Journal of Nusantara Studies 2025, Vol 10(1) 94-113
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin
ISSN 0127-9386 (Online)
http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol10iss1pp94-113

HYBRIDITY, IDENTITY, AND DIASPORA IN ZADIE SMITH'S *WHITE TEETH*

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Received: 30.11.2024 Accepted: 10.02.2025

ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: This study examines how hybridity, identity, and diaspora intersect within immigrant experiences, particularly among South Asian diasporic communities in Britain, as depicted in *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith. Situated within a sociocultural framework, the research explores how migration and multiculturalism influence individual identity formation. The study highlights how immigrants negotiate belonging in a globalized yet structurally exclusionary society by analysing the psychological, social, and political dimensions of diasporic identity.

Methodology: This study employed close reading as its primary method, analyzing the text through the lens of postcolonial theory. By examining key passages and tracing character arcs, the analysis explored how the novel constructs cultural hybridity, identity tensions, and the evolving concept of home. The study systematically applied theoretical concepts to multiple textual moments, ensuring a comprehensive and theoretically grounded interpretation of postcolonial identity in the novel.

Findings: The analysis reveals that hybridity and diasporic displacement contribute to a fragmented yet evolving sense of identity among immigrant characters. The novel illustrates that cultural integration is neither linear nor fully attainable; instead, it is marked by negotiation, resistance, and redefinition. While some characters embrace hybridity as an empowering construct, others experience cultural dissonance and psychological turmoil, reflecting broader sociological debates on assimilation and cultural retention.

Contributions: This study contributes to social science discourses on migration and identity by demonstrating how literature serves as a critical site for understanding the lived experiences of diasporic individuals. It advances discussions on globalization's impact on identity politics, highlighting the intersection of historical colonial legacies and contemporary multicultural tensions.

Keywords: Identity, Hybridity, Diaspora, Migration, Multiculturalism, Postcolonial Studies, Social Integration

Cite as: Güven, F., & Aldemir, N. (2025). Hybridity, identity, and diaspora in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. *Journal of Nusantara Studies, 10*(1), 94-113. http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol10iss1pp94-113

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study examines the complex interplay between cultural and social norms as depicted in Smith's (2000) *White Teeth*, focusing on how characters from diverse backgrounds navigate their identities within the framework of evolving political and social climates. The novel offers a nuanced portrayal of immigrants' challenges and struggles to construct a cohesive identity in an increasingly globalized world. *White Teeth* has been selected for its profound exploration of identity formation through the intersections of family dynamics, historical legacies, and socio-political influences. The research investigates how Smith employs narrative techniques to articulate the internal conflicts and dilemmas of her characters while simultaneously shedding light on broader societal and political issues.

By analysing Smith's narrative construction and character development, this study highlights the pervasive impact of social and political forces on diasporic individuals' identities and psychological traumas. It argues that the novel transcends a mere depiction of its protagonists' experiences, instead serving as a site of memory and reflection on unresolved traumas. Through its engagement with colonial history and the consequences of cultural displacement, *White Teeth* contributes to the broader discourse on identity and belonging within diasporic communities. Examining the characters' navigating multicultural environments amidst personal and collective struggles provides insight into the sociocultural factors shaping diasporic identities. Furthermore, this study highlights the continued relevance of postcolonial literature in illuminating the intricate processes of identity formation within the context of globalization and migration.

The effects of colonialism on identity are evident in the intergenerational transmission of internalized discrimination and the fragmentation of self-perception. The study explores how evolving identities influence the trajectory of postcolonial societies, fostering resilience while confronting historical legacies (Memmi, 1965). The process of recovering from colonialism necessitates a reconnection with indigenous culture and language, alongside addressing the socioeconomic structures embedded in colonial systems. Literature and other cultural expressions are pivotal in this process, providing a medium for articulating and processing trauma. These cultural manifestations facilitate healing and contribute to the construction of an inclusive postcolonial identity that acknowledges the past while envisioning a progressive future (Spivak, 2023). *White Teeth* exemplifies postcolonial literature by intricately weaving trauma into its narrative, reflecting the enduring scars of colonization.

Bhabha's (1994) concept of Hybridity underscores the potential for emerging multicultural identities, a theme that permeates *White Teeth*. The novel's characters exist within fluid cultural boundaries, fostering hybrid identities that challenge rigid national or ethnic categorizations. This study situates Smith's (2000) work within the broader discourse of postcolonial studies, demonstrating how diasporic identities are shaped through negotiation, adaptation, and resistance. The novel captures the struggles of postcolonial subjects and highlights their agency in reclaiming and reinterpreting their histories. Despite formal decolonization, postcolonial societies continue to grapple with the lasting impacts of colonization—manifested through forced migration, racism, dispossession, violence, and cultural displacement. Given these enduring repercussions, the quest for identity remains a fundamental concern for postcolonial individuals.

