The Representation of Cultural Liminality in Second Generation Migrants in Zadie Smith’s White Teeth and On Beauty

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Abstract

Multiculturalism has become one of the key concepts in English studies in recent years. Multiculturalism is closely related to discourses or national or cultural identity. The majority is morally obliged to ensure that minorities are neither marginalized nor forced to assimilate completely to the dominant culture. The research paper entitled The Representation of Cultural Liminality in Second Generation Migrants in Zadie Smith’s White Teeth and On Beauty draws attention towards matters such as social assimilation of immigrant generations, identity crisis, discrimination, predestination, or racism and pictures how the immigrants are separated from their home and need to battle with the troubles of living in an imploded empire. Zadie Smith as a black author describes black experience, rather than as a mixed race writer depicting a multicultural environment. The main characters of the novels are mostly migrants and the metropolitan experience they get in a stepping stone in their assimilation and so their different responses to the metropolis embody possible responses to the experience of immigration.

Keywords: Immigrants, Multiculturalism, Cosmopolitanism, Hybridity, Assimilation.

Cultural studies have laid a special emphasis upon problems of spatiality and spatial relations in the attempt to trace their influence upon the politics of identity, discussing the relocation of cultural spaces and the redefinition of their inhabiting identities. Postcolonial writings offer a profusion of visions and revisions transforming London into a palimpsest space displaying a sort of vernacular cosmopolitanism created by migrants. Since the 1970’s, there has been expanding worry with the effect of Colonialism and Post Colonialism on British characters and Culture and the impact that the previous British Empire actually has on individuals in the previous settlements and in Britain today. The research topic The Representation of Cultural Liminality in Second Generation Migrants in Zadie Smith’s White Teeth and On Beauty chosen as Zadie Smith is considered to be one of the most influential authors who bring attention to the struggle of identity that people with ethnic origin have to face while attempting to assimilate into society.

The novel White Teeth is an extensive encounter of three families the Joneses, the Iqbals and the Chalfens and two ages, a variety of different characters and stories. The novel portrays the difficulties and struggles undergone by children of first generation immigrants who come from a multicultural background. Zadie Smith narrates the switches between the characters and bobs backward and forward exactly as expected, giving the impression of a mosaic. She takes us to all places through this novel as we can spot Jamaica, Bengal, India and the Balkans altogether. The novel opens with the thwarted suicide attempt of Archie Jones, a World War II veteran whose Italian wife
has deserted their loveless marriage. It swerves into his rebirth as the husband of Jamaica teenager and the best friend of a Bengali Muslim from Bangladesh, whom he had known in the war. Both men have distinguished careers. Archie Jones designs folds in a paper printing factory and Samad Iqbal, obsessed by his great grandfather's dubious historical importance, is a waiter in a curry home and both become parents.

*White Teeth* takes place primarily in North London neighbourhoods with the mixture of race religion, class and second generation immigrant sufferings. While focusing primarily on the tensions between two generations in each of these three families, It is one generation born in the first half of the twentieth century and one born in its latter half. To some extent the novel also explores the histories of each family. While the legacy of Samad Iqbal’s great-grandfather Mangal Pande, rumored to be the man who began the Indian Mutiny, is a regular topic of conversation, it is the neatness of the Chalfen family tree that prompts Irie Jones to attempt to reconstruct her own rather more complex and chaotic ancestry.

Fathered either by Magid or Millat Iqbal as neither the novel’s characters nor its reader will ever know which, the child which Smith suggests will be a girl but leaves nameless is to have white British (Archie), black Caribbean (Clara) and Bengali (the Iqbals) heritage. It is to be raised, apparently, by Irie and Joshua Chalfen, and it is perhaps ironic that, not being Joshua’s biological child, the baby somewhat disrupts the neat Chalfen family tree that Marcus is so fond of showing off.

It is Irie's child, at that point, that associates the families as well as, for all the pressures between them, guarantees their proceeded with connectedness in the future. Moreover, to be born in London at the very dawn of the new millennium, the child represents a new, twenty-first-century, decidedly multicultural generation of Britishness the child represents a happy, familial convergence of both working-class and upper-middle-class white Britishness as represented by Archie and the Chalfens, respectively with Britain’s two largest immigrant populations of the twentieth century black Caribbean and South Asian. Moreover, the novel goes to great lengths to familiarise the child’s heritage. As the lives of the Joneses, Iqbals and, later, the Chalfens intersect, we repeatedly find members of each family in the households of the others.

