

## Post-racial, Post-national Hybridity in Zadie Smith's White Teeth

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### *Abstract*

This study analytically discusses what defines people as English in the 21st century by asking as to what creates Englishness in the milieu of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. It also presents the construction or determination of later generation immigrants' English identities when the limitations of their origins and races are deconstructed. Most importantly, it asks (and tries to answer), whether the second-generation immigrants balance their inherited identities and the ones they choose? The study illustrates by analyzing the events in *White Teeth* that traditional concepts of identity and the belief that family roots and race alone create a solid base for the children's identity, are nothing but a fallacy. The novel shows that the factors of nationality, culture, and race are fluid and that they do not provide an airtight framework for the construction of a person's identity.

### **Introduction**

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* is a complicated novel that sensitively captures the implications of being English in the 21st century. Though Smith's first novel, *White Teeth* succeeded in drawing the attention of literary critics not only to the literary work itself, but to the author's racial hybridity too, peeping at times through her multi-racial multi-nation characters. It is clear that the themes of identity and heredity are important elements of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. Identity, as generally comprehended, is the way in which a person looks at his/her own behavior and is his/her own conception of who he/she is as a person. However, heredity is beyond one's control and construction as it is a matter of genes received from one's parents. These are issues that are not only central to the novel, but also, to the writer, described by some critics as a Black British writer. Others, however, who see deeper and give credit to the writer's insight, describe her as a new, cosmopolitan, multi-cultural or post-racial British voice.

Born in London to white English and black Jamaican parents, Smith is gifted with an ability to perfectly portray the issues of hybrid identity (also drawing on her personal experiences as well as her creative talent) in *White Teeth*. As a writer, she belongs to the second generation of writer of mixed races who, according to Victorica Arana, are unlike the first-generation writers, given that she belongs to

a new cultural and social movement that is broader than merely academic and broader than specifically literary: it is the multicultural and multiracial . . . mobilization that is proclaiming itself loudly from hundreds of platforms and stages around the British Isles and popularly and officially styling itself as nothing less magnificent than 'Re-inventing Britain.' (Arana 21)

Commenting on Smith's works, Amira Richler states that

Smith continues the project of critiquing Englishness – a task she initially undertook in *White Teeth* – by asking the question of what it means to be English...She redefines London from a black British point of view in *White Teeth*. Smith's parody of Englishness as well as her rewriting of London illustrate that she remains engaged with some of the concerns associated with black British writing and fuses these concerns with postcolonial critique. (Richler 18)

## Method

This study examines the recurring themes of religion, race, culture and ethnicity that characterize the lives of the people in the novel as factors forming the hybrid English Identity. It raises questions that can be difficult to answer, questions that are related to the influence of familial origins, race, roots and their complex effects on identity. The study also examines the important questions about hybridity in the novel crystallized in the cultural conflict between the origins and adoptions of identities by migrant people and the concept of homeland as perceived by the second generation of the migrants, as a perpetual dichotomy between the land they were born and raised in, and the land from which their families migrated. Finally, prominent studies on *White Teeth* are reviewed here to highlight the psycho-social challenges erected by hybridity, identity confusion, and the reflections of post-national theory on these issues.

Earlier studies on nationality and identity in *White Teeth*

*White Teeth* revolves around the confusion of what constitutes 'Englishness' in the 21st century: The fathers of the Iqbal and the Jones families share some historical roots having served in the British Army in World War II, and having been in the same tank. Post war, both of them settled in North London. Archie gets married to a young

Jamaican lady whose name is Clara and fathers a daughter, Irie. Similarly, Samad, through an arranged marriage, gets married to Alsana and fathers the twin boys, Magid and Millat. Later in the novel, the Chalfen family gets involved in the lives of the Joneses and the Iqbals when Joshua, the Chalfen's son, is caught smoking marijuana with Irie and Millat behind the school in an attempt to impress Irie.

