷⁶ Smith, *Swing Time*, 111.

¹⁷⁷ Smith, *Swing Time*, 20.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, *Swing Time*, 19.

¹⁷⁹ Smith, *Swing Time*, 22.

child would trap her, even though her husband loved her and wanted another one.¹⁸⁰ Her studies and later work seemed to be her “plotting the escape from motherhood”¹⁸¹ that she was so meticulously executing. Later in the book she aims to become a member of Parliament for Brent West.¹⁸² While still remembering and honouring the past, she wants some change and she wants that change for her people. Rather than just accepting her societal position, she pushes through the difficulties in order to achieve something, to gain a voice. This is an important change both on a social and individual level. It is a big step from just making a living in the estate to trying to have a voice in the community – an essential difference between Clara Bowden and the main character’s mother in *Swing Time*. This is the gradual change that was already happening in *White Teeth* – the fight for a voice. However, here we see that this fight is not violent – as in case of Millat and his fundamentalist organization – it is gradual, political.

The mother has a very important influence on the main character in an ideological sense, even though for her young self, with all her youthful maximalism, all her mother’s fight seemed to be humiliating and unnecessary. Later in her life when she is exposed to any racist or sexist opinions, she can feel her mother at her shoulder with some “ironic commentary, pouring poison in my ear from thousands of miles away”.¹⁸³

This black activist mother is the complete opposite of another mother, Tracey’s. Tracey was another brown girl in the dancing class the the main character attended. However, she was a different mixture: her mother was white and her father was black. Tracey's mother is described as: “white, obese, afflicted with acne. She wore her thin blond hair pulled back very tightly in what I knew my mother would call a “Kilburn facelift”.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Smith, *Swing Time*, 19.

¹⁸¹ Smith, *Swing Time*, 18.

¹⁸² Smith, *Swing Time*, 150.

¹⁸³ Smith, *Swing Time*, 127.

¹⁸⁴ Smith, *Swing Time*, 10.

It is not even specified what her occupation was, but it seems that Archie's paper-folding business would fit just right. She was very laid-back; when the girls frequented their house, the main activity was watching TV, eating unhealthily, and playing with some of the expensive toys that Tracey had. The narrator, even though she is just a young girl, feels the difference and states: "I couldn't help but notice the placidity of a small, all-female household".¹⁸⁵ This feeling of passivity, calmness, and inertness of white culture is present both in *White Teeth* and *Swing Time*. As rightly noted, "this contrast between the resignation of the working class white English and the ambition of the non-white immigrant has been the favourite subject of Smiths".¹⁸⁶

Talking about the white part of the narrator's heritage, there is another similarity between Irie's and main character's mothers: later in the book we learn that the latter was also the second wife of a white father. In *Swing Time*, his white children from his previous marriage come to visit. It is one of the most disturbing scenes in the first third of the novel. When the main character had to face her half-sister – quite literally, she turns and looks for the first time at her face – that girl, who is also her father's daughter, at that moment she thinks:

The girl turned to me, and we stared frankly at each other. ... Apart from the comically obvious fact that I was black and she was white ... I felt we both saw [the similarities]. ...[H]e made one like me and one like her. How can two such different creatures emerge from the same source?¹⁸⁷

This is one of the first moments in her childhood that the narrator faces the black and white opposition in society. Even though they share a father and are half siblings, the sister seems to be scared and unwilling to be in their house. They do not have any working

¹⁸⁵ Smith, *Swing Time*, 35.

¹⁸⁶ Kirsch, 18.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, *Swing Time*, 44-45.

relationship later on and never see each other again, with the exception of one time when attending their father's funeral. The sister is not the only half-sibling that the main character has – there is a brother, who is very malicious to the main character's mother. He definitely despises her both for her colour and for the fact that their father married her: “[H]e don't care about no one. ... He's fucked up in the head. Marrying that bloody spade!”¹⁸⁸

This opposition between the passivity and maliciousness of the white part of the family, as opposed to the assertiveness of the black mother is extremely important for the young girl as she is developing. She cannot eliminate any part of her heritage, obviously, and she feels that tension from a very early age, having to understand it somehow while her half-siblings could adjust to the world “with a certain slowness, through the years.”¹⁸⁹ The mother was not a fan of the idea of the meeting these siblings, and she also openly disapproves of the Tracey's family, noting that the narrator's upbringing is different, better, because she is ‘clever’ and “she knows where she comes from and where she is going.”¹⁹⁰ This proves to be a much more difficult situation for the main character: yes, she is aware of her heritage and the cultural history and oppression of her people, yet she does not share her mother's fierceness and she is not like her father's white children either. She is something new, something different; she does not belong to either of the cultures yet belongs to them both.

