



Immigrants' Rooted Cosmopolitan Identity Construction in *White Teeth*

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Abstract— Focusing on Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, this paper examines how immigrants construct rooted cosmopolitan identity in globalized London. By combining Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism with close reading, it explores the disillusion behind the first-generation immigrants' nostalgia for mythologized "roots" and the second-generation immigrants' mimetic assimilation to "pure Britishness", revealing how recognition-seeking trajectories fracture the subject's sense of temporal continuity. Through the second-generation immigrant Irie's embodied memory which echoes the sensory survival lineage of the Maroons, Smith rethreads roots and routes, suturing racial memory to the textures of London everyday life and resisting cultural-spiritual coloniality that exceeds territorial sovereignty. In the resistant narrative, *White Teeth* explores a third route to immigrants' identity—the construction of rooted cosmopolitan identity which passage from rootless assimilation to rooted identification, highlighting the cohabitation of ethnicity and cosmopolitanism at the scale of nested memberships, showing Smith's unique writing back to the Empire.



Keywords— *White Teeth*; Zadie Smith; Rooted Cosmopolitanism; Identity Construction

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, the resurgence of British nationalism has posed increasing challenges to multicultural societies. Although cosmopolitanism is often proposed as a response to nationalist exclusion, universalist cosmopolitanism in Western discourse tends to privilege male, white, and middle-class subjectivities, constructing the cosmopolitan as "an intellectual...not limited by the local culture of his place of upbringing" (Veer, 2004). Its ideals and practices tend to overlook the complexity of structural inequalities related to race, gender, and class, making it difficult to effectively address the specific situations of marginalized groups which is actually what Zadie Smith explores in *White Teeth* (2000).

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000), deals with the first and second generations of the multicultural British diaspora

with its exploration of two-generation immigrant families living in North-East London. Existing studies on *White Teeth* has predominantly focused on Samad's obsessive attachment to cultural "roots" alongside discussions of Magid and Irie's over-assimilation into Britishness, which likewise fails to provide a stable basis for identity. For instance, Kershaw (2021) highlights how colonial histories continue to shape diasporic identities through everyday racial dynamics. Yet few studies have identified rooted cosmopolitanism as a viable alternative that reconciles both extremes to offer a more dynamic mode of identity formation. This article argues that *White Teeth* advances a form of rooted cosmopolitanism that reconciles historical racial memory with contemporary hybridity. Rather than positioning "roots" and "routes" as oppositional, Smith presents identity as a fluid negotiation between ethnic inheritance and cosmopolitan openness, thereby offering a

literary reconfiguration of Appiah's concept of rooted cosmopolitanism. Through this framework, the novel envisions a mode of subject formation capable of resisting both cultural nostalgia and total assimilation, while maintaining continuity between past and present.

II. DISILLUSIONMENT OF THE FIRST-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS WITH MYTHOLOGIZED ROOTS

"Roots" serve as a significant symbol of belonging and identity construction for immigrants. However, in *White Teeth*, Samad's obsession with "roots" ultimately leads to disillusionment. Samad's "roots" are mythologized through two forms: religion and cultural memory, representing his fantasized pursuit of ethnic, cultural, and moral purity. As a Bengali immigrant, Samad Iqbal is marginalized in racial, social, historical, cultural, and economic dimensions, becoming a covert victim, despite this process functioning within politically correct rhetoric and discourse. Wendy Webster (2005) systematically discusses the changes in "Englishness" before and after WWII in *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965*. During and after WWII, Britain, as the empire on which the sun never sets, was depicted as a "people's empire", and the war was framed as "the people's war". During this period, due to wartime necessity, subjects of the empire—regardless of race, color, or class—were united, fighting together against the fascist invasion. As a soldier in WWII, Samad's "loyalty" is actually a result of his internalization to colonialization. Though disabled by a wartime injury, he "proudly aligns himself with the British Empire with a sense of patriotic duty while fully embracing his racial, religious and cultural identity" (Bağlama, 2019, p. 82), while viewing fighting for a foreign country as a "great honor". However, by the late 1950s, a new narrative of "Englishness" emerged. During this period, Britain faced both internal and external pressures, with anti-imperialist waves rising in the colonies and a growing number of immigrants. British people began to change their views on empire and immigration when their traditional lifestyles threatened. Immigrants across the face of the earth—hundreds of millions of them—are often ground zero of nationalist resurgence, and often symbolize the foreign Other that threatens the imagined community of the nation, built as it is on the logic of insider/outsider, us/them (Friedman, 2018, p. 199). The people of the colonies who once brought glory to the empire and served it gradually became perceived as threats to "pure Englishness". The "people's empire" collided with a completely different narrative developed in the period that invoked a quiet, private, and domesticated identity, and showed empire as a threat to Englishness (Webster, 2005, p. 8). The rise of a

