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Structuralism and Hybridity Theories in Zadie Smith's Novel, White Teeth

A B S T R A C T

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Zadie Smith investigates the struggle between the identity of the character and the historical background of their family. Nevertheless, whereas inherited heritage, prehistory, and cultural origins give the impression that they play a central role in the character's growth, opportunity and private preference are influential aspects which encompass the prospective to claim superiority over any actually prearranged living course. In this sense, fate and history are continually interacted throughout the plot, of the bildungsrom in the novel. This paper revolves around the theme of identity structure in a multicultural society as appears in Z. Smith's novel, "White Teeth". The paper follows structuralism and hybridity theories as a guide for analyzing the novel. the paper ends with the conclusion that sums up the result of the discussion.

الخلاصة:

تبحث زادي سميث في الصراع بين هوية الشخصية والخلفية التاريخية لأسرتها. ومع ذلك، في حين يعطي التراث الموروث، وما قبل التاريخ، والأصول الثقافية الانطباع بأنهم يلعبون دورًا محوريًا في نمو الشخصية، فإن الفرصة والتفضيل الخاص هما من الجوانب المؤثرة التي تشتمل على المنظور المستقبلي للمطالبة بالتفوق على أي دورة حياة تم إعدادها مسبقًا. في هذا المعنى، يتفاعل باستمرار القدر والتاريخ في جميع أنحاء المؤامرة، من **bildungsrom** في الرواية. تدور هذه الورقة حول موضوع بنية الهوية في مجتمع متعدد الثقافات كما يظهر في رواية "Z. Smith "White Teeth". وتتبع الورقة نظريات البنوية والتجهين كدليل لتحليل الرواية. تنتهي الورقة بالاستنتاج الذي يختصر نتيجة المناقشة.

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Key Words: Zadie Smith, Structuralism, Hybridity, White Teeth, Bildungsroman

1. Introduction:

1.1. Zadie Smith and "White Teeth"

The Anglo-Jamaican novelist, Zadie Smith who was a very talented young woman graduated in 1997 from Cambridge University. White working class Londoners of twentieth century, were the subject of Zadie's *White Teeth* which was published three years later. It is an outstanding novel which is regarded by many readers as well as critics as a panorama that depicts the life that multicultural individuals lead the society of Britain.

The whole novel describes the life of three families that have various ethnic origins who live in north London. Unlike other Black British writers, Smith presents a different version for the life of the black young people who live in Britain. Her first novel can be considered as an autobiographical sketch of more than five hundred pages. In her novel, she handles a lot of themes like the Diaspora that the old generation of migrant lived in, the atrocities of the II World War the people suffered from, the struggle that the intergenerational families had within their relations, biogenetical engineering and radical religious fantasia among others. The novel is very distinguished with its manifold time layers, varied characters, and diverse discourses.

Z. Smith investigates the struggle between the identity of the character and the historical background of their family. Nevertheless, whereas inherited heritage, prehistory, and cultural origins give the impression that they play a central role in the character's growth, opportunity and private preference are influential aspects which encompass the prospective to claim superiority over any actually prearranged living course. In this sense, fate and history are continually interacted throughout the plot, of the bildungsroman in the novel.

Smith portrays a very clear image of the British society at the beginning of the third millennium. A society that is a mixture of people of various races, talking different languages, having diverse folklores. *White Teeth* is a representative of a *Midnight's Children* (1981) that is described in the essay written by Salman Rushdie entitled, "The New Empire"(1982). In his essay Rushdie says that " Britain is undergoing a critical phase of its postcolonial period ... It's a crisis of the whole culture, of the society's entire sense of itself" (Rushdie: 129). The link between *White Teeth* and *Midnight's Children* is that the dilemma is quite clear in the conflict between the individual and all that surrounds him/her. The individual tries to achieve his/her identity so that he/she searches for all that may bring uniqueness and authenticity.

1.2. Hybridity as a Theory and Methodology

The word hybrid as appears in the Oxford dictionary means "a thing made by combining two different elements; a mixture."(As a noun). "Hybrid" is used as an adjective to depict a "mixed character." The origin of the word, "hybrid", is unknown but probably from Greek .It was first used in the nineteenth century to explain the offspring of two different species of plants or animals. In the mid eighteenth century, the word was used to illustrate the offspring of different races of human beings.

Post-structural theorists deployed "*Hybridity*" later to explain the cultural outward appearances that came out from colonial encounters. Social scientists that are paying attention to diaspora as well as migration, globalization and trans-nationalism adopt hybridity as a subject that is varied and includes debates about its usefulness as a category. This paper follows the theory of hybridity to be the methodology that helps analyzing *White Teeth* to shed light on the theme of identity determination and structure in a multi-cultural society.