Postcolonial theory offers a critical framework for examining colonialism's psychological, political, and cultural ramifications. Literature in this field frequently explores identity formation within contexts marked by historical disruption, cultural hybridity, and resistance to dominant narratives. Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space" emphasizes the transitional and fluid nature of diasporic identity, necessitating a reconciliation of cultural heritage with the demands of the host country. Similarly, Said’s (2005) concept of the "other" highlights the persistent marginalization of diasporic communities as a consequence of colonial histories. This theoretical lens is essential for analyzing the themes of migration, exclusion, and belonging in *White Teeth*.

Diasporic literature, a significant subset of postcolonial literature, focuses on the lived experiences of individuals and communities who have migrated from their native lands. These

narratives often explore the psychological and emotional dimensions of migration, addressing themes such as cultural dislocation, generational conflict, and racial discrimination. In *White Teeth*, the experiences of South Asian immigrants in Britain provide a critical lens through which these themes are examined. However, despite the novel's rich thematic content, unresolved issues persist, necessitating further exploration of identity, belonging, and cultural negotiation in an era of increasing geopolitical tensions. In light of contemporary global migration crises, the persistence of racism and xenophobia, and the resurgence of nationalist ideologies, the study of identity and belonging remains crucial. *White Teeth* offers a compelling exploration of these concerns, illuminating the intricacies of diasporic existence in a rapidly transforming world. The novel's protagonists, originating from homelands that have experienced colonial rule, confront the complexities of diaspora as they migrate to the very Western nations that once colonized them. This study thus seeks to investigate whether these characters successfully navigate the challenges of diasporic identity formation or remain entangled in the unresolved legacies of their colonial pasts. The study attempts to answer the following questions:

i) How does *White Teeth* portray cultural hybridity through the protagonists' experiences of migration and assimilation?
ii) How are the tensions of hybrid identity resolved?
iii) How does the concept of "home" evolve for the immigrant characters in *White Teeth*?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 A Review of Relevant Studies on *White Teeth*

Smith's (2000) *White Teeth* has been the subject of extensive academic inquiry, particularly in postcolonial and migration studies. Recent scholarship has explored its nuanced depiction of multiculturalism, hybrid identities, and diasporic struggles within Britain's changing socio-political landscape. This section reviews significant studies that contribute to understanding these themes and how they inform the novel's broader literary and social implications.

Neupane (2024) applies multiculturalist theories from Barker (2002) and Kymlicka (2006) to argue that *White Teeth* promotes a vision of cultural plurality and mutual respect. The study emphasizes the novel's portrayal of accommodation and diversity as fundamental to modern multicultural societies. Similarly, Lone (2024) provides a comparative analysis of

Smith's *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*, illustrating how both novels use satire and humor to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural conflicts and assimilation pressures.

Other scholars have focused on the novel's linguistic and narrative strategies. Yang (2020) analyzes power dynamics in conversations between male and female characters and among women of color, demonstrating how language both reinforces and subverts structures of dominance. This study contributes to understanding how marginalized groups use linguistic negotiation as a form of resistance within diasporic literature.

Chaturvedi and Dhand (2024) examine *White Teeth* through the lens of immigrant identity formation. Their analysis highlights how first-generation immigrants and their descendants navigate cultural hybridity while facing systemic disparities. Their findings align with Thasleema and Khaan's (2023) research on second-generation immigrants, which identifies identity crises, alienation, and cultural duality as recurring themes in diasporic experiences.

Building upon postcolonial frameworks, Güneş (2024) positions *White Teeth* as a microcosm of contemporary London, where diverse ethnic groups interact and challenge traditional notions of British identity. By drawing on Said's (2005) and Bhabha (1994) works, this study elucidates how Smith's novel deconstructs rigid ethnic boundaries and fosters a more fluid conception of identity. Similarly, Sakız (2023) explores the 'diaspora space' in *White Teeth*, arguing that its narrative structures reflect the liminality of diasporic experiences and the ongoing process of identity negotiation.

Niraula (2024) extends this discussion by comparing *White Teeth* with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, focusing on generational differences in identity formation and acculturation. His study underscores how migration narratives often juxtapose first- and second-generation experiences to highlight tensions between tradition and adaptation. In a related vein, Iqbal et al. (2023) adopt a transcultural perspective, investigating cosmopolitanism in *White Teeth*. Their study underscores how Smith's characters blend multiple cultural influences to forge hybrid identities, reflecting the complexities of postcolonial urban life. Alanazi (2023) furthers this argument by examining the novel's critique of fixed national and racial identities, proposing that *White Teeth* presents a post-racial, post-national vision of identity construction.

Morais (2014) provide foundational insights into the role of hybridity in *White Teeth*, emphasizing how the novel portrays cultural transactions and the struggles of first- and second-generation immigrants in a multicultural society. Their analyses demonstrate that *White*

Teeth problematizes the notion of a singular cultural identity, instead portraying identity as an evolving, negotiated process.