purely "uncontaminated" nationalism left Samad facing exclusion and marginalization. Fukuyama points out that Rousseau's ideal of complete societal withdrawal is ill-suited to the context of globalization, as limitless individual choice exacerbates alienation, forcing individuals "to the search for a common identity that will rebind the individual to a social group and reestablish a clear moral horizon" (Webster, 2005, p. 58). Consequently, Samad's inability to achieve recognition and dignity due to his socially constructed identity as the Other shatters his romanticized fantasy of the empire, prompting him to establish a collective identity which is manifested in the fervent religious faith and the cultural memory of their ancestor, Pandit.

Samad's religious fanaticism operates as an inward compensatory response to a "runaway" reality which makes him oppose the school's Harvest Festival as "pagan" and demands Islamic holidays instead. The issue is less doctrinal than political: converting the public visibility of ritual into identity validation, reading "school recognition of Islamic festivals" as imperial acknowledgment. Religion thus becomes an instrument of identity politics that offsets his marginal position within the dominant order. The school supervisor, however, applies a different standard: retain the Harvest Festival because its charitable orientation warrants it: "it is precisely the charity aspect of the Harvest Festival that makes it worth retaining?" (Smith, 2000, p. 130). Bringing food to the elderly needs no biblical warrant, since it is "more about community" (Smith, 2000, p. 130). The supervisor's stance exemplifies Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism: a universal concern for human welfare carried by a legitimate partiality to one's own community. The festival is kept as a civic practice that honors local ties while articulating obligations that cross confessional lines.

However, religious fanaticism fails to furnish Samad with a stable identity which grounded less in piety than in compensatory fixation. The conflict between religious sexual repression and the liberalized Western society in which he lived perpetually pulled Samad between assimilation into Western culture, its allure, and marginalization, resulting in a Du Boisian "double consciousness". In depicting Samad's religious devotion, Smith extensively employs a third-person perspective centered on Samad's viewpoint, conveying his identity as a devout Muslim through his actions, words, and inner thoughts. However, in the digression concerning Samad's prolonged struggle between sexuality and religion, the author's identity abruptly surfaces with the line 'Let's rewind a little' (Smith, 2000, p. 137), underscoring the 'unreliability' of the Samad-centred narrative. As a first-generation immigrant far from his homeland and a veteran

who fought for the metropole, he is inevitably influenced by metropolitan culture, rendering his contamination inevitable. The author's abrupt intervention shifts the reader's perspective from Samad's central viewpoint to an omniscient one, exposing the British trait Samad desperately conceals: self-comforting with British proverbs to justify his desecration of Islam. This double consciousness inevitably breeds a split identity, as the fragmentation of human consciousness, perpetually in conflict and incapable of coalescing into a unified awareness, compels those under its sway to act against their own sense of purpose, inflicting profound psychological anguish. He is torn between being a good Muslim and a man in Britain, between tradition and desire, between purity and corruption which yields his "hypocritical" religious practices. Under the pressure of double consciousness, Samad's body resists the moral imperatives of his mind: on the one hand he prays five times a day; on the other he conducts an extramarital affair with the music teacher Poppy which constitutes a counterattack against his disability and an attempt to demonstrate his power, charm, and agency. Although Poppy professes an interest in Indian culture and even stops her students from mocking Indian music, the gesture reads less as genuine cross-cultural understanding than as a strategic bid to attract Samad. Samad repeatedly insists that he is Bengali rather than "Indian", however, Poppy, as a white subject, disregards minority heterogeneity. After Samad ends the affair, Poppy appears at the restaurant where he works and, as a customer, accepts his service with brittle hauteur. Her "looking Samad up and down" (Smith, 2000, p. 208) invites a Fanonian reading of the white gaze—a form of visual power secured by positionality within a racialized order. Through the visual power of the white gaze, Poppy repositions Samad, a racial minority, at the bottom of the social hierarchy, exposing the absurd fantasy that ethnic minorities might achieve agency through sexual relations.