Archie is endeavoursing to murder himself since his wife Ophelia, a violet-peered toward Italian with a swoon moustache, had as of late separated from him. The two have been unhappily married for 30 years, and it seems that Archie quickly drove Ophelia to madness somewhere near the beginning of this period. Archie’s decision to kill himself is made, as most of Archie’s decisions are, with a coin toss. It is made not in the throes of anguish or loneliness but while he is surrounded by a large, extended family of caricatures; seems to correspond to his sense of the world as predictability, familiarly tedious. Samad and Alsana whose relations are rather strained, given that Alsana has decided to never again answer any of her husband’s questions with a simple yes or no argue over whether or not they need to evacuate the house. When Samad finally convinces his wife that doing so would be wise, they go to the Joneses for shelter, where the members of both families argue variously about topics such as religion, history and the merits of reinforced supporting walls.

Racism does surface in *White Teeth*; it is not in the form of angry young white men but rather calm, elderly white man. As part of their school’s celebration of Harvest Festival, the young Irie, Millat and Magid are enlisted in a project of helping the community; assigned to Mr J. P. Hamilton of Kensal Rise, they are to bring him charitable donations of various largely canned foodstuffs. Initially frightened by them and anxious that they might attempt to rob him, Hamilton eventually invites them into the town house gleeom of his hall, and leads them to his living room, where he and the children have tea.
Disappointedly professing that he is unable to eat the vast majority of the items that the children have brought him because of his false teeth, Hamilton begins to talk about teeth more generally and about his being in the Congo during the Second World War, where he spotted the nigger by the whiteness of his teeth. When Millat announces that his father Samad was also in the war and that he also fought for England, Hamilton rejects this out of hand, stating authoritatively that there were certainly no wags, no Pakistanis. Hamilton’s comments cause Irie to start crying quietly, and the three visitors leave hastily.

A long way from really assuming the issue of angry young white men and racist violence, White Teeth depicts racism in contemporary London as an agitating yet recognizable erroneous date that is progressively subsiding into small, domestic spaces as time passes by, instead of as something determined and undermining.

Millat has often experienced racist abuse, and yet these experiences are never actually portrayed. When Irie, Millat and Josh Chalfen are caught in possession of marijuana in school, their headmaster penalises them by forcing them to form a bi-weekly study group based at the Chalfen residence. Citing the fact that Marcus and Joyce Chalfen are, respectively, an eminent scientist and a horticulturist, he talks excitedly about the benefits that being around them might have for the disadvantaged Irie and Millat.

Irie is immediately fascinated by the Chalfens who seem to be middle-class, good humored, intellectual and rationalistic. Fascinated too by Marcus’s research, Irie goes on to spend as much time in the Chalfen household as possible in order to escape her own; she even starts working evenings there, initially helping Marcus with some filing and eventually becoming his secretary and publicist.

While Irie’s own family is by all accounts characterized by unrest and mindlessness, the Chalfens appear to offer soundness and security and she ends up there hastily to be very much desperate needing for them. Like Irie, Millat comes to spend rather a lot of time at the Chalfen house, albeit under rather different circumstances than Irie; while she caters for Marcus’s secretarial needs, he caters for and, in turn, brazenly exploits Joyce’s emotional needs. An isolated, middle-aged woman with strong mothering instincts, Joyce finds herself not only bored but also increasingly unneeded by her husband and children, and becomes obsessed with Millat as soon as he enters her home. Happy to exploit her suspicions about the primitivity of Islamic families, Millat manages to convince her that his own household is a place of broken relationships and impossibly backward beliefs, and manipulates her into providing him with as much food, shelter and money as he desires.