The studies reviewed above illustrate the continued relevance of *White Teeth* in contemporary postcolonial and migration discourses. By engaging with themes of hybridity, multiculturalism, and identity politics, the novel remains a crucial literary work for understanding the lived realities of diasporic individuals in Britain. However, gaps remain—particularly concerning the psychological dimensions of diasporic identity and the historical contexts that inform these struggles. This study directly addresses these gaps by exploring how *White Teeth* not only represents identity crises but also the psychological and emotional dimensions of diasporic experiences. This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how hybrid identities are negotiated and sustained in postcolonial Britain by situating these themes within broader historical and socio-political frameworks. Furthermore, it extends the discussion of cultural integration by considering how diasporic individuals psychologically reconcile tensions between their heritage and host society. Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of *White Teeth* and its broader implications for postcolonial literature and cultural studies.

2.2 Postcolonial Theory: Identity, Hybridity, and Diaspora

Postcolonial theory emerged in the mid-20th century, coinciding with the independence movements of many Asian and African nations from European colonial powers. Foundational theorists like Fanon, Said, and Bhabha have critically examined the relationships between colonizers and the colonized, highlighting colonial domination's psychological, cultural, and political ramifications.

Fanon (2004) focused on the psychological consequences of colonization, emphasizing dependency and inferiority complexes that affect the colonized. He argued that true liberation and self-identity stem from mental and cultural autonomy. Said (2005) analyzed how the West constructed and perpetuated stereotypes about the East, reinforcing Western dominance through literature and discourse. Bhabha (1994) introduced the concept of *Hybridity*, positing that colonial and postcolonial cultures are not binary but exist within a complex interaction space that generates new, hybrid identities.

Postcolonialism provides a critical framework for understanding how colonial histories continue to shape societies and cultural identities. This theoretical approach examines how marginalized groups resist, negotiate, and reinterpret power structures imposed by colonial

regimes. Emerging in the late 20th century, postcolonial studies interrogate the legacies of oppression, economic exploitation, and cultural manipulation, addressing how these issues persist within contemporary global dynamics.

A key concept in postcolonial theory is othering, which explores how colonial subjects are depicted and how these portrayals influence their self-perception and societal roles. Said's (2005) work on Orientalism critiques the West's construction of the "Other" and how these depictions serve colonial interests. Fanon's (2004) studies delve into the psychological trauma endured by colonized peoples, arguing for the necessity of decolonizing the mind as a form of resistance.

Postcolonial theory intersects with other analytical frameworks, such as poststructuralism and feminist theory, further enriching its critical scope. These perspectives illuminate postcolonial societies' cultural, literary, and historical dimensions, offering a nuanced understanding of how colonial legacies shape identity. As Loomba (2002) notes, postcolonial studies critically examine how individuals within colonial societies employ subtle forms of resistance—ranging from satire and humor to linguistic and cultural reclamation—to challenge dominant colonial ideologies.

Bhabha's (1994) theoretical contributions, particularly his Hybridity and the Third Space concepts, remain central to postcolonial discourse. Mimicry, as described by Bhabha (1994), refers to the act of colonised subjects imitating their colonisers' language, behaviors, and customs, often with subversive intent. He conceptualises this imitation as a tool of compliance and resistance, creating an ambivalence that unsettles colonial authority. Third Space represents a liminal zone where cultural identities interact, evolve, and redefine themselves beyond rigid national, ethnic, or colonial boundaries. This Space is characterised by ambiguity and transformation, where traditional power structures are challenged, and new identities emerge. He posits that identity is not fixed but is continuously shaped by historical, social, and political interactions, making Hybridity an essential element of postcolonial identity formation.

The concept of Hybridity is particularly relevant in the context of globalisation, migration, and cultural exchange. Bhabha (1994) argues that hybrid identities disrupt colonial power by blending elements from diverse cultural backgrounds, thereby challenging the rigid binary of coloniser and colonised. This dynamic is especially evident in *White Teeth*, where characters navigate fluid cultural boundaries, embodying the complexities of hybrid identities in a postcolonial world.

Postcolonial theory provides invaluable insights into contemporary issues of migration, globalization, and cultural negotiation by interrogating colonial authority and reinterpreting identity beyond essentialist frameworks. This study will further explore how *White Teeth* exemplifies these postcolonial themes, mainly through the lens of Bhabha's (1994) notions of Hybridity and the Third Space.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes close reading, a core method in literary analysis, to explore the portrayal of cultural hybridity, the complexities of hybrid identity, and the shifting notion of home in Smith's (2000) *White Teeth*. Close reading involves an in-depth interpretative examination of the text, concentrating on elements such as language, narrative structure, character development, and thematic patterns, all while integrating postcolonial theory. Key works by Bhabha (1994), Said (2005), Fanon (2004), and Brah (1996) provide the theoretical grounding for unpacking the novel's critique and reconfiguration of postcolonial identities.

