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硕 士 学 位 论 文

**Identification but not Homogenization:  
On Mimicry in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth***  
身份认同而非同质化: 论《白牙》里的模拟

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## Synopsis

This MA thesis uses Jamaican British writer Zadie Smith's debut novel *White Teeth* as the case study. With the employment of Homi Bhabha's strategy of mimicry, it explores the identification of generations of immigrants in the postcolonial Britain. Different from previous reviews of the book, the thesis takes the perspective of temporality, stressing the existing being of the Third Space in today's Britain. Through analyzing different degrees of immigrant generations' adaptation to the cosmopolis by unilateral or two-way mimicry when facing essentialist nationalism, the thesis studies the process of their identity construction, and the differences between them in racial discourse, religion and nation identification. It reaches the conclusion that racial and cultural homogenization is impossible and that identity is compartmentalized in the process of identification.

The first chapter generalizes Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry and its adoption in both the past colony and the present cosmopolis. It emphasizes that mimicry cannot be separated from race. The strategy symbolizes the colonial authority and in the meantime menaces the latter because of its ingrained quality of not quite/not white. From the temporal angle, the chapter further studies the causes and effects of the strategy. Otherness exists not only between the native and the immigrant, but also in the individual's past and present. Temporal deferment between the prescriptive pedagogical and the ever-changing performative makes the one who conducts mimicry fluctuates between past tradition and metropolitan alienate present. The national culture in the postcolonial world is instable, and the subject of the nation splits to permit minority's voices which make dissemiNation possible. This chapter also recalls the British immigration policies since WWII, and points out that Britain has been hostile to immigrants. The legislation demonstrates essentialist nationalism that is called Englishness. The chapter compares Englishness and Britishness, introduces various categories of identity, and stresses that identification is a process. Finally, this part confirms that Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* is characterized by Britishness and mimicry.

The second chapter starts the textual analysis within the framework of mimicry along the two lines—races and generations. The racial essentialism usually takes the shape of racial discrimination, and the non-white are struggling to live through the

unavoidable stage of the liminality, to shake off the ascribed identity, and to claim the avowed one. By the attitudes of the characters such as a white businessman, a veteran and an old Jamaican immigrant, this part shows that in the book racial stereotypes are bilateral, and the white tend to ascribe “the Other” to all immigrants while the latter call the former robbers. Then by telling the experiences of other characters like Clara, the Chalfens and school children, it also proves that multiplicity is the tendency.

The third chapter discusses nationality-building, homeland invention, intergenerational adaptation and religious conflicts in the fabric of temporality, and highlights race as the foundation of minority imaginary. In the stories of Samad and his twin sons, mimicry is used in divergent ways. Physical distance and temporal separation create an illusory picture of the motherland for the first generation, and they reverse mimicry to regain what was abandoned in order to keep different in the host country. Making effort to dominate their present, the sons and their generation take the place where they were born and brought up as their motherland. They at once question their position in the city and embrace the city by positively playing a unique role there. They are people of action taking measures to change others’ perception. Mimicry for them is two-way navigation between their family root and their local community. The chapter also attaches a special importance to the role of religion in identity seeking. The advocacy of religious purity is a pedagogical power which just fails both Samad and Millat. Alsana and Irie by contrast succeed in assimilation due to their openness and positive confrontation with the present.

The part of conclusion reiterates that the realist book of *White Teeth* vividly displays the current existence of multiracial Britain characterized by cultural hybridity. In temporality, the British today live in the Third Space where they are unconsciously involved in the combat between the pedagogical and the performative.

**Key Words:** *White Teeth*; mimicry; identity; the Third Space

## 中文摘要

本文对英国牙买加裔女作家扎迪·史密斯的处女作《白牙》做文本分析，运用霍米·巴巴的模拟理论，讨论了该书里不同世代的移民如何努力获得身份认同、融入英国社会，旨在从时间性的角度，强调在当前的后殖民英国里存在着第三空间。不同世代的移民在构建身份的过程中遭遇英格兰民族主义，采取了单一或是双向的模拟方法，从而在种族话语、宗教、国家认同等方面产生了世代差异。本文认为后殖民的第三空间不允许种族和文化同质化，其间，移民在认同过程中构建起的身份包含着诸多元素，相互作用，具有时间性。