Irie Jones, with her complex racial foundation (and considerably more so her unborn kid) turns out to be, consequently, representative of this new sort of nationality, one that the text presents as the arising model for the contemporary nation. White Teeth shows how postcolonial history keeps on influencing people’s activities in the present and the impact it actually has in the development of individual characters. This can be seen especially in the version aqueduct of Magid and Millat, Samad’s twin children. The two characters are unmistakably multiplied in their appearance, but both are dependent upon totally different cultural encounters. Magid is directed off to Bangladesh by Samad trying to prevent him from being sullied by Western thoughts; Millat keeps on living with Samad and Alsana in Britain. Notwithstanding, an unexpected social reversal happens that baffles Samad’s aspirations for his sons. Magid gets back from Bangladesh not, as Samad wished, reconnected with his Eastern roots, but pervaded with the philosophies of nineteenth-century British colonialism demonstrated by his radicalism, logical logic, and affectability to perspectives to art and culture dependent on Western values.
The novel is set primarily in Willesden, North London, an area once a part of the old colonial community and but holding elements of the ordinary and consistently. It is this mix of the provincial and the cosmopolitan that reflects the way by far most carry on with their lives in multicultural Britain, that is occupied with everyday encounters of the places they occupy but with authentic and social connections with areas far and wide occupied with everyday encounters of the places they possess however with historical and social connections with around the world.

Smith portrays the twins regarding Zeno's mystery: a traditional philosophical problem. This paradox identifies with the circumstance in which an arrow in flight apparently is moving throughout some undefined time frame, but at any single moment of time it very well may be supposed to be unmoving. This paradox is utilized figuratively to speak to the stalemate among Magid and Millat, both of whom give off an impression of being pushing ahead separately on their own directions but are secured in balance by their unflinching enmity towards one another. Multiculturalism arises here, not as a relief for the issues of Britain's relationship with its own colonial past, anyway as an eliminating of the shows of expansionism that keep impacting on people in the present. Smith accomplishes this by stopping the worldly direction now by putting all occasions in the prompt present. This serves to integrate in this one experience the traditions of expansionism and the unending experience between two subjects – one opposing, the other being appropriated by imperialism both of whom are compelled to impart through a meta-language that keeps on being constrained colonial discourse.

Magid and Millat's settled in positions held to a stalemate, however this is not the deserted circumstance on multiculturalism that the text makes open. One of the significant points to be noted here is of Irie’s unborn child, which emerges at the end of novel. This incident seems to be a best example for the positive, looking forward model multiculturalism in Britain. Irie in an angry wave sleeps with both Magid and Millat and being twins which one of them is the father of the unborn child she is bearing can never be perceived. The completion of history is seen here as the mistake of people to see the legitimacy of the nullifying position: any impression of progress past the present is thusly unthinkable. This represents a significant evasion of the weight of the past, and symbolizes an escape from the ideological determinism of colonial genealogy.

In the attempt to determine a fixed identity, some of Smith’s characters tend to desperately cling to those genealogical, historical and cultural roots they have inherited and which are thought to predetermine their present; some others try to escape the influence of inherited roots by rejecting and substituting them. Characters such as Samad attempt to control and determine identity by clinging to their ancestry and historical roots, some others, such as Irie, by rejecting their genealogical and racial heritage, yet others, such as Samad, Millat, Magid, by either embracing or refusing their cultural heritage and, finally, still others, such as Marcus and Joyce Chalfen, by trying to scientifically or socially determine life.

With its invocation of the idea of original trauma, the text conceptualizes migration as an experience that constitutes a fundamental shattering of identity and threat to selfhood. This sense the traumatic permeates the novels and the characters experiences is the effect of their original trauma of not belonging and torn between conflicting origins and their respective demands and impulses. Magid, Millat and Irie seem to juxtapose two fundamentally distinct worlds, the seemingly carefree atmosphere of a London school playground and the harshness that makes up the typical fate of the most diverse immigrants. This is a far cry from fashionable conceptualizations of hybrid multicultural identities.
The traumatic nature of the experience of migration lies in the fundamental threat to identity and selfhood it entails, both literally and metaphorically conveys the novels more significant and potentially far more disturbing and diminishing the character credibility. Samad is in an arranged marriage and struggles with secular desires. Archie and Clara’s daughter struggle with body image and self-work. Samad’s twins struggle to move into religious and political positions that differ from his attempts to direct them. The children are subsequently intensive Londoners, in spite of just one of the parents being English by birth. To this ethnic stew Smith also adds the Jewish and Catholic Chalfens to make it a perfect multicultural example.