So when she cannot quite grasp her identity in relation to her history and heritage, she tries to identify herself in comparison with her peers. It is not surprising that when the narrator sees a girl of the same colour – Tracey – at the tap dance class, she feels that they have a lot in common, some mutual understanding: “Our shade of brown was exactly the

¹⁸⁸ Smith, *Swing Time*, 47.

¹⁸⁹ Smith, *Swing Time*, 157.

¹⁹⁰ Smith, *Swing Time*, 31.

same – as if one piece of tan material was cut to make us both”.¹⁹¹ Even though they come from the same background: both were “from the estates and did not receive benefits”,¹⁹² there is a big difference in the family environment of the two girls; Tracey was the apple of her mother’s eye. She seems to have all the latest toys, the most expensive dancing shoes, “diamanté everything”.¹⁹³ They became close friends for a long time, and it was usually with Tracey that the main character somehow identified herself. She was the “peer group” for the main character.

This duality, of course, is another important topic in both *White Teeth* and *Swing Time*. Just as the twins Magid and Millat were separated and went their own paths in completely different directions, these two brown girls, very similar, almost mirrored in heritage, continued two completely different lives later on. Both *White Teeth* and *Swing Time* are preoccupied with the idea of how “the same experience is a different experience to two different minds”.¹⁹⁴ Starting with an almost identical social position, their later life proved to be completely different. In some sense, they continued their mother’s paths: the narrator continued fighting with her own self-identification, travelling the world as a pop-star’s assistant, while Tracey fulfilled her mother’s worst nightmare and had 3 children with three different men and then lived on very little income.

Some differences between the narrator and Tracey were obvious from the very beginning. Tracey loved everything modern and pop, while the main character found joy in jazz, classical movies and dancing. She understood dancing as something natural and beautiful, and it quickly became her dream – to become a great dancer. For the main character, when it came to art of dance there was no colour, no prejudice, no hatred – only

¹⁹¹ Smith, *Swing Time*, 9.

¹⁹² Smith, *Swing Time*, 10.

¹⁹³ Smith, *Swing Time*, 10.

¹⁹⁴ Kirsch, 18.

the beauty of the movement. There is, however, this powerful moment when the young brown girl is watching an overtly racist film with the main actor in blackface and does not even understand the implications of that¹⁹⁵ – for her it was only dancing, the music, the soul. Her mother disapproved of her dancing, seeing it as an offering of her body to other people – a certain submission that the mother could not bear, especially in the context of black culture. Tracey’s mother, quite on the opposite, put all her hope into her dancing career, as a “young, pretty woman of color”.¹⁹⁶ The narrator was not, however, completely ignorant to racism. There are those creeping moments in her life where she “feels unease”¹⁹⁷ about some details. When she and Tracey were writing some stories, making up Cinderella-style fairy-tales about ballerinas, the main character was always “blond, ... with hair ‘like silk’ and big blue eyes”,¹⁹⁸ “and only in one story did the prima ballerina have a terrible secret: she was ‘half-caste’, a word I [the narrator] trembled to write down.”¹⁹⁹ These young girls admired the world of classical dance which is very much white-dominated and they had to submit to its unfair rules.

From some school memories of the main character from the 90s we can see that the school was still very much a “social experiment” of mixing different cultures together.²⁰⁰ There is, of course, the rhetoric of equality that even the children – her classmates – believe in. There is a peculiar moment where the main character goes to her white friend to play some games and she “solemnly explained ... one day as we played, she herself was “colour blind” and saw only what was in a person’s heart”.²⁰¹ But when the main character showed her *Stormy Weather* – a film with African-American cast, she got unexpected

¹⁹⁵ Kaitlyn Greenidge, “Shaken out of time: Black bodies and movement in Zadie Smith’s swing time”, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, (Virginia Quarterly Review, Winter 2017, 93(1):196-199), 198.

¹⁹⁶ Greenidge, 197.

¹⁹⁷ Smith, *Swing Time*, 32.

¹⁹⁸ Smith, *Swing Time*, 32.

¹⁹⁹ Smith, *Swing Time*, 32.

²⁰⁰ Smith, *Swing Time*, 53.