第一章概述巴巴的模拟理论，以及它在过去的殖民地和现在的西方国家里的体现，强调了该策略与种族密不可分。因为模拟本身所固有的不完全/非白种的特性，原被殖民者对殖民者的模拟，既是宗主国权威的反映，又威胁了这种权威。本章从时间角度探讨了模拟的起因与结果。在后殖民的今天，“他者”的隔阂不但存在于移入国民众与涌入的外来移民之间，还体现在个体的过去与当下之间。身份构建是两种力量相互作用的过程：一是起约束作用的说教力量，一是不断调适的行为力量。两者之间存在时间差，使得进行模拟的人摇摆于过去的传统与异化的当下之间。国家文化不再一成不变，国家主体产生分裂，少数族裔的话语崛起，关于国家的言说不再单一。本章还回顾了自二战以来英国的移民政策，指出英国法律实质上折射了“英格兰性”这一民族主义，并不欢迎移民。为此，通过对封闭性的英格兰性和开放的不列颠性做比较，本章介绍了身份构成的不同角度和不同分类，肯定了《白牙》所描写的英国具有不列颠性。

第二章沿着种族和世代两条线索，在模拟的框架下细读文本。种族本真主义体现为种族偏见。偏见是相互的，如文中的白人商人、白人老兵和牙买加老移民等，相互之间为对方贴上一成不变的身份标签：白人把移民统称为他者，移民认定白人全都是忘恩负义的强盗。非白人要摆脱身份标签、赢得自我的道路更为艰难。而另一方面，文本里的主流却是不列颠性的开放和多元文化的异彩纷呈。这通过克拉拉、谢尔芬一家和学生们的经历得以很好的展现。

第三章讨论了在时间性的架构里国籍构建、祖国幻想、世代调适和宗教冲突等几个方面，突出了种族是少数族裔想像的基础。萨马德和他的双胞胎儿子进行

模拟的方法是不同的。老一代移民原先尽力模仿宗主国人的言行举止，一心要融入他们，但是在饱受歧视之后，时空隔绝使得他们对于祖国的想像不尽其实，颇多美化。年轻一代则立足于当下，把生于斯、长于斯的宗主国认同为祖国。他们一方面质疑自己被歧视的地位，另一方面在这个国家里扮演着积极而独特的建设角色。他们勇于改变人们对他们的看法，其模拟跨越了家族之根和成长环境，是双向的，而非父辈那种移民模拟移入国人民的单向形式。这一部分还特别突出了宗教在身份构建里的地位。所谓的宗教纯洁性其实是一种说教力量，萨马德父子都没能真正实现。倒是他的妻子艾尔莎和女主角爱丽因为能够宽容并积极正视现实而成功地适应了英国生活，找到自我。这一章还进一步厘清种族问题的地位，说明它非但没有消解，反而是文化多样性和杂糅性的基础。

本文在结论部分重申了《白牙》展现多元化英国的现实状况，指出虽然多种族的英国人自己并无意识，但他们正生活在说教力量与行为力量角力的第三空间里。

**关键词：**《白牙》；模拟；身份；第三空间



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## Introduction

Britain has different social and population constitutions from before in the post-Empire age. Concomitantly, her social psychology and citizen identification are experiencing enormous changes. It has long been debated what British nationality is and whether Britain is a nationalist country. Three hundred years ago in his poem “The True-born Englishman” Daniel Defoe saw the budding empire as one of heterogeneity, describing the English as “a people composed of mongrelised ‘mixtures’, identifying the Scot, Pict and Dane among many other constituent elements” (C. Phillips, “Mixed and Matched”, 2000: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/jan/09/fiction.zadiesmith>).

In the age of postcolonialism, the arrogant Empire has become the Commonwealth to have to adjust to new relationships with her former colonies, especially the West Indies, those in the subcontinent and those from Africa. These now independent countries exercise powerful impacts both outside and inside her. Their influence from the within results from tremendous migration that is remapping a variety of realms in this cosmopolis where the long-established dualism has to decline and ambivalence and reinterpretation thrive.

The immigration tide directly leads to racial and cultural clashes, particularly between the white and the non-white. The non-white are grouped into a single category of “black British” due to their political similarities. The term with the use of the lower case “b” is defined by Prabhu Guptara in *Black British Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* as “those people of non-European origin who are now or were in the past, entitled to hold a British Passport and displayed a substantial commitment to Britain, for example by living a large part of their lives here” (Guptara, 1986:16). The single term however takes a risk of homogenization of their difference into an easily accessible, controllable, and definable form, erasing diversity across ethnic and cultural groups. As a result, since the 1990s, further fragmentation among communities has been encouraged, and more separate categorization and politicized constructions of religious or ethnic identities have been on the increase, such as “British Muslims”. Race can no longer be naturalized as skin colour only. Instead,

more than a biological term, it is increasingly associated with such constituents as culture, gender, class, economy or social identification and psychology.