2.1. Hybridity and Multicultural Society

The novelist, Smith uses many elements that help creating a successful novel that depicts the life of the immigrants and the refugees. *White Teeth* is a kind of the historical novel, the bildungsroman, or family history to shed light on the characters the writer has portrayed. In this regard, the novel exposes many perspectives concerning the first and the second generations of those migrants and their life in Britain. The construction of the individual's identity and the state of diaspora as well as the dilemma of self-determination are the main focuses of Smith in her novel. She shows vividly the suffering of the people who are of different origins which are represented by misrecognition and racism that the white society adopted in its treatment to them when calling them "different".

What is important about Smith's novel is that it sheds light on the inter-cultural struggle of the migrants to incorporate with the governing culture. Besides, it frankly presents the traditionalistic struggle between the successive generations of the migrants. The different generations have diverse perspectives towards the dominant culture. The old one tries to keep their own identity while the new generation attempts to westernize their identity to get rid of being "different".

The novel as focusing on the theme of self-determination as well as identity construction can be seen as a bildungsroman. What is important about the style that the novelist uses throughout writing the novel is the way of manipulating the structure, e.g. the chapter heading as "The Miseducation of Irie Jones". This heading obviously clarifies this classical genre. The writer divides the novel into four parts. Each part explores important episodes that each main character presents. The reader can see that the first two parts are focusing on the identity struggle to determine a new way of living throughout the course of the crisis of the male characters. However, the last two parts are devoted the new generation and the dilemma of the teenagers and the process of being a mature person.

Some critics regard *White Teeth* as a historical novel. It tells the readers about the lives of three different families who live in Willesden Green. While Smith does not go behind the common structure of the traditional novel, i.e. following the chronological life-writing. She is shifting between diverse altitudes of time. Moreover, by paralleling between places and generations the author recovers intercessions in the past that helps giving details to the present identity dilemmas of the characters in addition to their involvement in the life of each other. What the novelist tries to explore is the social notion of family. She does so by revealing dysfunctional constructions and struggles within families. She shows the bonds and alliances between the Chalfens, the Joneses, and the Iqbals.

2.2. Hybridity and Structuralism in *White Teeth*

What is most important about the novel is that it illustrates the post-colonial Britain as a complex structured society with characters from different backgrounds

regarding their nationalities, cultural practices, and religious beliefs. They consisted of Brits from different nationalities, as well as gay, lesbians, and octogenarians (Arikan, 2013:1681). Thus, the society set up demonstrated in the novel

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is a multicultural one. The author uses interconnected three immigrant families who struggle to define their identities. The various cultures and religions influenced the characters to be unable to state their definite group in which they belonged. The movement of people within the physical set up contributed to the identity crisis where some of them adopted other cultures while others defended their own cultures and stuck to it. Those who adopted new cultures and structures in the society formed the hybrid identities and a hybrid structural form of the society. On the other hand, Smith used immigrants to construct both structuralism and hybridity theories in the society. Moreover, the colonizer and the one who was colonized are also important aspects that Smith exposes in relation to identifying one's identity given that all this happened during the post-colonial time after World War II (Ciribuco, 2017: 3).

Structuralism theory illustrates how families in the post-colonial Britain struggled to get a sense of belonging because they were detached from their places of origin. Two men: Samad a Bangladeshi and Jones an English man were both soldiers in the World War II but they met in 1945 and ended up being great friends. After the war, the two returned to Britain and started families; Jones married a Jamaican lady called Clara while Samad married a Bangladeshi lady called Alsana. Jones' daughter Irie formed part of the hybrid society while the Samad's twins struggled to get their identity in the multicultural society hence making their parents send one of them back home (to Bangladesh). Unfortunately for Samad, his son who was supposed to be raised to be an Muslim at their home became an atheist, while the one who was raised in Britain became a radical Muslim (Dr. Bagchi and Dr. Franssen). On the other hand, Irie faces an identity crisis as well due to her multi-ethnic origin. She represents the second generation of children that were born by the immigrants from different ethnic backgrounds and different races. Britain is largely dominated by the whites, made the second generation children to be racially labeled. It also enhanced the negative attitudes and forces against immigrant families (Prakasam, 2015: 2).