This methodology is well-suited to addressing the research questions, as it emphasizes a text-centered, theoretically informed perspective on understanding identity, migration, and belonging within *White Teeth*. In contrast to empirical methods that depend on external data, literary analysis draws meaning directly from the text, interpreted through established theoretical frameworks. By investigating the novel's language and the construction of identity conflicts, this study aims to illuminate how Smith (2000) engages with postcolonial discourse to portray hybrid identities.

To tackle the first research question—how *White Teeth* illustrates cultural hybridity through migration and assimilation—the study identifies key passages where characters navigate identity negotiation, cultural tensions, or assimilation efforts. It focuses on how various generations of immigrants interact with British society, articulate their identities, and experience shifts in cultural affiliation over time. Bhabha's (1994) theory of the Third Space is applied to moments where characters occupy in-between spaces, not fully belonging to either culture. For instance, the struggles of Irie Jones exemplify the conflicts faced by second-generation immigrants as they navigate their hybrid identity. The divergent paths of Magid and Millat Iqbal—one embracing Western rationalism and the other resisting assimilation through religious fundamentalism—further reflect Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and ambivalence. The analysis ensures that hybridity is not examined in isolation, but rather as a continuous concern interwoven throughout the text.

The second research question—how the tensions of hybrid identity are addressed—hinges on a close reading of character development and their evolving relationships with cultural identity. The study investigates how first-generation and second-generation immigrants resolve their identity struggles differently, with some adhering to fixed notions of heritage while others welcome fluidity. For example, Samad Iqbal's ongoing battle to preserve his Bengali identity is analyzed across several passages, revealing that his fear of cultural erosion leads to greater fragmentation of self. Bhabha's (1994) notion of mimicry is employed to show that Magid's Westernization is not merely an assimilation process, but a nuanced reproduction of dominant culture marked by difference. In addition, Irie's choice to define her identity outside rigid racial and cultural categories is discussed through Spivak's (1990) feminist postcolonial lens, emphasizing how hybrid identities can represent sites of empowerment rather than instability. This examination spans the novel's treatment of identity resolution, fostering a comprehensive dialogue on whether hybrid tensions achieve genuine reconciliation.

The third research question—how the notion of "home" transforms for immigrant characters—is explored through passages that depict the evolving meanings of home across generations and cultural contexts. The study employs Brah's (1996) theory of diaspora space to assess various character experiences, highlighting how home transcends mere geography to become a psychological and cultural construct shaped by migration. Samad's nostalgic yearning for Bangladesh is highlighted in multiple sections, illustrating the contrast between his idealized vision of home and his lived experiences in Britain. Conversely, Clara Bowden's disconnection from her Jamaican roots is analyzed to demonstrate how some characters reject nostalgia, defining home by their current realities. Moreover, the study examines how second-generation characters like Irie, Magid, and Millat conceptualize home distinctively from their parents, suggesting that the novel portrays home as a dynamic and evolving concept rather than a static point of return.

By applying postcolonial theory to a broad range of textual moments, this study ensures a thorough engagement with *White Teeth* as a cohesive work, rather than focusing on isolated passages. This approach enables a systematic analysis of recurring motifs, revealing how Smith (2000) constructs identity as an ongoing negotiation shaped by migration, cultural hybridity, and historical contexts. Through meticulous textual analysis, the study seeks to offer a deeper understanding of these complex interactions.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Cultural Hybridity: Migration and Assimilation

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* intricately explores themes of cultural hybridity, migration, and assimilation through the experiences of its diverse characters. Smith presents a multifaceted portrayal of how cultural identities are negotiated and transformed within a diasporic context by focusing on the lives of first- and second-generation immigrants in Britain. The novel's protagonists, particularly Irie Jones and the Iqbal twins, Magid and Millat, serve as focal points for understanding the tensions between heritage and assimilation in a multicultural society. Through their struggles with identity, Smith reveals the complexities of cultural hybridity, illustrating how migration fosters conflict and fusion between traditions and modernity.

The concept of hybridity is central to understanding the identity struggles faced by Smith's (2000) characters. Bhabha (1994) defines hybridity as a "third space" where cultural meaning is negotiated, resisting fixed notions of identity. For example, Irie Jones embodies this hybridity as she struggles with acceptance, attempting to conform to Western beauty standards while longing to reconnect with her Jamaican heritage. Her visit to her grandmother, Hortense Bowden, signifies a return to her cultural roots, mirroring that hybridity is a productive site of identity formation. As Smith writes, "Irie wanted to be part of the story, she wanted to know where she came from so she could work out where she was going" (p. 328). This is consistent with Bhabha's (1994) argument that hybrid identities do not conform to essentialist definitions but rather emerge in the interstices of multiple cultures, forging new modes of belonging. Irie's realization that "there was England, and there was Jamaica, and there was a great abyss in between" (p. 327) highlights the disorienting nature of hybrid identity. Her struggle is further emphasized when she reflects, "She wanted to be black and British, but it seemed you couldn't be both, you had to choose" (p. 266). The tension of navigating these identities is further illustrated when Irie notes, "But it was Irie's feeling that a girl shouldn't be made to feel this way about her hair" (p. 272). Her realization that "it wasn't that she wanted straight hair, it was simply that she wanted to be different" (p. 274) further exemplifies her internalized conflict.