Instead of focusing on the historical or familial roots of the identity, Stuart Hall, acquiesces to the claim that identity is dynamic and not a fixed entity. He considers historical roots and genealogy among other factors as means of forming one's identity. He believes that because identity is not a transparent thing, it can never be fully established. He says,

cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return. (Hall 226)

Also, Hall, indirectly, supports the framework of post-racial theory. He claims that identity springs from the politics of positioning which supports the idea that there is no "unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'" (Hall 226). Commenting on Hall's claims, Cicelyn Turkson says that "[b]y revealing the futility of endless desires for lost origins and romanticized roots, Hall presents identity's constant transformation as an opportunity to replace 'roots' with the notion of 'routes'" (Turkson 3). Therefore, identity can be considered as a 'route' of continuous transformation that belongs to the future as much as it does to the past. Identity is more than just looking at the past and trying to make sense of one's historical roots, it is, rather looking at present and future as well, all of which continuously affect the identity.

To be able to look beyond the racial origins and "routes," critics need to re-examine the cultural identity and the limits it includes regarding the national origins. Therefore, the post-racial theory cannot be separated from post-national theory. Turkson claims that

Post-nationalism creates room for identity to be more than the sum of ancestral loyalties or historical implications. It clears space for the influence of the immediate present to blend into and record a more ambiguous hybrid look at identity. (Turkson 4).

Likewise, Rinaldo Walcott questions the authority of origins and nationality. He opines that origins and genealogy are old and narrow means of formulating thoughts about identity. His argument is similar to that of Hall, but it is different in the fact that it focuses on a post-national perspective by condemning the limits that conform to

origins, while the latter's argument focuses on a post-racial approach. Both Hall and Walcott have the same opinion that it is difficult to deal with genealogy due to the fact that there is an "endless desire to return to 'lost origins'... to go back to the beginning" (Hall 236). Similarly, this "endless desire" to return to the origins is also present in Walcott's argument in which he says that "[c]onversations concerning origins seem to always insist upon neat and tidy borders, borders which often refuse to acknowledge their permeability and most often their confinement and restrictions" (Walcott 108). The problem of roots or 'routes,' according to both Hall and Walcott, cannot be exaggerated or simplified to a linear perspective. Walcott suggests that "Instead of merely thinking of genealogy as a line of descent, we might think of genealogy as a line which is fractured, and therefore, shoots off into many and varied directions" (Walcott 109).

- Hybridity

While post-national and post-racial theories concentrate on the impacts of hybridity, they do not work as efforts to idealize the 21st century and show it as a Utopian era in which multiculturalism is present and genealogy has no effect on immigrants' identities. At the same time, "these theories are not an attempt to diminish the importance of genealogy, origins, or roots. Rather, post-racial and post-national readings are pivotal in revealing twenty-first century definitions of home as becoming less distinct" (Turkson 5). Thus, the second-generation immigrants and their children must go through problematic relationships with their national and racial identities. They must link two clashing concepts of home, as is evident in *White Teeth*.

In her criticism of multiculturalism, Molly Thompson uncovers the damaging effects of trying to assign a fixed identity for someone while he/she has different and opposing cultural standards. She agrees with Hall's concept of one origin and asserts that "we should perceive our ethnic identities as being connected with the notion of movement, multiple origins and hybridity and advocates a replacement of 'roots' with 'routes'" (Thompson 133). Thompson, much like Walcott and Hall, considers the search for roots and origins as pointless. At the same time, Thompson warns readers against a reductive inter-racial harmonious reading of the text:

*White Teeth* also tells a story of intergenerational tensions and cultural conflicts within and between its protagonists. Indeed, the text suggests that, as a result of belonging to different generations and holding a diversity of cultural beliefs, the possibility of feeling at 'home' in this multicultural world is unlikely. (123)

Hybridity confuses the concepts of belonging. As a result of that confusion, second-generation migrants experience both the lack of belonging either to the home in which they live at the moment, and belonging to too many places simultaneously. White Teeth, as Turkson suggests, “provides a painfully humorous look at how a new breed of hybrid identities are never quite at ease in any setting, never seem quite right under any label, and are never too assured of any origin, within any group” (Turkson 7).