By absolutizing "roots" and seeking to reproduce them through a rhetoric of bloodline purity, contrary to Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism, Samad directly triggers intergenerational conflict in the immigrant family and deepens his paralysis between an unenterable new "home" and an irrecoverable old one. Appiah maintains that roots are plural and to be celebrated, and that patriotism does not preclude cosmopolitanism. Samad, by contrast, conceives of roots as singular and absolute which will pass naturally to the next generation: "our children will be born of our actions. Our accidents will become their destinies" (Smith, 2000, p. 102). When his religion and ideology are fundamentally incompatible with Western values, this one-dimensional, linear hereditarianism of blood leads him to

impose those "untainted principles" on his children, seeking in them the authority he has lost. The children's wish to join the Harvest Festival "like everybody else would" (Smith, 2000, p. 151) is a bid for recognition, but Samad blocks it with patriarchal authoritarianism. Paradoxically, as an act of protest, children adopt a Qur'anic "silence" to resist their insistence on absolute roots. What in Samad's religion marks a "process of purification" (Smith, 2000, p. 159) is here redeployed to unsettle that very purity, exposing the fragility of purity discourse. Here, the narrative focus shifts from the father's self-account to the children's collective action, redistributing agency from Samad to the younger generation. In this secondary narrative position, the father's "absolute roots" are revealed as an authority that demands constant maintenance and is easily appropriated. The cultural "roots" cannot return in their purest form, and the next generation no longer identifies with his "homeland sentiment". This generational conflict has thus torn apart Samad's illusion of establishing identity through religion.

Beyond religious fanaticism, Samad also mythologizes the cultural memory of the forefather Mangal Pande—the soldier said to have sparked the 1857 Indian Rebellion—as a heroic figure resisting colonial oppression. However, by repeatedly invoking Pandey's history to establish an identity as an "imperial rebel", Samad perpetuates an identity rooted in the colonial binary structure. His cultural memory functions both as an instrument of resistance and a shackle of nostalgia. In Appiah's definition, cosmopolitanism is an expansive act of the moral imagination. It sees human beings as shaping their lives within nesting memberships: a family, a neighborhood, a plurality of overlapping identity groups, spiraling out to encompass all humanity (Appiah, 2019, p. 20). In contrast to this inclusive ethical orientation, Samad, caught in the tension between his homeland and the colonial power, prefigures himself as a "hero" while casting Britain as the "villains" he must oppose, deliberately maintaining distance. Smith employs the metaphor of the garden's ancient tree, which 'took up half the garden with its roots and not allowing anything else to grow' (Smith, 2000, p. 195), to reveal Samad's fanatical obsession with "roots" and its inherent exclusivity. The detail of 'cutting down the old oak in the corner' suggests the solution: only by shedding this fixation on singular, absolute roots can space be created for multicultural symbiosis.

III. THE SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS' IDENTITY ANXIETY OF PURELY INTERNALIZING BRITISHNESS IN EUROCENTRIC COSMOPOLITANISM

Smith categorizes immigrants determined to fight for “recognition” into two groups: those who either reject everything differing from their tradition, or conversely, admire everything belonging to the dominant culture while rejecting everything stemming from their own heritage. Second-generation immigrants Irie and Majid belong to the latter category. They experience failure and frustration due to the exclusionary logic of the other identity constructed for immigrants by the host nation. This identity anxiety manifests in Majid’s linguistic inferiority complex and Ali’s physical transformation as they attempt to fully internalize a pure Britishness to gain “recognition”. Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry names this colonial technology of control: the colonized are pressed to copy the ruler’s outward forms and to internalize their values, “almost the same, but not quite”, thereby advancing a purportedly civilizing assimilation. Because mimicry operates in the registers of affect and ideology rather than naked coercion, it “emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 85). In such colonial discourse, the colonized are often required to demonstrate loyalty and assimilation by imitating the colonizers’ language, customs, and values, through which ‘a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated’ and ‘the conceptions of “truth”, “order”, and “reality” become established’ (Bağlama, 2019, p. 83). Majid’s fervent pursuit of standard English exemplifies this linguistic mimicry and the identity anxiety of Bengali immigrants experiencing linguistic shame within the discourse of the colonial power, reflecting his determination to prove to white people at all costs that he was intellectually rich and possessed equal intellect. It becomes evident in the episode where Abdul-Mickey, whose speech is marked by a pronounced Cockney accent, expresses admiration for Magid’s refined deployment of upper-class English. Majid was essentially striving to overcome his ideological self-image as an outsider and escape the melancholic symptoms of rootlessness, discontent, deprivation, working-class identity, and double alienation that plagued him under the stifling material conditions of life in the colonial metropolis. Linguistic mimicry offers a consolatory fiction and a special identity through which the colonial subject imagines himself part of the metropolitan nation. The difficulty is that Britishness itself is hybrid and in flux, hence the more Magid pursues a “pure” British identity through Standard English, the more he is out of step with those around him and sharpens the