²⁰¹ Smith, *Swing Time*, 116.

reaction:

[S]he was offended by it – hurt, even. Why was everybody black? It was unkind, she said, to have only black people in the film, it wasn't fair. Maybe in America you could do that, but not here, in England, where everybody was equal anyway and there was no need to “go about it”. And we wouldn't like it, she said, if ...only black people could come to ... dance class.²⁰²

With the example of these little children who are exposed to multiculturalism from the very beginning of their life, we can see some tendencies in the larger society. Even the most valuable concepts need time and generations to settle down and truly become the norm among people. It is symptomatic of the fact that here children are hybrids, mixtures of different cultures, pieces of concepts and a patchwork of experience that is something completely new and unknown. Unfortunately, racism is still exists “in latent or disguised form”.²⁰³ On an individual level, it seems to be a constant struggle for self-identification, especially for the mixed race children.

Even though the narrator understands that she does not have to choose between her heritages, even though she is not like her parents, just as with Irie, the tension between the two cultures is omnipresent in all aspects of her childhood. The difference between the cultures is highlighted by the fact that her mother and father could not be more different people. An intellectual, opinionated, and educated civil rights activist mother and a laid-back, calm, white father are quintessentially the duality that is within the main character. The main character's early life is, in essence, the quest to find herself between her Jamaican and her British roots while maintaining her own individuality.

There is no wonder that instead of delving into those oppositions she sees the frame

²⁰² Smith, *Swing Time*, 116.

²⁰³ Ibrahima Dieme, “A decentered reading of Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*: Voices of cross-cultural belonging”, *Theoretica and Applied Linguistics*, Vol.4, №4, 112.

of reference in something shared by everyone – art, precisely, dance. Michael Jackson, Fred Astaire, the Nicolas Brothers – for the young narrator, those are the milestones of history, the voices and the bodies of time. Dancing is a type of art that does not require words or explanations – it comes from the soul, the spirit, nature. “It is fostered outside any academy or institution”,²⁰⁴ existing in all different cultures and forms. It is a medium that communicates through cultures, “across languages”,²⁰⁵ and ages. That is why it metaphorically becomes the narrator’s dream – the heritage shared by each and every one, a new globalized version of identity.

4.2. Adulthood – Aimee

Even though her childhood plays very important role in her identity formation, the main character’s young adult years fall on the decade of the early 2000s – the contemporary timeline of the novel. It was a time of pop music and musical TV and the main character gets a job at YTV (which is a fictional version of MTV). At this work place the narrator also meets and subsequently starts working for a very popular pop star called Aimee.²⁰⁶ They first meet at the job interview and after this she is offered a job as one of Aimee's four assistants. Just as with the main character, we do not know any of Aimee’s other names – Aimee might be her pseudonym. She seems to resemble Madonna a lot, so maybe her surname is not necessary – she is just too famous for that.

It is important to mention that the main character saw and loved Aimee when she was a child. Back in the day, she and Tracey used to dance to her music together. Aimee was an idol for a lot of young girls and that is why, at first, the opportunity to work for her seems like a lifetime goal for the narrator. However, it quickly becomes clear that Aimee is

²⁰⁴ Greenidge, 198.

²⁰⁵ Greenidge, 198.

²⁰⁶ Smith, *Swing Time*, 73.

in many ways a typical highly ranked celebrity: she is impulsive, spoiled by the money that she has, she is restless and hyper-active. Yet, as the novel progresses, the reader can see why Aimee is the main focus of the narrator in the contemporary timeline of the story.

Aimee was originally Australian, from the small town of Bendigo.²⁰⁷ She is twenty years older than the narrator, yet she looks much younger than her age.²⁰⁸ She travels the world and seems to be happy anywhere she goes. It seems that Aimee's life is the opposite of the lives of people that inhabited the narrator's childhood: she has all the means and no limits to her life, she can live it to the fullest and does so. "This is one of the striking things about Aimee: she has no tragic side,"²⁰⁹ says the narrator, highlighting her privileged position. Throughout her long career she also changed her look multiple times, trying all the new version of herself every time she felt it was necessary. She is a modern hybrid herself, in a way.

Being one of the icons of late 90s and early 2000s, she is also a quintessence of cosmopolitanism. Physically, she was described by the main character in a peculiar way:

The palest Australian I ever saw. Sometimes, without her make-up on, she didn't look like she was from a warm planet at all, and she took a step to keep it that way, protecting herself from the sun at all times. There was something alien about her, a person who belongs to a tribe of one.²¹⁰

Aimee's voluntary decision to erase the traits of her belonging to a certain culture is peculiar for the main character. Throughout the book she constantly notices the little things that Aimee does to be out of the typical context of cultural belonging: from her accent to the way her makeup looks, from the topics of her songs to her "both male and female" on-

²⁰⁷ Smith, *Swing Time*, 91.