- Trouble finding identity in White Teeth

Most of the main characters of the novel, to some extent, face issues defining their identities. Samad Miah Iqbal is an immigrant from Bangladesh who was raised in a highly religious family that is very particular about preserving their traditions. Samad now lives in England where he finds a completely different world than the one, he was raised in. To him, England is less strict than Bangladesh and more open to behaviors that his religious upbringing always considered taboo. This difference between the two cultures causes Samad to have an identity crisis, especially when he confronts his temptations for sexual attraction towards his children’s young teacher, which is extremely forbidden in his religion which bans sex outside of marriage. He also struggles to fit himself into his job as a waiter. Moreover, he constantly struggles with how he sees himself. Therefore, he imagines wearing a card that says:

I AM NOT A WAITER. I HAVE BEEN A STUDENT, A SCIENTIST, A SOLDIER, MY WIFE IS CALLED ALSANA, WE LIVE IN EAST LONDON BUT WE WOULD LIKE TO MOVE NORTH. I AM A MUSLIM BUT ALLAH HAS FORSAKEN ME OR I HAVE FORSAKEN ALLAH, I'M NOT SURE. I HAVE A FRIEND—ARCHIE—AND OTHERS. I AM FORTY-NINE BUT WOMEN STILL TURN IN THE STREET. SOMETIMES. (Smith 49)

In this description, Samad reveals his desire to show everyone at the restaurant that he has a complex identity that does not get easily described by his simple job title, waiter.

Furthermore, Samad not only struggles with his own identity crisis, but he also worries over his children losing their “original” identity. He is afraid that their Bangladeshi identity might melt in the English society which he sees as more open to unpleasant behaviors. His children, Magid and Millat are second-generation immigrants. Therefore, they are stuck between the world in which they are born and raised, the one that offers independence, free sex, and drugs, and the world their father tries to create at home, a world of strict rules and religious teachings to govern their behaviors. What makes it even more difficult for the children is that they see their father’s hypocrisy and his failure to stick to the rules he teaches them. Thus, the children feel that they need to form their own identities

regardless of the little guidance they get to achieve their mission. Millat joins KEVIN gang that takes religion as a shield to cover their immoral and illegal acts of stealing and doing drugs. Magid, on the other hand, has been sent by his father to live in Bangladesh and grows into a responsible, religious man thus achieving part of his father's expectations, but disappoints him in others, such as, by embracing the Western world and returning to England to seek a career in the law. Both the boys find their own identities while their father is still not satisfied with his.

The motif of the loss of identity keeps appearing as the main problem of other main characters in the novel, such as Archie and Clara. Early in the novel, Archie attempts to commit suicide after being divorced. Archie's decision to kill himself is not caused by his depression over his divorce, but because he believes he has lost his identity. Regardless of the fact that his first marriage was not a happy one due to the mental state of his wife, Archie fails to identify his self without a wife with whom he lived twenty years. Readers get the sense that Archie's marriage defined his life more than anything else, and helped form his identity. When the butcher tells him to move away from the entrance, Archie sees that as a providential signal telling him to go on and try to find himself again.

Likewise, Clara struggles to find her own identity after she leaves her mother. So far, her only identity is by her past and her mother Hortense's religion which she forces her to spread at school. Therefore, Clara struggles to find herself an identity that does not include her religion or her mother, which touches the defining line that separates identity from heredity. Although her mother wants Clara's religion and past to define her, she resists this identity and struggles to find her own. Finally, the events of the novel lead Clara into Archie's arms which allows her to begin a new and different life than the one her mother wanted for her: "Clara saw Archie through the gray-green eyes of loss; her world had just disappeared, the faith she lived by had receded like a low tide, and Archie, quite by accident, had become the bloke in the joke; the last man on earth" (38). Both Archie and Clara needed to find each other, Archie for a new direction in life and Clara for a different life than her previous "preset" one.