Brah's (1996) conceptualization of diaspora also provides a critical lens through which to analyze the characters' experiences in *White Teeth*. Brah (1996) defines diaspora as a space of multiple belongings, where cultural identities are shaped through the interplay of memory, displacement, and belonging. For Irie, the concept of diaspora manifests in her struggle to situate herself within the cultural narratives of both Britain and Jamaica. As she observes,

"Jamaica had always been a mystery to her, something both familiar and unknown" (p. 315). This aligns with Brah's (1996) assertion that diaspora identities are "constructed within and against narratives of the nation" (p. 192), illustrating Irie's search for a sense of belonging beyond rigid national identities.

Bhabha's (1994) concept of ambivalence also plays a role in the identity struggles of the Iqbal twins. Bhabha (1994) extends this argument by showing how colonized subjects internalize contradictions, simultaneously resisting and mimicking dominant cultural influences. In the novel, Magid and Millat reflect this duality. Magid, sent to Bangladesh to be raised with traditional values, paradoxically returns more Westernized, embracing scientific rationalism, whereas Millat, raised in Britain, rejects Western norms and turns to religious fundamentalism. Samad laments: "I send him away to be more like me, and he comes back more like them!" (p. 336). This paradox highlights Bhabha's (1994) notion of mimicry, where colonized individuals both adopt and challenge the authority of the dominant culture, leading to "almost the same, but not quite" (p. 76). Millat's assertion that he is "the face of the future" (p. 351) encapsulates his struggle to reconcile his British upbringing with his cultural heritage. As Millat declares, "We are the pure, the faithful. We are the future" (p. 400), reinforcing his internal conflict between tradition and modernity. His growing disillusionment is further illustrated in his confrontation with his identity when he says, "They wanted to call him English. English!" (p. 387). Millat's resentment is reinforced when he states, "I'm not English. I'm not Bengali. I'm not anything. Just like Archie Jones, a man without a side" (p. 411).

Brah's (1996) notion of diaspora as a lived space of cultural entanglements is also evident in the Iqbal family's experiences. Samad, as a first-generation immigrant, embodies the struggles of diaspora, attempting to hold onto his Bengali identity while feeling increasingly alienated in Britain. His lament, "We are split people. Our children will be born of split people, of half things" (p. 133), echoes Brah's (1996) argument that diasporic identities are "diasporic precisely because they are positioned at the intersections of multiple subject positions" (p. 193). Samad's constant oscillation between pride in his heritage and his desire to assimilate further exemplifies the ongoing negotiation of diasporic identity.

According to Bhabha (1994), hybridization challenges colonial narratives that assert a hierarchical existence of cultural distinctions and boundaries. He argues that such attempts to define and control cultural differences are likely to fail, as the ambiguity of these boundaries is inherently complex and elusive. For Bhabha (1994), hybridity emerges as a concept that undermines traditional Western colonial narratives and the clear demarcation between

colonizer and colonized. In this sense, *White Teeth* delves into the intricate nature of postcolonial immigrant identity within the diverse landscape of multicultural London. The city's rich tapestry comprises numerous nationalities, religions, and cultures. This cultural melting pot fosters interactions and sometimes clashes among its inhabitants. As Smith describes, "This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow, and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment" (p. 272).

Smith captures this tension as Samad exclaims, "We are split people. Our children will be born of split people, of half things" (p. 133). His words illustrate the struggle between assimilation and heritage, a theme that persists in the novel. Irie ultimately acknowledges, "There was no single thread, no single line, no straight road, but a thousand branches" (p. 543), reinforcing the notion that identity is fluid, evolving, and multifaceted. The novel's ultimate message is captured in the closing lines: "What was past was past, and if it wasn't, it should be. The future was yet to come. And with it, the promise of a new story" (p. 542).

4.2 The Resolution of Hybrid Identities

White Teeth is a vibrant exploration of multiculturalism and the tensions of hybrid identities in contemporary Britain. Smith examines the challenges of navigating cultural dualities, where characters struggle to balance ancestral traditions with the demands of their British environment. While these tensions are never entirely resolved, *White Teeth* suggests that identity is an evolving negotiation, shaped by generational conflict, cultural fluidity, a satirical critique of essentialism, interracial relationships, and an embrace of life's inherent chaos.