These attitudes witnessed during the post-colonial period emerged during the colonial times. Therefore, colonial times made people notice others regarding the differences they have in culture, religion, and race. Therefore, a negative structuralism was implanted into the minds of the colonized. It promoted a toxic feeling about someone of different background as if they were aliens. This is witnessed in Clara, and even her marriage was not a reason enough for her to change her perception about the other cultures. She tries to force Irie to join her religion and not that of her father. Smith, therefore, was successful in demonstrating how most people who live in multicultural societies still acquire their identities from their original cultures and religions. It is the feeling of doing what is right and ensuring that those around a person are also doing the same that made the first generation of parents feel like their second generation children were getting lost and hence losing their identity by adopting other cultures and religions (Arikan: 1683; Nair, 2010: 10).

The post-colonial Britain society derived its identity from their religion, thus making religion a significant aspect among them. Due to the presence of many religions, the identity structure looked confused. As much as Samad tries to hold on to his religion of Islam, he was challenged by the fact that he kept on changing his nationality from Bangladesh to Indiana to Pakistan. One of his greatest challenges was that he had not been in Bangladesh for long hence illustrating how identity was attached to one's original homeland. Identity had been attached with the homeland where one grows in a very complex way; Magid who studies in Bangladesh and is

expected to be a radical Muslim turns out to be a lawyer and works with a renowned scientist. While his brother who had been brought up in Britain and was expected to get a better education and become a professional man turned out to be a radical religious man without any interest in engineering which the father persuaded him to undertake. The dilemma of the characters' original homeland served to enhance a lot of disparities in knowing their identities. Thus, structuralism is important in portraying the intellectual pattern in a society (Kroupová, 2008: 23).

On the other hand, structuralism offers strict instructions within the community. It identifies what is acceptable in the society by cultural units and what behaviors can be tolerated (Rutherford, 2016:6). Therefore, Smith demonstrated how the multicultural society did not take into account all these requirements that the cultures demanded of its people by intermarrying people from other cultures, races, and religions. Smith was able to demonstrate how hypocritical the post-colonial society was in Britain. The generation that was very resilient in holding their historical religion and cultures were just but liars (Chaudhuri, 2006:2). First, Samad with the outward show of a radical Muslim had an affair with one of his sons' Christian teacher secretly. He was also a heavy drunkard later on which is contrary to the Muslim faith. The society seemed to favor those in power; hence Millat joined Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation (KEVIN). As expected by their cultural and religion norm one was supposed to treasure the spiritual sense of power more than the physical one, however, for Millat he chose to get the physical sense of power in KEVIN. On the other hand, Hortense based her life upon a belief that had not worked and had been proved wrong in her own eyes just to ease her inner person that she was doing the right thing or was doing as expected. Thus, the author demonstrated that structuralism consisted of a large gap within society between people who know the changes occurring within their culture and those who are not aware of such aspects at all (Soares, 2009:4).

The hybridity theory in *White Teeth* is enhanced by various languages under the same physical location. Millat took hybridity as a space to hide and express his free will by joining Raggastani which was a hybrid unit. Raggastani was made up of four different languages; English, Bengali, Jamaican and Gujarati. It is the feature of having bits of four different ethnic languages together as a single unit made it acquire different cultures as well. The same aspect is witnessed in KEVIN which is supposed to be a radical Muslim group that has embraced other cultures and even given its group English name (Trimm, 2009:151). Moreover, the founder of the group was not a true Muslim believer but a man from hybrid generation. Even in hybridity, the hybrid generation was not able to define their identity. Millat, he did not fit into his parents' religion neither did he find comfort in the religions of his choice. He moved from one group to another and even had problems agreeing with all the KEVIN's opinions where he seemed to have settled (Rizgar, 2016:17).

The Chalfen's family was significant in bringing out the hybridity theory in the novel. Marcus Chalfen represented the new generation whose interest is biotechnology and research. The wife praised him for having the ability to fuse embryos and generate mice that would do as instructed by Marcus. Therefore, the scientist believed that he controlled every single cell of all the mice including those coming in the future (Dr. Bagchi and Dr. Franssen). The hybridity aspect, therefore, tried to manipulate the current generation and make it be what it wanted rather than adjusting itself. Therefore, hybridity was used as the means to solve any type of problem that the society faced including treatment of illnesses. Nonetheless, the author warned the readers that hybridity could be good as well as bad. It could bring

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positive results as well as negative ones. Smith illustrated how hybrid was helpful to the society by creating new species that could take in the pressures that the current environment was offering, unlike the original species which were so rigid to change (Svanstrom, 2006: 13).

