

**THE PROBLEMS OF IMMIGRANTS: A READING ON ZADIE
SMITH'S *WHITE TEETH***

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Abstract

Zadie Smith is an Afro-British novelist, her *White Teeth* is about the early lives of two wartime friends - Archie Jones and Samad Iqbal and it is vividly depicted the problems of immigrants from Jamaica to England. This paper is mainly focused on racism, and in this novel Iqbal and Bowden are the main characters through them the racism and its issues are described. This paper also examines the struggle of the second generation, and the tooth symbolizes the original identity of Irie who was betrayed by her step mother. Ethnicity is most commonly used as a social-political construct and it includes shared origin, language and cultural traditions. The colonization of various races resulted in conflict, and *White Teeth* primarily takes the lives of issues of colonised nations into report. In this context, race becomes an important component of *White Teeth*.

Keywords: Colour, Second generation, Immigrants, Racism, Cultural conflicts

White Teeth starts with the suicide of Archie Jones and moves to the celebration on New Year. The novel is dealt with three different religions – Islamic, Jamaica and Britain. The chapters centre on the major role of male characters to encounter the turning point in their lives: the peculiar second marriage of Archie Jones, the temptation of Iqbal, the return of Magid and the trouble with Millat.

Racism is a belief that groups of humans own various behavioural traits and can be split into the superiority of one over another race or ethnicity. Ethnicity is always used in a sense to close one tradition attributes to race. Racial discrimination and Racism is always used to set out prejudice on an ethnic or cultural basis, self-reliant of these differences are described as racial. The definition of racial discrimination by the United Nations expanded in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination take on 1966. In International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination Article 1, Part 1 accurately stated:

...any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. (2)

White Teeth examines the life of Londoners of various ethnicities and social classes, with their relation and own cultural backgrounds. Hall says that: “Race is the modality in which class is lived. It is also the medium in which class relations are experienced” (103). Archie and the Chalfen’s family were popular Britons, Iqbals and Bowdens are present immigrants. The novel *White Teeth* provide the idea of racism fixed in the culture of British by describing the non-white without respect. The novel provides few hopes for a peaceful multi-culture world through the younger generation of Londoners who brings positive relation with another.

Systemic racism has a significant impact on the Iqbal’s lives, beginning with Iqbal, who despite being well-read and skilled having served in the British Army during World War II; it is unable to search service in London which is more highly developed than working as a waiter in a curry house. The novel recounts instance of micro aggressions that Iqbal has faced over the course of many decades. Iqbal the only non-white in his World War II division is

treated with contempt by his fellow Army officers. Even after few years, in London, where his children attend a middle-class school, he is also treated as an outsider. Iqbal becomes perplexed and troubled, fascinated to and opposed to aspects of Western society, as witnessed by his affair with Poppy Burt-Jones, which he sees as a Western vice. He is fixed on to the subject that his son Millat to a harsh Islamic background. Ralph Waldo Emerson states, “The end of the human race will be that it will eventually die of civilization.”

In addition to telling how racism and racial categories affect Iqbal, *White Teeth* challenges the notion that many of the novels’ white characters, together with Poppy Burt-Jones and Joyce Chalfen, support: that cultural differences and racial are easily understood and approached. In their interactions with non-white people, both characters are viewed as mistaken and often offensive. Poppy, for example, believes Iqbal is Indian, despite the fact that he is from Bangladesh and is drawn to him because of exoticism he appears to stand for. For the time being, Joyce Chalfen intent on nurturing others like plants makes incorrect, assumption about Irie, Millat and Magid’s bonding with their parent’s, implying that coloured people will not value their children suitably. Joyce and Poppy demonstrate a simplistic, ineffective and harmful accepting of race by assume that they understand other’s racial identities, it is simple to connect the gap between their own and other’s experiences of ethnic and cultural differences. *White Teeth* depicts Iqbal, Irie, Millat and Magid as far more difficult and nuanced figures than Poppy and Joyce visualize them to be, implying that only those who live with a particular racial identity can comprehend the experience of that identity.

While the novel’s younger characters don’t decide or go beyond racial conflicts, they do offer another and noticeably more positive, image of race relations. Irie, unlike Iqbal does not choose to isolate herself from the society as a result of the racist incidents she has witnessed. She is a part of a second younger generation of multicultural Londoners who are used to racial differences and the resistance they can cause. Though racism exists at Glenard Oak, Irie’s friendships with her peers, namely Millat, Magid and Josh Chalfen, remain unaffected by racial divisions throughout the *White Teeth*. The end *White Teeth*, Irie, Millat, Magid and Josh have formed a sort of family. Irie and Josh are raising her daughter, who refers to Millat and Magid as uncles, implying their unity in the face of racial strife.