paradox. This complete assimilation of pure Britishness stands in stark contrast to the creolization occurring within the globalized context. Expanding from its original reference to a linguistic phenomenon and ethnographic racial mixing to describe sociocultural fusion, the concept of creolization itself embodies a philosophy of difference—an embrace of boundary-crossing and heterogeneity (Xiaohong Sheng, 2024, p. 68). Its rejection of standardization and reverence for fluidity bear the hallmarks of cosmopolitanism—‘Today the entire world is becoming archipelagic, creolized’ (Chancé, 2011, p. 265) which emphasizes the fluidity within identity. Language reflects the subject’s cognition and mode of thought. Magid’s relentless pursuit of standard English has forged an utterly rational perspective which led him to assimilate the logic of British colonizers, positioning humanity as the ruler and controller of nature: “We must learn more like the English. The English fight fate to the death” (Smith, 2000, p. 288), showing his entirely discard of Islam’s reverence for nature. In the scene where Magid renames himself among friends, Smith juxtaposes the emphatic length of the Bengali original with the clipped Anglicized replacement, signaling the erasure of immigrant history and cultural memory and the potential fluidity of identity is thereby congealed into the single logic prescribed by colonial discourse.

For Irie, a Jamaican-British mixed-race woman subjected to the overlapping objectifications of patriarchy, coloniality, and class, her pursuit of a socially “recognized” British identity—unlike Magid’s fixation on reason and language—unfolds through coercive bodily modification under European aesthetic hegemony, a divergence that reveals not mere personal preference but the structural politics of recognition shaped by intersecting systems of domination. Colonial discourse installs “white femininity” as the normative benchmark, racializing and sexualizing mixed-race women in tandem. Following Foucault’s social-constructionist view of body and knowledge, the body is, in effect, a text produced through the constraints of multiple discourses, compelled to conform to prescriptive norms and symbolic systems; it functions as a palimpsest on which discursive traces, disciplinary techniques, and punitive mechanisms are inscribed. In *White Teeth*, Smith renders the body as a carrier of these operations of power and underscores their micro-physics, especially in the case of the immigrant woman Irie: she is both the object of male desire and the site where postcolonial identity is tested and negotiated. Irie’s body is figured as a Jamaican substantial frame “designed with another country in mind, another climate” (Smith, 2000, p. 266). This misalignment with British aesthetic norms thwarts self-recognition. Psychologically,

anxiety is the feeling of being “caught” and “overwhelmed” (May, 2009, p. 45), and that inner suffocation is externalized physically: tight undergarments leave her breathless. Irie therefore seeks recognition through the most immediate vehicle—the body—precisely the site where power and discourse interlace: “there was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land” (Smith, 2000, p. 266). Within this mirror-gaze system, visibility is defined by the other’s eye, and the subject position wavers under which condition her “perception does not sharpen but becomes blurred or vague” (May, 2009, p. 45). The narrative then stages self-objectification: she imagined “tearing off loose, white-flecked flesh and packing it into those old curvaceous Coke bottles” (Smith, 2000, p. 243). Here, the body is partitioned, fitted, and commodified—no longer a vessel of sovereign will but “a body subjected to domination, remodeling, correction, and normalization ... a body drilled again and again” (Min’an Wang, 2022, p. 43). The mirror and the corset form a feedback loop of external gaze and internalized discipline: the former sets the terms of bodily legibility and the latter installs them as ongoing corporeal constraint.