One of the most prominent ways in which the novel explores hybrid identity is through the generational conflicts that arise between first-generation immigrants and their British-born children. Characters like Samad and Alsana cling to their cultural heritage, fearing that their children will lose their sense of identity in a Western environment. Samad, in particular, is deeply conflicted about his family's integration into British society. His desperate attempt to preserve his Bengali heritage by sending his son Magid back to Bangladesh ironically results in Magid becoming even more Westernized than his twin brother Millat. As Samad laments, "I made a devil's pact... I had tried to civilize the boy, return him to Allah. But he has come back a pukka Englishman" (p. 193). He further agonizes, "You split them up, send one to Bengal, let the other stay. You send them away with their history strapped to their backs, like a little rucksack of rules and commandments" (p. 210). This conflict echoes Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity, which challenges binary understandings of culture, arguing that identity

is always in flux and constructed in an "in-between" space of negotiation. Meanwhile, Alsana struggles with her own cultural expectations, particularly in her relationship with her husband, and is forced to negotiate her identity within the constraints of both British society and traditional gender roles. These tensions highlight the ways in which cultural identity is not static but constantly evolving across generations.

The novel also challenges the notion of rigid identity by embracing cultural fluidity. Characters like Irie Jones, the daughter of a Jamaican mother and an English father, resist the pressure to conform to a singular cultural identity. Irie's journey is self-discovery, where she rejects the binary of being either Jamaican or British and instead embraces a more hybrid identity. She comes to realize, "There was England, and there was Jamaica. And there was Irie, hovering somewhere in between, unable to land" (p. 266). She further acknowledges, "It made sense. History was just a long convoluted story, full of coincidences and quirks, rather than the clean things she had been taught" (p. 312). This reflects Said's (2005) idea that identities are socially and historically constructed rather than innate. Unlike Samad, who sees identity as something that must be preserved in its purest form, Irie accepts her mixed heritage as an asset rather than a burden. Through Irie, Smith suggests that the resolution to hybrid identity is not found in choosing one culture over another, but in embracing a personal identity that incorporates multiple influences.

Samad's belief in a glorified, traditional Bengali heritage is juxtaposed with his own moral failings, demonstrating the contradictions in his attempts to impose strict cultural values. Similarly, the radical Islamic group KEVIN that Millat joins is depicted as comically extreme, revealing the dangers of trying to force a singular identity onto a diverse and complex individual. As Millat himself struggles with his place in British society, he reflects, "He was neither one thing nor the other. This was the story of his life. To Allah he was a Bengali. To Willesden, he was a Paki. To the Jordans, he was a thug. To the media, he was a statistic" (p. 351). This alienation is reinforced when Millat bitterly remarks, "You're never anywhere. You're always caught between" (p. 385). Fanon (2004) describes the alienation and psychological trauma of the colonized subject forced to navigate multiple, often conflicting, cultural expectations. The Chalfens, a white middle-class intellectual family, embody another form of essentialism, believing in genetic superiority and an academic approach to identity that disregards lived experiences. By mocking these rigid perspectives, Smith emphasizes the impossibility of maintaining a "pure" identity in a multicultural world.

Archie Jones and Clara Bowden's marriage symbolizes the blending of cultures and histories. Their daughter, Irie, is a product of this fusion, representing a new generation that does not fit neatly into traditional racial or cultural categories. Irie's decision to have a child without revealing the father's identity further reinforces the idea that identity is self-determined rather than dictated by rigid definitions of race or heritage. As the narrator reflects, "Irie decided to have the child and let history choose the father" (p. 433). This sentiment is echoed earlier in the novel when Irie declares, "I don't want to belong to anyone. But myself" (p. 401). This is consistent with Spivak's (1990) concept of "subalternity," where marginalized voices, particularly women of color, must carve out spaces for self-representation and agency despite dominant cultural narratives that seek to define them.

Smith's portrayal of hybrid identities resonates strongly with contemporary migration studies and global identity politics. In an increasingly interconnected world, migration patterns have led to the formation of transnational communities where individuals negotiate multiple cultural allegiances. According to Bhabha (1994), migration fosters a "third space" where cultural meanings are constantly redefined, much like the experiences of Smith's characters. Thus, identity is not fixed but constructed through historical and social processes, reinforcing Smith's depiction of her characters' struggles.

The challenges faced by first-generation immigrants in *White Teeth* mirror real-world migration experiences, particularly the tensions between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to a new environment. The generational conflicts depicted in the novel reflect ongoing debates in sociology and migration studies about acculturation and the identity crises faced by second-generation immigrants. Research on diasporic communities, such as that by Brah (1996), suggests that identity is shaped by displacement and historical memory, further supporting Smith's narrative themes.