- Post-national Theory and the Identity of the immigrants:

In *White Teeth*, readers can the immigrants' desire to follow fixed concepts of origins and roots to encounter the uncertain effects of their new English identity. They have the intense desire to be considered English and yet, at the same time, they resist being considered as English because of the fear of losing their original identities, their "roots." For example, Clara's mother, Hortense, and the Iqbal parents, Alsana and Samad, believe that England is the land

that continuously threatens their identities. They believe that it threatens the religious, ethnic and cultural values that they want to ingrain in the identities of their children. Samad speaks about the internal struggle he and some immigrants feel and the cost they pay for the opportunity of making England their home:

These days it feels to me like you make a devil's pact when you walk into this country... You want to make a little money, get yourself started...but you mean to go back! Who would want to stay?...In a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. Just tolerated. Like you are an animal finally housebroken. Who would want to stay? But you have made a devil's pack...it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable, you belong nowhere. (Smith 336)

In these words, the readers can feel Samad's fear of being engulfed by the English culture, and his inability to stop doubting his own beliefs in the notion of a stable homeland. He is afraid that being in England is somehow erasing the invisible umbilical cord that ties him to his original homeland.

The Iqbal parents and Hortense, are shown inferior as immigrants, or at least less than primary, contributors in the society of England. Their transcultural links to Bangladesh and Jamaica are less effective in the construction of their identities; these links only label them as immigrants. As such, Alsana and Samad's identities are clearly hybrid and cannot be described as original to any place by any means. Their identities, along with Hortense's, are not based on their roots or origins, but are linked to their status of being immigrants who are "Others" within the society of England. However, when the English society sees them as "Others," they lose that identity. Therefore, one could say that their hybridity is based on the conflicting effects of society; they fear the threat of losing their original identities and roots because they feel that their identities are becoming English more than their original ones, yet, the English society does not regard them as English, they are still "Others."

Immigrants usually encounter cultural struggle which forces them to need the native people, regardless of age, experience or level of education, in order to reach their goals. The peculiar relationship that grows between Hortense and Ryan Topps, the white boyfriend of Clara's whom Hortense convinces to become a Jehovah Witness, is the best example of this. Ryan, or Mr. Topps as Hortense calls him, learns—through Hortense—about the principles of Christianity and the end of the world. However, his opinions, words and actions are more valued than hers, which unfortunately, shows that identity can be also used to limit immigrants. In the following lines, Hortense describes how long she has waited to be looked at as a primary contributor to the society with true value:

Mr. Topps and I, we ol' soldiers fightin' the battle of de Lord. Some time ago he converted to the Witness church, an' his rise has been quick an' sure. I've waited fifty years to do something else in de Kingdom Hall except clean...but dey don' wan' women interfering with real church bizness. Bot Mr. Topps do a great deal, and 'im let me help on occasion. He's a very good man. But 'im family are nasty-nasty. (Smith 320)

Regardless of the fact that Topps learned Jehovah teachings from Hortense, and that she worked for the "Kingdom Hall" for fifty years, Topps is more active than her when it comes to the "real church bizness" (Ibid). She only does the "clean." However, one may wonder about the reason behind that, is it because of her identity as an immigrant? Or her gender? Or her level of education? There is no certain answer to these questions, but the closest guess is her identity as an immigrant because, when we compare Hortense's character with Samad, we see the parallel: They both do 'inferior jobs', she cleans at the church and Samad at a restaurant.