²⁰⁸ Smith, *Swing Time*, 238.

²⁰⁹ Smith, *Swing Time*, 74.

²¹⁰ Smit, *Swing Time*, 97.

stage looks – Aimee chooses universality, she chooses to be like everybody, yet like nobody at all. Especially for someone whose childhood was marked by this binary opposition of black and white, the dominant and marginal culture of the 80s, this possibility to deny both and see yourself as a “world citizen”²¹¹ must be highly attractive. Because she was caught in an in-between cultural state, those expressions of “cultural transcendence”²¹² that Aimee possesses seem to open the possibility of a new version of identity for the narrator, one that is not based on choosing, but rather denying.

However, this universality is also tightly connected to the privilege of Aimee’s position both in racial and materialistic terms. It is the great “benefit of whiteness”²¹³ that allows Aimee to change her appearance, a universality based on belonging to a dominant culture. In one heated discussion, with all her impatience, Aimee attacks the main character, almost accusing her of belonging: “But we’re not in Bendigo any more! You’ve Left Bendigo – right? Like Baldwin left Harlem. Like Dylan left ... wherever ... Sometimes you gotta get out – get the fuck out of Bendigo! ”²¹⁴ Here Bendigo, Aimee's native city, is the symbol of the past that you need to leave behind in order to go for something new, something you yourself choose to be.

However, Aimee’s fluidity with her appearance is something unattainable for many people. During one of their travels to America, the narrator had a one-night stand with a doorman, who:

Like most people of his line of work – like Granger – he had been hired for his height and his colour, for the threat considered implicit in their combination. Two minutes of smoking a cigarette with him revealed a gentle soul on good terms with

²¹¹ Dieme, 114.

²¹² Dieme, 114.

²¹³ Kitsch, 19.

²¹⁴ Smith, *Swing Time*, 140.

the universe, ill-suited to his role.²¹⁵

Just as for this guy, who is trapped in the stereotypes about his appearance, the narrator also understands that she cannot so easily let go of her cultural history, she cannot change her appearance and identity as Aimee can – she cannot “leave Bendigo” so easily. Furthermore, there are two parts of her heritage that are always there, always present:

Aimee: –God knows why the British think they’re the only people allowed to be funny in this world.

Narrator: –I am not that British.

Aimee: –Oh babe, you are as British as they come.²¹⁶

Maybe it is indeed impossible for the second generation immigrants in Britain to be like Aimee – the past is too close, too strong, and too influential.

Slowly but steadily, the narrator realizes that Aimee’s position is so specific and so detached from her own that she starts to see all the decisions that she makes as grotesque and absurd. Poverty is an issue that Aimee decides to fight at a certain point in the novel. And to do so, she decides to simply “end it” by building a school in an unnamed African country – an idea that seems almost painfully familiar for the contemporary reader. A realization comes to the mind of the main character about how easy it can be for some people, while almost unattainable for others and it marks the moment when she sees the idea of “global citizenship” as something superficial:

[A] surreal demonstration of what was possible when good people of means decided to get things done. The kind of people able to build a girls’ school, in a rural West African village, in a matter of months, simply because that is what they have decided

²¹⁵ Smith, *Swing Time*, 143.

²¹⁶ Smith, *Swing Time*, 108.

to do.²¹⁷

“‘White woman saves Africa.’ Is that the idea? Very old idea”, the narrator’s mother sums up after hearing about the school.

For the narrator herself, who ends up taking the opportunity to travel and help with the school, it is a journey to reconcile herself with her African past after she has shaken off Aimee’s glitter. It is also similar to Irie’s quest to find out about her family tree on her mother’s side. However, it turns out that the narrator is a white girl for the African tribes: when she starts dancing in the circle of drums,

Narrator: Why are they saying ‘too bad’? Was I that bad?”

Hawa: No! You were so great! They are saying: *Toobab* – this means ... ‘Even though you are a white girl, you dance like you are black! ... [Y]ou and Aimee, both of you – you really dance like you are blacks. It is a big compliment, I would say.’²¹⁸

It turns out that in this poor African country, “nationality and class privilege”²¹⁹ are much more important than race itself. The narrator comes to that country with Aimee, she is British and speaks English. She is not one of them; she is part of the “imperial power”²²⁰ together with Aimee.