*On Beauty* brings the presence of the past in everyday lives centres on race relations in the US and the ways they permeate both personal histories and wider societal issues. As in American culture everywhere, the inheritance of subjugation is fundamental, however regularly quieted or underground, nearness for a considerable lot of the books characters and their relational relations at the core of the story is the interracial Besley family. Howard is a white Englishman of working class London origins, while Kiki is an African American lady whose family hails from Florida. Their home depicted right in the beginning in the novel, inspires in its subtleties the historical backdrop of subjugation and the common war and represents the continuous break inside the country all in all and was built in 1856, during the nation's most disruptive recorded moment and one that despite everything shapes its race relations.

As light from above refracts through the glass it bathes the top of the stairs in a many-hued pattern. It is the Besley family convention to try not to venture into this multi-shaded light, which represents the nation's evasion of perceiving its history and diversity. In the novel the family display of photos along the middle flight of stairs contains pictures of Kiki’s maternal family line: a house-slave, a servant and a medical caretaker. The last acquired the house from a specialist with whom she had worked, along these lines empowering the family to move into the white middle class.

The Besley’s house is divided because of the strained relations at home, despite the real affection that binds the parents and their three children Jerome, Zora and Livi while every one of the children can be viewed as building up an alternate ideological situation over the span of the novel-religious, scholarly, liberal and a politicized diasporic personality individually. The frayed relations in the Besley house centre on the parents, as Kiki has discovered a condom in Howard’s pocket while he claims to have a one night stand at a conference, for which she is beginning to forgive him. But, the marriage is additionally shaken by Kiki's resulting acknowledgement that Howard has aggravated his adultery with a deceit jumbling the length of the issue and the way that it was their friend, just as his colleague, Claire Malcom. Kiki learns this at the anniversary party she and Howard toss for their thirtieth wedding celebration.

Kiki lasts her hurt at Howard’s betrayal in specifically racialized terms highlighting white perceptions of black people in Wellington. For example when Kiki rubs into Claire around and finds up head from side to side in a way she comprehended white people appreciated, Also Kiki’s child Livi, knows that white, and now and again dark individuals can see a young black man only as an illicit. In addition to that Zora sarcastically assures that someone who is passing by the house and staring at her brother Levi that he in fact lives there and is not about to break in. Their setting of dubious having a place in generally white Wellington and in a nation with a long history of racial domination develops the hurt Kiki encounters when she understands that Howard has betrayed her with Claire. Kiki feels that she is being ludicrous, with Howard failing to see that blow of Kiki not
only as his wife, but specifically as a black woman in a white dominated society. Howard fails to see much more than the face that Kiki has gained weight as she has aged. Howard is muddled about what has turned out badly in his marriage, or what has driven him to have a relationship with Claire, even as he encounters the inevitability of individual history during a good natured, however grievous visit that he makes to his repelled father, Harry in Cricklewood. It is outlandish for Howard to remove himself from the examples of childhood and his sentiments of disgrace at his working class origins, similarly as it is incomprehensible for his father not to voice racist thoughts, despite the fact that he has a certified affection for his mixed race grandchildren.

Carl, who is gradually seduced by life at Wellington college, whose previous educational experiences make him leery to such institutions when he first meets the Besley’s he refers to himself as not an educated brother as the way he has spoken word is marginalized by educational institutions as it is not considered legitimate. While Zora, who has been brought up in an academic household comfortable on campus and focused on her future, for Carl things were not so good. The problems that are keeping him back are a poor and unequal school system which under-educates back youngsters and in a suspicion that often turns them away from education, Carl was previously been hurt in an educational system in which his teachers started worrying that he was going to mug or rape them. In high school he had sexual relations with one of his teachers, which turned into a bad scene and marked the beginning of things going always wrong especially with classrooms.