Even so, Samad inferiority in the English society is dissimilar to Hortense's. The character of Samad in the novel portrays the narrow perception that the English society has about him, and at the same time, it portrays Samad's resistance to these limited perceptions. While he works as a waiter in a restaurant owned by his cousin, Samad hopes that his customers could identify him as someone more than an immigrant. Therefore, he has the fantasy of wearing a sign—as mentioned earlier—that says: "I AM NOT A WAITER. I HAVE BEEN A STUDENT, A SCIENTIST, A SOLDIER, MY WIFE IS CALLED ALSANA, WE LIVE IN EAST LONDON BUT WE WOULD LIKE TO MOVE NORTH..." (Smith 49).

Samad's wish to overcome the limitations of being identified as an immigrant shows the need to expand the English identity to involve his immigrant-hybrid identity as a Bengali-English. Regardless of his belief in the power and effects of the origins and cultural identity, Samad, at the same time, wishes to expand the limitations of Englishness to include his hybrid identity as a Bengali-English citizen. In the sign he daydreams to wear, he wants to reveal things that are universal and respected by people regardless of their cultural background. He wants to announce that he had the identity of a scholar, a soldier, and a husband which articulate that he is similar to any random English man and not an "Other."

However, Samad's wish to show himself as someone who is not just an immigrant is mocked at by one of his young co-workers. His co-worker is an Indian waiter, but he appears as if he did not experience the bitterness of being perceived as an "Other" yet. Therefore, he mocks Samad's attempts to change the way English society looks at him as a waiter, as an "Other." The young waiter says to Samad:



"I hear you trying to talk to the customer about biology this, politics that - just serve the food, you idiot - you're a waiter, for fuck's sake, You're not Michael Parkinson. 'Did I hear you say Delhi'..." "I was there myself you know, Delhi University, it was most fascinating, yes - and I fought in the war, for England, yes - yes, yes, charming, charming"..." "Samad, Samad..." he said with what seemed infinite pity, pulled the apron off and wrapped it round his waist. "You are such a sad little man." (Smith 48)

Samad's struggle to make the others see him as the man he sees himself is not a special case. Most of the immigrants share this desire and want to be regarded as they know themselves and not only as "Others." Wishing for a sign that defines you, as in the case of Samad, and patiently waiting for fifty years to do something more than cleaning a church, as in the case of Hortense, is the shared factor that unifies the identities of the immigrants who are viewed as "Others." Struggling to find an identity other than the distorted one that the society stuck onto them, establish a hybrid identity regardless of their origins, roots and cultures. Regardless of their different cultural backgrounds, races, ethnicities, the immigrants share a problematic relationship to both their "original" countries, and the country to which they migrated, which is England in the case of White Teeth.

Moreover, the first-generation immigrants share deep disappointment at their children's choices. They experience solemn depression when their children do not preserve their families' pre-English identities and identify more with the English society which their parents think, is not their own. Therefore, and regardless of their different racial roots or origins, all the immigrants in White Teeth share pointless sorrow in attempting to maintain their original identities and making their children embrace it, despite the fact that the children never lived these identities. This hope of maintain the family's original identity and the fear of replacing it with the English identity is the cause of Alsana and Samad's fear and sadness every time their son, Millat, brings a non-Bengali girlfriend with him to their home: "[w]hen Millat brought an Emily or a Lucy back home, Alsana quietly wept in the kitchen, Samad went into the garden to attack the coriander" (Smith 272). Similarly, Clara's mother, Hortense, does not approve of her marriage to Archie:

When Hortense Bowden, half white herself, got to hearing about Clara's marriage, she came round to the house, stood on the door steps, said "Understand: I and I don't speak from this moment forth," turned on her heel, and was true to her word. Hortense hadn't put all that effort into marrying black, into dragging her genes back from the brink, just so her daughter could bring yet more high- colored children into the world (Smith 272).