Furthermore, *White Teeth* aligns with current discussions about the politics of integration and multiculturalism in Britain and beyond. As seen in Millat's radicalization, Smith captures the socio-political consequences of alienation and the struggle for belonging. Contemporary debates about immigration policies, xenophobia, and national identity, particularly in post-Brexit Britain, highlight the novel's enduring relevance in discussing the complexities of hybrid identity.

White Teeth offers no singular resolution to the tensions of hybrid identity but instead embraces the idea that identity is inherently fluid and evolving. The novel's exploration of hybrid identity is deeply connected to contemporary migration studies and sociological

theories, reinforcing its significance beyond the realm of fiction. The novel highlights the complexity of postcolonial identity, illustrating that identity is not a fixed entity but a dynamic process of negotiation. Rather than offering a definitive resolution, Smith celebrates the complexity of identity in a multicultural society, making *White Teeth* a powerful commentary on the evolving nature of cultural identity in a globalized world.

4.3 The Evolution of Home for Immigrant Characters

White Teeth explores the fluid and evolving concept of home, particularly for immigrant characters such as Samad Iqbal and Clara Bowden, as well as their children, who experience a generational shift in identity and belonging. The novel highlights how home is not merely a physical space but a psychological and cultural construct shaped by history, migration, and personal choices. Through the experiences of its characters, the novel examines how home can be both a place of longing and a site of conflict, negotiation, and transformation. This idea resonates with Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity, Said's (2005) othering, Spivak's (1990) notion of the subaltern, Fanon's (2004) insights on decolonization and identity, and Brah's (1996) conceptualization of diaspora.

Brah (1996)'s notion of diaspora is particularly relevant to the novel as it provides a framework for understanding the diasporic condition beyond physical displacement. She argues that diaspora is not simply about movement from one location to another but also about the creation of imaginary homelands and the intersection of multiple diasporas within a shared social space. This theoretical lens helps illuminate the complexities of home and identity for Smith's characters, who navigate belonging within a multicultural yet deeply stratified British society. Similarly, Bhabha (1994) suggests that hybridity disrupts binary oppositions of self and other, leading to a third space where new identities are continually negotiated, reflecting the struggles of Smith's characters.

Samad clings to an idealized vision of his homeland, even though he has spent most of his life in Britain. His struggle to maintain his cultural identity and Islamic faith in a foreign land leads to deep personal conflicts. His decision to send one of his sons, Magid, back to Bangladesh in an effort to preserve his heritage reflects this inner turmoil. However, this effort ultimately backfires, as Magid returns more British in outlook than his twin brother Millat, who grows up in London and becomes influenced by Western youth culture. As Samad reflects, "You begin to give up the very idea of belonging. Suddenly this thing, this belonging, it seems some long, dirty lie" (p. 407). Similarly, he laments, "What am I? A coward, an idiot, or is this

just the human condition?" (p. 145), illustrating his struggle with displacement. This aligns with Brah's (1996) assertion that diaspora involves both "homing desire" and "homing in," where subjects negotiate between longing for an imagined homeland and forging a place in their present realities. Bhabha's (1994) hybridity theory further explains Samad's crisis, arguing that the colonial subject exists in an in-between space, neither fully belonging to the homeland nor the host nation.

Clara Bowden has a different relationship with home. Unlike Samad, she embraces British life more readily, partly due to her upbringing under her fanatically religious mother, Hortense. Clara's past in Jamaica does not serve as a strong cultural anchor for her in the same way that Bangladesh does for Samad. Instead, she finds a sense of belonging through her marriage to Archie and her daughter Irie. Her attitude toward home is marked by adaptation rather than nostalgia, signaling the different ways in which first-generation immigrants navigate their displacement. When asked about Jamaica, Clara admits, "I hardly remember it, you know. It's not home for me. It's just something I came out of" (p. 62). Clara's story reflects Spivak's (1990) subaltern position: her voice is often overlooked, and she assimilates into British culture without fully questioning the power structures that define her status in society. However, as Brah (1996) notes, the diaspora space is not only about the migrants but also about those who are already present in the host land, emphasizing the entanglements of multiple cultural histories. Bhabha's (1994) theory of mimicry also applies to Clara, as she unconsciously adopts the dominant culture's traits while still retaining elements of her past, showcasing the ambivalence of colonial identities.

Millat, Magid, and Irie struggle with conflicting notions of home, as they do not fully identify with their parents' nostalgic visions of their respective homelands, nor do they feel entirely accepted by British society. This tension propels them into a search for identity, which manifests in different ways.

Millat, raised in London, rebels against British culture and eventually joins a radical Islamic group as a way of asserting his identity. His embrace of extremism is, in part, a response to his father's failed attempts to impose traditional values: "He was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali... he lived for the in-between" (p. 351). This struggle reflects Fanon's (2004) idea of colonial alienation, where the subject oscillates between imposed identities without a clear sense of belonging. It also ties into Brah's concept of diaspora space, where new identities are constantly negotiated amidst socio-political structures. As Millat himself declares, "I ain't no paki, I ain't no Muslim. I'm Millat, man,

Millat" (p. 233), highlighting his resistance to imposed labels. Bhabha's (1994) third space is evident in Millat's identity crisis, as he occupies a liminal position where his British and Bengali heritages collide without clear resolution.