So after this path leads her nowhere and once again equated with Aimee, the narrator is very much concerned with the moral differences between her and her pop-star boss. There are some things that she starts to find unacceptable. Getting progressively more and more fed up with Aimee’s character, tired of superficiality, the narrator does not feel that she belongs to that lifestyle anymore. The last straw comes when Aimee is fast-tracking the adoption of a beautiful African baby using her money and power. The

²¹⁷ Smith, *Swing Time*, 126.

²¹⁸ Smith, *Swing Time*, 417.

²¹⁹ Kirsch, 19.

²²⁰ Kirsch, 19.

narrator is shocked and she decides to send information about this illegal adoption to some tabloid newspapers. This chapter of her life also closes with her coming back to Willesden.

Even though the narrator's journey is very much connected with finding herself in between the old and the new – just as we saw with the second generation immigrants in *White Teeth* – in *Swing Time* the journey is much more complicated, because the division between the old and new is not so obvious anymore. The narrator's childhood is coloured by racism and social injustice. In a conversation with her mother, the narrator states that it is not the political voice that her generation is after, her generation is “finished”²²¹ with political battles. Then, aware of the cultural history of her people, sensitive to all the “old clichés that govern the world”²²², yet willing to move onward, the narrator is caught in the seemingly perfect world of Aimee and all her pop-star cosmopolitanism. Yet she quickly sees all the cracks in that worldview too, all the power play that is still based on privilege.

It is the same feeling of frustration that the narrator feels when her mother starts talking about “working on some issues on the community level” and when Aimee suggests that “all lives are of equal weight”. Even her journey of “subtle editing of Aimee's project”²²³ in Africa, which was supposed to be her reunification with her roots, in the end highlighted her uniqueness and hybridity – her specific position as an mixture of two cultures.

It seems like this unnamed narrator was trying to find her name, her own unique voice in society, yet fails to fit it into some existing framework. Both in her childhood and adulthood, the most fitting idea was of some sort of universal heritage that everybody can ascribe to: whether it is a form of art that everybody can understand, or a form of cosmopolitanism that does not yet exist – it must be something across cultures, something

²²¹ Smith, *Swing Time*, 126.

²²² Dieme, 112.

²²³ Dieme, 112.

uniting rather than dividing. Interestingly, the narrator is a better singer than she is a dancer. In the few moments when she let herself sing, she felt the amusing unity with the world and the audience. She actually has a better natural voice than Aimee. However, she never finds her voice really: she is very perceptive, she notices and sees things as they are, yet she is never assertive enough to be fully pronounced. The book does not find any “satisfactory or meaningful way”²²⁴ to accommodate the duality that is the identity of this mixed race girl. However, *Swing Time* strives to explore the ways to accommodate some harmony and natural diversity that must be achieved in society.

²²⁴ Kirsch, 19.

5. Conclusion

The topic of immigrants, their identities, their experience and their position in society is key topic in the oeuvre of Zadie Smith. Most of the novels she has published to date are concerned with the topics of identity and multiculturalism. It is not surprising, considering her own cultural background, and her first-hand experience of living in London – a city that was proclaimed multicultural, yet still has too many traits of racism and discrimination towards immigrants, especially the ones with dark skin. In her novels, Zadie Smith creates the imagined area of Willesden and populates it with characters who left their home countries for Britain in order to open the discussion about their identities, struggles, and dreams.

With now three or four generations of people whose ancestors came to England in the first wave of immigration, we can no longer simplify their experience and call them *immigrants* anymore. The people who were born and raised in England in immigrant families are a peculiar mixture, the hybrids of several countries. These are the members of society with their own histories and stories and with their own anxieties that are very often born out of their in-between position. Yet it should not be supposed that their past define them. While their great-grandparents and grandparents struggled to survive in England, while their mothers and fathers engaged in political fights to make their lives matter and their voices heard, the contemporary generation is much more concerned with their self-identification, again, struggling to find their own unique identities and place in the world. Immigrant identities have shifted from focusing on providing basic needs for the family and maintaining functioning households, to social assertiveness and political struggle, and finally to raising the question of self-identification and individuality yet again.