On the other hand, the friendship that last over fifty years and connects Archbald Johns who is the working class Londoner to Samad Iqbal who is the Muslim migrant from Bengal is the main issue that the novelist focuses on in her novel. Notwithstanding to the closeness these two men are fully differing from each another. They are slightly having something in common. Archie, an undemanding, easy-going character, has a lucid world outlook. The following statement describes him fully: "He was a man whose significance in the Greater Scheme of Things could be figured along familiar ratios: Pebble: Beach. Raindrop: Ocean. Needle: Haystack" (Zadie, 2000:11). Nevertheless, he has only one noteworthy flaw that is his lack of will-power and his being unable to make a decision. Archie basically believes that fate is the one who determines his life, so that he leaves decisions to the rotary motions of a flipped coin to let things happen accidentally.

The reader can get an obvious view regarding Archie's character. Archie's need to determine his fate and to set certain goals for his life help him be less exceeding for his limit and be dominated. He is a poor person who has not interfered in events. He does not impose his motivation on course of the life of the other characters. His unsophisticated life that is led by fate does not indicate a deep identity crisis. However, sarcastically Archie is the one who is saved from committing suicide after his first wife's departure. His survival is seen by Archie as a second chance because of his being in the middle of his mid-life crisis.

The external situations of Archie's life, after all what happened to him, alter entirely. Here, the novelist uses the narrator to tell the readers that "a new Archie is about to emerge" (Ibid: 18) Clara Bowden is a 19-year-old Jamaican girl with whom Archie gets married at the age of forty seven. They moved to Willesden Green to live in a house there. They raised Irie, their daughter at that place. On the other hand, neither Archie's second marriage nor his new responsibility as a father helps him have a momentous individuality rebuilding. His character does not get any extraordinary changes at all. The latest start does not compose a second opportunity for him that seriously advances his past life.

Hybridity was used here to put up good fights such as the fight against ethnicity and racism. Jones' daughter, Irie was such an example, she had room for every culture, religion and ethnic group hence this made her life quite easier and successful in the multicultural set-up. Therefore, hybridity created a new way of people determining their identities whereby their culture, religion, race or homeland was not a factor of consideration (Amrulloh, 2012: 9). The population such as Samad who supports pure-blood population was showed to be weak and narrow-minded.

The same way science used a hybrid to come up with a stronger variety of species in the novel; the same way did Smith use cultural hybridity to demonstrate a stronger population that could not be infected by the social illness such as racism and ethnicity. The social hybridity took over that of science when Irie slept with Samad's twins and got pregnant. However, the scientific methods that could not identify who was the father of the multiethnic child in her womb (Dr. Bagchi and Dr. Franssen).

Hybridity theory also determines the structure of the society as illustrated in the novel. Jones relation with Samad was associated with that of the colonized and

colonizer respectfully. Though he was an English man, he did not match up the expected social levels in the English community. First, he married a lady from another ethnic origin, and his best friend was Samad who was not an English man. Therefore, he belonged to the first generation but represented the hybrid population. According to Magid, the people of Eastern origin were the ones who left things to fate as a way of solving their problems. Nevertheless, Jones is an English man practiced this behavior and had always used the flipping of a coin as the way to solve his problems. Smith relates this with the future mouse that was released by Jones after being shot in his thigh. Just like the mouse that had been mutated genetic structure by induced carcinogens, Jones represented a generic population which did not hold any societal positions and ethnic values at heart but would always find a neutral position as a solution (Sell).

2. Conclusion

According to what has been mentioned and discussed above, hybridity changed the structure of the society . It was successful in

releasing the multicultural characteristics that were fought for vigorously. It neutralized the need to control others as shown during the colonial times and offered every person an opportunity to lead or control . Nonetheless, as it created opportunities on one side, on the other side confusion was created which enhanced lack of identity. Irie had a hard time trying to fit into the English culture where she felt was her place. The English community, however, strongly rejected her and labeled her as a stranger. Smith, however, was quick to correct this by stating that she is associating her to a shipwrecked and marked X. Irie did not want to let go of what she thought to be her original identity. On the other hand, the future mouse resembled the need of the society in adapting to hybridity and cross-cultural origin to survive.

The mouse illustrated the hopes and fears that the multicultural society was facing. The mouse was programmed to die at the beginning of the new millennium, and even when it was released; it could not escape its fate. Therefore, the society could not run away from its fate because its destiny was in scripted in its genome just as that of the mouse and the only way the society would survive was through hybridity

The novelist is succeeded in drawing full picture of the identity structure in a society that is distinguished by its various cultures, races, and religions. It is obvious that creating identity in such a society is not an easy task. It has many aspects that cause suffering for the individuals that live in such a society. The goal of writing *White Teeth* is to illustrate this suffering and it is fully achieved.

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