Numerous identity categories compete for their own discursive right through a plenitude of strategies including mimicry. Likewise, in the literary field flourish rewriting, reinterpretation and rehistoricization, by minority writers in particular. Black British writing has a long history, beginning with the slave narratives of Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho, through the work of 1930s Caribbean writers such as C.L.R. James and Una Marson, to the Windrush generation of authors and artists including Claudia Jones, George Lamming, Sam Selvon, John La Rose, Kamau Braithwaite, V.S. Naipaul, Wilson Harris and Aubrey Williams (Low, 2006:5). These writers bear double awareness of being both minorities and British. They are engrossed in combining the duality to construct a new nationality of the postcolonial Britain. History is a top concern. These writers have to handle history of their origin, of Britain and of the interrelation between the two. Salman Rushdie chronicles the unfettered migrant sensibility to create new identities by reimagining history in his magical-realism. Sam Selvon engages himself in creolizing the English novel. In Kazuo Ishiguro's works, history, as well as personal memory, stands by at a distance, but never stopping its "selecting, framing and rearranging" (Mengham, 2003:2). Hanif Kureishi centres on essentialism in nationality. Zadie Smith is interested in different generations' divergent conceptions of multiculturalism.

The British-born half-Jamaican writer Zadie Smith has so far contributed three novels, most major characters being non-white or whites in mixed marriages. With the shades of Salman Rushdie, Martin Amis, Hanif Kureishi and even Charles Dickens, Smith's multicultural people attend to pressing questions of family and fate as they navigate a maze of history, identity and, most inescapably, race. She wins worldwide acclaim immediately after the publication of the first novel *White Teeth*, and is hailed as a new voice in British literature. Her second novel, *The Autograph Man*, meets with mixed reviews. Her third novel *On Beauty*, widely thought to play homage to E.M. Foster's *Howards End*, gives "a panoramic view" of the way of today's life, "simultaneously intellectual and visceral" (Simpson, 2006).

Negative views of *White Teeth* are mostly about its narrative and styles. For instance, James Wood coins a term "hysterical realism" to refer to cartoonishness in the book stuffed with plentiful information and caricature characters, moaning that storytelling has become a kind of grammar. Brian Phillips agrees that the author who

is unable to show events from the perspective of real characters only shows characters from the perspective of real events. But in the mainstream, the book has gained overwhelming critical acceptance. Some critics concentrate on literary heritage and the themes of the book. Merritt Moseley makes a comparison between Zadie Smith and George Eliot, finding that both women writers tackle questions of paternity, patrimony, and patriotism. Some critics reflect on the structure and the perspective of the book, such as Matthew Paproth who points out the postmodernist attitude in the modernist narrative. There has been much more criticism of culture and postcolonialism. Raphael Delleo relates creolization to London's cultural pluralism, laying stress on history and biological racism. Kris Knauer as well as Merritt Moseley gives a warning against the syndrome of the fascination with the Other. Z.Esra Mirze has an interest in an ideological shift in the definition of otherness. Dominic Head discusses the sense of cultural confusion in the framework of Homi Bhabha's theories, and the impact of genetics on the postcolonial world. Most reviews like that of Kathleen O'Grady identify the author's celebratory tone in the description of polyracial metropolis, but others such as Katarzyna Jakubiak's essay voice a different opinion that optimism in the book is simulated in regard to the international marketing and hyping.

This MA thesis uses *White Teeth* as the case study. Like her contemporary writers, Smith squares up to the two questions which gnaw at the very roots of the modern condition: Who are we? Why are we here? By analyzing *White Teeth* for the answers from postcolonial and cultural perspectives, the thesis elaborates on the confrontation and interaction between English nationalism and heterogeneous Britishness as a result of immigration from former colonies, focusing on migrant adoption of mimicry strategy and on the temporal interrelation in the search for identity and identification, arriving at the conclusion that in the postcolonial cosmopolis, racial and cultural homogeneity is impossible and that identity is compartmentalized in the process of identification.

Spanning nearly 500 pages and 150 years, *White Teeth* chronicles, in a distinctly modern voice, lives of three families in north London. Samad Iqbal, a Muslim living in Willesden Green, is a proud and passionate Bangladeshi whose career path is as stunted as his war-withered hand. He has on mind his great-grandfather, Mangal Pande, who may or may not have been the catalyst for the Sepoy Rebellion, and whose nemesis, General Havelock, is commemorated by a statue in Trafalgar Square.