Zadie Smith is a talented author who examined the question of hybrid identity in two

of her books specifically, first tackling the original generation of immigrants and their children in *White Teeth*, and coming to revisit the following generations in the next book, *Swing Time*, published 15 years later. She shows the difference in the identities of those people in all the ways available for her as an author: through the type of narration, with the scope of the characters, with time switches, and insights into their minds. And a change occurs; the characters are different. The flamboyant “hysterical realism” of *White Teeth* is muted and forgotten in favour of much more melancholic and slowly-paced *Swing Time*. The shift in the identity has already happened, and instead of the colourful patchwork of different identities, cultures, colours, and ideas that inhabited the pages of *White Teeth*, we see a vision of a one-coloured and plain but cosmopolitan, multinational world where everybody belongs everywhere and nowhere at all. In *Swing Time*, the spice is missing, the idea of equality by means of trans-national cosmopolitanism seems deprived of all national colour and peculiarity. This idea of equality that might have been a dream for the immigrant grandparents suffering from discrimination because of their appearance proves to be unattainable in *Swing Time*, even useless for the following generations.

However difficult it is to stay in this limbo between two worlds and two cultures, however strongly the children and grandchildren of the immigrants desire some resolution and stability, it seems that the hybridity, the mixture, is the only valuable way forward as an answer to the question of their identities. Only through negotiation, through partial adjustment with partial resistance, through respecting all the parts of their parents’ cultures, and through embracing their in-between state can these immigrants can stay true to themselves. Just as with Irie’s baby in *White Teeth*, future generations will be the mixture of multiple cultures, yet there will be no unity. The idea of a unified, homogenous, cosmopolitan society that is introduced in *Swing Time* proves to be unrealistic due to the elitism that has still not been extirpated. So the only cosmopolitanism that seems possible

without any degree of discrimination is the one that embodies multi-faceted and diverse subjects – hybrids of all kinds.

Those hybrids that inhabit Zadie Smith's novels are so complicated and complex in nature that they are the perfect examples of hybrid identities. Their identities do not simply consist of two equal parts: influenced by complex personal relationships, they have to come to terms with their past, present, and future. Their journey is linear, from old to new, but and at the same time it is also cyclical – trying to reconnect with their roots. This hybrid is not a temporary form of identity – it might be *the* new form, which, in all its complexity, highlights this unique situation that the immigrants find themselves in.

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Abstract

Present research addresses the topic of construction immigrant identities in two novels, *White Teeth* and *Swing Time* by contemporary British author Zadie Smith. The main focus of the work is to look closely at the examples of the characters in the aforementioned two novels who are first and second generation immigrants and see how they negotiate and create their identity formations. The most valuable theoretical framework for the present research proves to be the hybrid identity theory created by Homi Bhabha. Thus, the first theoretical part of the thesis attempts to explain the theoretical framework in order to apply the notion to the literary examples from the novels that are addressed in the following two chapters of the thesis. The following analysis of the literary characters revealed that the identity formations are primarily constructed through negotiation and hybridization as the immigrant identities tend to be hybrids of the cultures of their ancestors. Additionally, the penultimate chapter addresses the ideas of cross-national cosmopolitanism that are mentioned in the second novel which seem to be the possible and desired outcome of the processes of hybridization, while also exploring the limits of the theory.

Abstrakt

Současný výzkum se zabývá tématem přistěhovalecké identity ve dvou románech *White Teeth* a *Swing Time* současného britského autora Zadie Smithové. Hlavním cílem práce je podrobně prozkoumat příklady postav ve zmíněných románech, které jsou přistěhovalci první a druhé generace, a zjistit, jak vyjednávají a vytvářejí své formace identity. Nejčinnějším teoretickým rámcem pro současný výzkum je hybridní teorie identity vytvořená Homim Bhabahou. První teoretická část práce se pokouší vysvětlit teoretický rámec tak, aby ten pojem byl pak aplikován na literární příklady z románů, které jsou popsány v následujících dvou kapitolách práce. Následující analýza literárních postav odhalila, že formace identity jsou primárně konstruovány vyjednáváním a hybridizací, protože přistěhovalecké identity jsou hybridy kultur jejich předků. Předposlední kapitola se dále věnuje myšlenkám nadnárodního kosmopolitanismu, které jsou zmíněny ve druhém románu, a které se zdají být možným a žádoucím výsledkem procesů hybridizace, přičemž zkoumá i meze této teorie.

Keywords

negotiation, hybridity, black British writing, identity, Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, *Swing Time*

Klíčová slova

negociace, hybridita, britská černošská literatura, identita, Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, *Swing Time*