Alsana, Samad and Hortense share the fear of their children's becoming English, which would make them "others" to their own children. The consequences of immigration make them have no other choice than wishing that their identities do not become foreign to their children's someday. Irie's grandmother, Hortense, forgets that she herself is a product of mixed race and explains to Irie the logic behind her objection to the marriage of Irie's parents, Archie and Clara. She utters that her objection to the marriage was not caused by something related to Archie's personality, "[b]ut it more de principle of de ting, you know? Black and white never come to no good. De Lord Jesus never meant us to mix it up" (318).

Immigrants want their children to not only be original parts of the new homeland, but they want them to also keep and navigate their parents' identities, and not neglect or forget the cultural, religious and ethnic limitations their parents present to them. This desire shows how challenging and difficult the case is to the immigrants and their children as well. While they consider England to be their homeland, and consider themselves to be English, immigrants are still struggling to keep the ties to their other or "original" homelands, and want their children to do so. Interestingly, Bergholtz (2016) remarks that Smith blames the calamities of the story as springing from the inevitable effects of globalization which promotes a pluralistic society but fails to ensure there is no ambiguity in it. For immigrants and their children, identity involves an inner contention that is based on questions concerning links to the original home, religion, race, culture the past, and the future.

- Post-racial Theory and the Identity of Second-generation Immigrants:

Second-generation immigrants' struggle to determine their identity is a significant part of their daily lives. Understanding that origins and "roots" are complicated and undependable is the link that connects Millat, Magid and Irie. As they are the children of first-generation immigrants, Millat, Magid and Irie are connected through the constant struggle to define their identities and the confusing status of not fully belonging either to their original homeland or to England. At the same time, they go through the confusing state of belonging to both homelands simultaneously. The second-generation immigrants' status of belonging is really complicated. Thompson comments on their status in *White Teeth* by stating that "the text suggests that as a result of belonging to different generations and holding a diversity of cultural beliefs, the possibility of feeling at 'home' in this multicultural world is unlikely" (Thompson 123). So, the confusion that the second-generation immigrants have about their belonging is not the only link that connects them, their shared rebellion against

their parents' cultural expectations and the desire of finding their own way in the English society is another significant link.

The second-generation immigrants' means to find their own identities are unacceptable to their parents and considered to be as foreign as many other things associated with the English culture. First-generation immigrants, especially Samad, believe that, in England, there is nothing for immigrants' children but corruption and destruction of familial and religious morals. He complains about this belief to Archie and gives him what he considers a real-life example:

Well, take Alsana's sisters—all their children are nothing but trouble. They won't go to mosque, they don't pray, they speak strangely, they dress strangely, they eat all kinds of rubbish, they have intercourse with God knows who. No respect for tradition. People call it assimilation when it is nothing but corruption. Corruption!. (Smith 159)

The second-generation immigrants' hybrid experience is located between respecting their family's national and racial legacy, and being an active and contributing part of the English culture, which, according to the first-generation immigrants' point of view, makes the children become too English. The novel clearly shows the confusion that both first and second generation immigrants have, and its suggestion that the second-generation immigrants should successfully balance their feeling of belonging, is valuable. Second-generation immigrants should find a way to balance their identities to include both their original and current cultures; they should keep all the precious values of their ethnicities and previous cultures, and not alienate themselves from the culture of England, the land in which they were born and raised.

Bağlama (2019) pertinently notes that *White Teeth* is as much about identity as it is about finding mechanisms to escape from a chaotic, fragmented, alienated world. The only difference that can be seen between Magid, Millat and Irie is their belonging to different racial and cultural backgrounds. Otherwise they share a similar situation of being descendants of immigrants who live in England, which creates a stronger link between them than any chasm created by their differences. These children, like their parents, can be described as "others" in the English society. Regardless of the fact that the immigrants' children are English by birth, raised in England and embrace all the values of the English society, they will be perceived as "others." There will be people who would judge them depending on their race and assign them a mistaken identity which will make them feel less than the perfect type of citizens:

He knew that he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelled of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's

jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all the jobs to his relatives; that he could be a dentist or a shop-owner or a curry shifter, but not a footballer or a film-maker; that he should go back to his own county; or stay here and earn his bloody keep; that he worshiped elephants and wore turbans; that no one who looked like Millat, or spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat, was ever on the news unless they had recently been murdered. (Smith 194)

The previous passage shows Millat's understanding of how he is perceived in the English society, and how limiting these perceptions are for him. Regardless of the fact that he, Magid and Irie are English by birth and upbringing, they feel that they are misidentified, seen as "Others," and constantly reminded that they are not originally English, and that their hybrid identities are not the ideal English identities.

In *White Teeth*, Englishness is portrayed as if it is an exclusive identity to represent white, English people only, while in reality, 'Englishness' is also shown yellow, brown and black as much as it is white. While there are many examples, such as the children's teacher Poppy Jones, to show that Englishness is personified in the white people, yet, the actions of Millat, Magid and Irie are usually presented as English as those of their other fellow students. According to their parents' points of view, the second-generation immigrants' Englishness is frightening. The way they want to stick to the English culture by following English manners of thinking and valuing life matters is what makes the second-generation immigrants become real English. In this context, the role of English as a language at play in deconstructing rigid notions of identity is identified by Ledent (2016) when she notes that it helps shape the post-colonial human relations.

Interestingly, the novel reveals an important case about English identity and the concepts of homeland when Magid is sent to Bangladesh to embrace the Bengali culture and traditions and returns from there more English than he was when he left England. He stays in Bangladesh for years, but develops more faith in the English sciences and culture more than he does in the Bengali culture. Moreover, he appears as if he even neglects the teachings of the religion his father wanted him to strictly follow by starting to eat pork which is a great disappointment to his father. Even though Samad sent Magid back to Bangladesh to shield him from the corruption of London, Magid embraces the English culture and becomes as much of an Englishman as his father dreaded. Magid's embracing of the English identity after his living in Bangladesh proves the point that "routes," not roots, are the determining factors of the person's identity. The novel suggests that returning to roots or origins is not a simple thing. Therefore, when Samad tries to link his son, Magid, to his parents' culture by sending him there, Magid finds out that he

belongs to England, the land in which he was born and raised, more than his parents' native homeland.

Although his children lived in completely different cultures for a while, Millat in England and Magid in Bangladesh, they anyhow grew up to dash their father's expectations. Magid, when he moved to Bangladesh, embraced his internal English identity and grew up to admire the scientific mindset characteristic of the English culture, and rejected his Bengali culture and his parents' faith. On the other hand, Millat, in England, struggles with his English identity and begins to reject the English culture. While struggling with his identity and feeling confused due to his belonging to both the English and Bengali cultures, Millat feels more connected to his origins and hence ends up getting involved in the KEVIN gang. His joining the KEVIN can be as a rebellion against his English identity. He tries to take the advantage of religious, ethnic and racial identifiers that he thinks would make him more than just English as his other fellow students. Disappointed over his children's taking paths he does not approve, Samad wonders what was wrong: "what was wrong with all the children, what had gone wrong with these first descendants of the great ocean-crossing experiment? Didn't they have everything they could want? Was there not a substantial garden area ... weren't they safe?" (Smith 182).

### Conclusion

This study finds out that Smith's *White Teeth* forces readers to identify the current English experience as not about accepting multiculturalism and the so-called "others," but about accepting the fact that there are people with hybrid identities who contribute to the English culture as well as their English compatriots. Thompson says that the novel "offer[s] us alternative ways of thinking about belonging and unbelonging in our multicultural, global world" (Thompson 124). Ali and Ibrahim (2019) also note that the role of the history and the past of the first gen immigrants cannot be shirked away in identity construction by the second generation. Regardless of the fact that these citizens with hybrid identities have different heritages, origins and cultural backgrounds, their hybrid identities are the post-national, post-racial ones of the twenty-first century.

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