Alsana, Samad's much younger wife, comes to him through an arranged marriage and can kick and punch him with a ferocity that matches his own. They have problem twin sons, Magid who is sent to Bangladesh but comes back to London a very English scientific infidel, and Millat who is a member of KEVIN—Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation. Samad's lifelong friend, Archie Jones, is a resident of Willesden hailing from Brighton and once came joint thirteenth in an Olympic cycling event. Committing suicide in vain after the divorce, he is married to Afro-Caribbean Clara Bowden, a 6-foot Jamaican and lapsed Jehovah's Witness. They have one daughter, Irie, who is too-plump and often depressed. Halfway through the book the second generation—Magid, Millat, and Irie—become involved with the Chalfens, Marcus and Joyce—straight-talking, middle-class, Jewish, educated and liberal—and their children, particularly son Joshua who later joins FATE, an animal rights group.

Samad and Archie are bosom pals, meeting regularly in O'Connell's Pool House, where the owner and sole employee, Abdul-Mickey, whose relatives are all called Abdul with an Irish or English name tagged on, refuses to serve pork, and reads handbooks on how to look after the customers. Archie and Samad were brought together by the war, and their particular war involved driving a tank around defeated towns, until it broke down and they were left without support in a Bulgarian village. Samad is Archie's teacher, his guru, his misguided conscience, and he lectures him on great-grandfathers and "the East" and Englishness—his moment of greatest inspiration came in the Bulgarian village as they waited, unaware that the war was over, fuelled by morphine collected from abandoned medicine chests. Archie, eternally the pupil, finds it hard to know what to think without help. He tosses a ten-pence coin to make all life's more difficult decisions.

Also in this village the pals happen to capture a Nazi doctor, but out of sympathy Archie just lets him go when executing him, without notifying Samad. The doctor reappears as a genetic expert when Chalfen, the biologist, holds a news press in 1992 for his patented FutureMouse, a creature that has been genetically coded to live its life according to a fixed calendar, with diseases occurring at preordained points. The Chalfen children for ideological reasons go to the same comprehensive as Samad and Archie's. When Joshua Chalfen, Millat and Irie are caught during a police raid of the drug haunts outside the school, their harried headmaster sends Irie and Millat on a course of improvement at Joshua's house. To everyone's surprise, the arrangement

works well—initially at least Joyce Chalfen, the mother, quickly takes to Millat, the street gangster, and in more than a motherly way; and Irie, much in love with the easy life, helps Marcus, the father, with his filing.

Dramatically almost everyone who has appeared at any point in the book attends the news press for FutureMouse. After a mess, the creature runs away, the twins are punished for Millat's intended killing, and Irie is revealed pregnant but unable to make sure of the baby's father between the twins.

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## **Chapter One Mimicry in Identity Construction and Nationalism in Britain**

### **1.1 Homi Bhabha's Not Quite/Not White**

Political and economic changes and developments have given rise to what now is well known and sensed—globalization. One of its effects is the tremendous migration, especially from former colonies to their metropolises. Globalization can be interpreted in two ways: the compression of the world and the notion of the integration of the world (Robertson, 2000:12). The host country can be taken as a compressed world with its diversity in ethnicities and cultures. The geographical shifts help blur the borders of nations and peoples, which no doubt leads to a search of identity by both migrants and metropolitan natives. The battlefield between the colonized and the colonizer accordingly moves from the former colony to the metropolis. This MA thesis tries to focus on mimicry employed by migrants to assimilate into their mother country which they used to identify with before migration yet feel lost in after arrival.

In his 1994 book of *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha advocates a couple of terminologies to delineate the existence of postcolonial discourse, among which mimicry is a powerful and insightful one. Mimicry, claims Bhabha, as the mode of colonial discourse, is a strategy of colonial power and knowledge. The narcissistic demand of colonial authority takes colonial man as the Other, an object of regulatory power. Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* keenly points out that “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it” (Fanon, 1965:210). The blank has to be filled in and the repressed has to be replaced by the repressing. The colonial native has to accept what is imposed on him. At the same time the pre-existent differences in cultures, races and histories determine the colonial man to be the subject of racial, cultural and national representation. Out of respect for the authority, the colonial man mimics the colonizer’s behaviours and discourse, partially to produce a vision of the latter’s presence. Hence the object takes an



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