The fact of racism and racial difference cause some characters including Iqbal and Millat, to become angry and violent. *White Teeth* also portrays peaceful cultural coexistence through the characters of Irie, Millat, Magid and Josh. *White Teeth* argues that racial differences and the shocking affects of racism cannot be easily forgotten, it also presents an uncertainly optimistic view of racial and cultural exchange in the modern society, in view of how race and ethnicity impact those creating different narratives for them, but do not at all times force those apart.

If religion is the opiate off the people, tradition is an even more sinister analgesic, simply because it rarely appears sinister. If religion is a tight band, a throbbing vein, and a needle, tradition is a far homelier concoction: poppy seeds ground into tea; a sweet cocoa drink laced with cocaine; the kind of thing your grandmother might have made. To Samad, as to the people of Thailand, tradition was culture, and culture led to roots, and these were good, these were untainted principles. That didn't mean he could live by them, abide by them, or grow in the manner they demanded, but roots were roots and roots were good. You would get nowhere telling him that weeds too have tubers, or that the first sign of loose teeth is something rotten, something degenerate, deep within the gums. (WT, 193)

The so-called symbol of the novel *White Teeth* is teeth, represents the power of identity. Teeth have roots in the past and in ones' culture. They can also rot either from the root or from the bared portion. This rot likely is symbolic of the ways in which immigrant's quests for identity can go wrong, causing damage to the self. The characters in *White Teeth* frequently try to change their identities and appearances in order to gain acceptance within the foremost culture. The novel explores how many alterations or lack can cause nearby and difference for individuals.

Modern British culture norms insist flawless white teeth, such as those attained by Archie racist boss, Kelvin Hero, whose "double row of pearly whites... owed more to expensive dentistry than to regular brushing" (WT, 70.) Individuals attempt to achieve these norms by caring for their teeth and even changing them through cosmetic dentistry. Iqbal insults his son

Magid, who has aligned himself with Western culture, by referring to him “Mr. White-trousered Englishman with his stiff-upper-lip and his big white teeth.” (WT, 454)

Clara Bowden’s entire top rows of teeth are knocked out as a teenager in a bike accident. When Archie meets her on 1975 in the day of New Year, this lack of teeth is “possibly her one flaw.” Clara’s missing teeth and her unmasked Jamaican pronunciation makes her voice sound odd, but she is confident in her single identity: “come de end of de world, d’Lord won’t mind if I have no toofs,” she tells to Archie. (WT, 25) On the day of her wedding to British Archie, she begins to wear a perfect set of false teeth also begins to work on eliminating any traces of her Jamaican accent. Clara’s willing adaptation into British culture is symbolised by this compromise to British dental norms.

Clara’s’ adaptation appears to Irie, her teen daughter to be a purposeful attempt to conceal their familial roots. When Irie discovers her mother is wearing false teeth a discovery that occurs by accident. When Irie knocks over the glass containing the artificial teeth in Clara’s room and the teeth literally bite down in Irie’s flesh. She interprets this dishonesty as an on purpose betrayal by her mother and a conscious effort to destroy the familial past she longs to know. The false teeth, according to Irie, are “yet another item in a long list of parental hypocrisies and untruths;” they symbolize “stories you never got told” and “histories you never entirely uncovered” (WT, 379). The discovery of Irie’s mother’s artificial teeth forces Irie to leave her parent’s and move in with her grandmother. Where Irie begins boring her family history through photos and other remains hidden in her grandmother’s cupboards. Including a picture of Clara in front of her artificial teeth, “grinning maniacally, the true horror of the teeth revealed” (WT, 381). Irie’s decision to become a dentist exemplifies her desire to discover and care for realism, in both past and in the present.

By the end, *White Teeth* represent how people should recognise their similarities as human beings and work together to live in peace. The novel focuses on a Bangladeshi family to depict ethnicity and cultural prejudices. Iqbal and his wife Alsana are the first generation of immigrants to the United Kingdom, and their sons are the second. Throughout the plot of the story, Iqbal makes references to his roots. Iqbal refers to the paths and defends Islam as his true culture. Iqbal is concerned that his sons will not be exposed to a harsh environment in London. He considers British culture to be dishonest. Iqbal bemoans the fact that he fell in

love with a white woman. He attributes it to his mistakes of not attaching to Muslim values and thus misbehaving against Allah and the woman was his temptation. Iqbal claims that he should never have come to Britain because it is the source of all issues. He claims that bringing his sons to Britain is as far from God as bringing them to Bangladesh. All forms of immorality have occurred as evidenced by visible protection on the pavements, Harvest festival participation while forgetting his culture.

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