Magid, on the other hand, grows up in Bangladesh but adopts Western rationalism and becomes deeply assimilated into British intellectual life upon his return. This ironic reversal of expectations underscores the unpredictability of identity formation among immigrant children. His transformation parallels Said's (2005) arguments, which highlight how Western structures shape the way Eastern individuals perceive themselves. Magid, rather than maintaining a "pure" Bengali identity, internalizes Western ideals, illustrating the power of colonial discourse and the fluidity of diasporic subjectivity as theorized by Brah (1996). As Smith writes, "Magid was more English than the English... all crisp suits, cravat and polished leather brogues" (p. 406). Bhabha's (1994) hybridity framework further explains Magid's paradoxical assimilation, showing how colonial subjects reconstruct their identities within imperialist frameworks.

Irie, the daughter of Clara and Archie, seeks a sense of belonging by reconnecting with her Jamaican roots, yet she also desires integration into mainstream British society. She grapples with issues of self-worth, heritage, and racial identity, highlighting the unique struggles of biracial individuals who straddle multiple cultural influences. Her journey reflects Bhabha's third space, where identities are negotiated rather than fixed. As she painfully realizes, "She wanted to be part of the big picture, but she was too fussy about the details" (p. 379). Similarly, she declares, "I don't want to belong to a race. I just want to belong" (p. 437), encapsulating her struggle for self-definition.

Smith presents Britain as a contested and unstable home for immigrants and their descendants. While characters like Samad resist assimilation and others like Magid embrace it, *White Teeth* suggests that home is ultimately an evolving and negotiable space. The novel does not offer a singular resolution but instead portrays home as something that must be actively shaped and redefined within the broader diaspora space. As Bhabha (1994) argues, hybridity and the third space create possibilities for new cultural formations rather than fixed identities, a theme echoed in Smith's novel. Ultimately, *White Teeth* aligns with Brah's idea that diaspora is about negotiation rather than nostalgia, showcasing the complexities of belonging in a postcolonial, multicultural Britain.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In her exploration of cultural identity, Smith (2000) critically examines the tensions and crises that arise from navigating multiple identities, mainly through the struggles of Samad Iqbal as he attempts to preserve his heritage in the face of dominant English culture. Samad's internal struggles reflect the psychological impact of migration. He clings to an idealized past, sending Magid back to Bangladesh to preserve his cultural roots, only for Magid to return more "English" than his Westernized twin, Millat. His experiences underscore the complex negotiations of identity among first and second-generation immigrants, illustrating the psychological and cultural dissonance that shapes diasporic lives. By framing *White Teeth* within the broader discourse of postcolonial identity, this study contributes to Asian postcolonial scholarship by shedding light on the persistence of colonial legacies in forming diasporic identities, particularly for South Asian immigrants in Britain. Smith presents a narrative that reflects the diverse ethnic composition of London, revealing the intricate struggles of belonging, assimilation, and cultural retention for immigrant communities. Characters like Samad and Clara embody the integration challenges and the societal stigmas that shape immigrant experiences. Many migrants arrive with expectations that quickly clash with reality, forcing them to renegotiate their sense of self while being labeled as outsiders. This tension between cultural heritage and adaptation highlights the liminal Space occupied by diasporic individuals—a space of both dislocation and redefinition. Samad's attachment to his ancestry and internal conflicts illustrate how cultural heritage remains central to identity formation, even as immigrants navigate new social landscapes.

Beyond *White Teeth*, the study's findings offer valuable insights for migration studies, particularly in analyzing how diasporic individuals construct hybrid identities in response to shifting socio-political contexts. By examining how immigrants adapt to new environments while maintaining cultural continuity, this research provides a framework for understanding contemporary migration patterns and how postcolonial subjects negotiate their place in an increasingly globalized world. The novel exemplifies how literature can serve as a site for reimagining multicultural coexistence, challenging essentialist notions of identity, and fostering a more inclusive discourse on Hybridity. *White Teeth* ultimately advocates for a model of peaceful coexistence in a world marked by cultural intersections and conflicts. It calls for a discourse transcending rigid binaries, emphasizing mutual engagement, adaptation, and the possibility of new, fluid identities. In doing so, Smith's (2000) work resonates beyond its immediate setting, offering a broader commentary on migration, integration, and identity

formation in postcolonial and transnational contexts. By situating the novel within Asian postcolonial and migration studies, this study underscores the enduring relevance of Hybridity as both a challenge and an opportunity in constructing diasporic identities.

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