On Beauty also alludes to other aspects of the so-called culture wars that were characterized as wars over competing values about homosexuality, religious expression. The religious Monty accepts that uniformity was a myth and multiculturalism a foolish dream; and that minority groups over and over again requested equivalent rights they haven't acquired. Point of fact, as Howard's girl Zora scornfully conveys Monty's circumstance as obviously everybody gets phenomenal treatment-blacks, gays, dissident’s women everyone aside from helpless white males. Yet while On Beauty alludes to these diverse aspects of the culture wars. It focuses on affirmative action and the virulent backlash against such legislation in the academic sector where race or ethnicity may be used as one of several criteria to select candidates for university admissions.

In both the novels Smith focuses on a specific religious community like the Muslim and Jewish Diaspora. However different experiences of the first and second generations remain in the background and the main plot firmly focuses on the immigrant’s children. Smith's writing marks a point of departure from the traditional portrayal of an immigrant population that is seen as despondently stranded between two cultures. Through hybrid her characters inhabit a comfortable zone of cultural self-fashioning. Her multicultural vision navigates the mores of ethnic and social presence in an upbeat celebration of combination and hybridity. Though racially heterogeneous, the characters she creates are for the most part integrated into the metropolis, which provides a space on which to draft the blueprints for their various identities.

In Smith’s White Teeth, for example, we find a cast of characters gathered together in the city of London as a consequence of imperialism, in a development that has come to be known as reverse colonization. Hortense Bowden, an aggressive Jehovah’s Witness impatiently awaiting the end of the world is the product of a union between a West Indian mother and a British officer. Muslim waiter Samad Iqbal proudly and also repeatedly traces a genealogy back to a rebellions ancestor in the Indian Mutiny of 1857 Characters like Samad cling to their national culture in an effort to maintain a coherent sense of self. Growing up in a multi-ethnic suburb, they confidentially negotiate the various strands of cultural inheritance and adolescent trauma.
On Beauty is also actively concerned with the process of navigating and constructing identities from sources that are often regarded as incompatible or contradictory. In Smith’s novels identity is as much about forging links in the present as it is about stalking a claim on the past. On Beauty highlights that identity is as much a matter of consciousness positioning as of simply being. Also it focuses on the pain and Joy inherent in human relationships and the role of art in a changing world. Smith’s stated relation to the source-text indicates the multifarious webs of meaning and relations that pattern the plot, relationships and identities of characters from both.

The novels White Teeth and On Beauty examines a family within a spatial setting in which one of the partners is an outsider to that particular location and the other partner is intrinsic to it. The subject of dissatisfaction with the West is detectable all through White Teeth; the characters express their aching for the homeland, however can't return there, Irie's quest for an identity is a long procedure brimming with turns and impasses. While in transit to understanding herself she searches for good examples in different ways: the perfect beauty, artistic pictures, the normal white Britishness, lastly history her own underlying roots. Zadie Smith's On Beauty happens in a white savvy town in the United States which bears the significance of American history in the nation's contemporary culture. It scrutinizes the crumbling of the mixed race marriage of Kiki and Howard Belsey, for both of whom the tremendous issue is whether so many years of love and understanding would be adequate for the couples to hold together their marriage even after thirty years after Howard's repeated infidelity. In both novels, the main characters are in transition from early childhood to young adulthood either directly and chronologically in the case of Magid, Millat and Irie or in patches of memories.

Both the novels are considered to be the articulation of identity and that the culture contributes a key aspect to the protagonist's individual position. The principal characters of Zadie Smith’s books find themselves in such circumstances. In both novels, one of the partners is an actual foreigner and one of the partners is the bearer of secret. To the first generation of immigrants the absorption of their children appears to be perilous and stressing; in their eyes the children are being undermined by British lifestyle and are relinquishing their customs. The culture turns into an unfavourable obstruction to self-comprehension. Particularly when the obsession and passionate separation is made, come to rule relational connections summoning a bigger feeling of aggression. The novels engage with issues of national identity and belonging in a multicultural frame and also familiarize parameters of nation, place and belonging. Undeniably the novel's complex relationships and tightly interwoven connections among a set of London families of Caribbean, Bengali, English and Jewish British origins takes cultural heterogeneity to its extreme. In the case of immigrant experience trauma lies in the condition of being torn between cultures, creating a hybrid identity that is impossible to fully explain, categorize and untangle.

Works Cited

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