After a series of failed attempts to “tame” her bodily shape, Irie turns to her hair. Hair grows out of the body with whose roots buried in the body’s “soil”, originating in the body yet differs from the living, responsive sensorium of the body as a whole. Wang describes hair as having a vegetal quality: external manipulation—reshaping, augmenting, trimming, or modifying—neither diminish bodily pleasure nor pressure the body’s unruly desires (Smith, 2000, p. 145), and hair possesses a plant-like capacity for continual regrowth. Precisely due to this controllable plant-like quality, hair becomes, within regimes of symbolic veneration, a clear index of the self and a site of virtually unlimited inscription on the body; as a bodily signifier, it thereby “enters the circuits of ideological reproduction” (Smith, 2000, p. 150). Modernity’s colorist heritage gave way to socio-racial strategies and technologies of the body such as skin bleaching or straightening frizzy hair, the function of which was to move as far as possible away from the so-called Black phenotype and the supposed socio-political position associated with it (Ferdinand, 2021, p. 210). Hair seems the easiest part of the body to reshaping, yet chemical straightening inflicts intense pain on Irie’s scalp: “she felt the initial cool sensation change to a terrific fire” (Smith, 2000, p. 277). The pain overlays the literal hair root with the metaphorical “roots” in identity, revealing the contradiction and disillusionment that follow from forcing oneself against one’s own origins. As a site for the production of exteriority, aesthetics, and symbolic

exchange, the ladies’ section of the salon is saturated with descriptions of pain, offering the most immediate image of how Black women’s aesthetics are disciplined in Britain. In the chemical relaxer, the hair becomes “dead, split, stiff, drained of all elasticity, like the hair of a dried-out corpse”, which signals not only the erasure of Black women’s agency but also the conversion of recognition into an economy of bodily pain. In this framework, “the passive body’s ultimate outlet is a covert aesthetic self-remodeling: the body unfolds not according to its own inner drive but according to aesthetic goals” (Min’an Wang, 2022, p. 43). Irie’s hair makeover exemplifies the “passive body”: her “self-invention” is not autonomous creation but a submissive compliance with white aesthetic discipline. Compulsory corporeal rewriting cannot secure recognition or a stable identity, because mimicry can never be a perfect replica. This perpetual “almost same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86) exposes the hypocrisy of colonial discourse, which proclaims universality yet preserves exclusionary boundaries. Smith renders the contradiction at the level of psyche and sensation through mirror imagery and fine-grained descriptions of bodily movement. When Irie gazes into the mirror, what she confronts is not her “authentic self” but an alienated reflection—an image concealed beneath wigs and the borrowed hair of others. This distorted mirror image encapsulates how dominant aesthetics obscure and reshape the Black female subject during which mimicry fractures the colonial subject’s identity and “rearticulates presence through its ‘otherness’, that which it disavows” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 91).

Immigrants’ identity anxiety is also intensified by the Chalfens who turn ostensibly open cosmopolitanism into an instrument for maintaining white advantage and consigning immigrants’ attempts at integration to disillusionment. The Chalfens, like Samad, object to the school’s Harvest Festival, yet their stance and motives are entirely different. Unlike Samad, the Chalfens, dressed in “counterfeit Indian attire”, did not genuinely embrace Indian immigrants and culture. Instead, they seized the opportunity to showcase a cosmopolitanism centered on imperial discourse. Their objection looks like an intellectual critique of authority, but it is in fact a defense of the “purity” of Britishness against supposed pagan threat. In fact, the Chalfens are not purely “native British” but third-generation immigrants, and, as with Bengal’s hybrid history, there is no such thing as pure Bengaliness or pure Britishness. However, after achieving assimilation through language, reason, and academic capital, and gaining social recognition as intellectuals, their defending the “purity” of British identity became a crucial pathway for reproducing their social status. Thus, their opposition

to the Harvest Festival was not an open embrace of multiculturalism, but rather a gatekeeping practice that consolidated their own orthodoxy by delineating differences from the other. This cosmopolitan posture that masquerades as universal inclusion ultimately reinforces migrants' othered status behind a performative welcome. Joyce Chalfen, who prides herself on being enlightened and inclusive, ostentatiously greets the "brown-skinned stranger" when Irie and Millat visits and even speaks on young Oscar's behalf, saying that he "finds it exciting" (Smith, 2000, p. 299). Such speaking for others is a superficial Eurocentric cosmopolitanism: Joyce turns the "brown-skinned stranger" into consumable difference and into cultural capital for family cultivation. "Exciting" does not register recognition of an equal person, but treats the visitors as a novel spectacle and a token of diversity, a prop for sensory enjoyment and liberal display. Labeling all non-white individuals as "brown-skinned people" not only erases the ethnic heterogeneity Samad insists upon, but also subsumes Bangladeshi immigrant Millat and Jamaican-British Irie under the symbol of the Other. Joyce's "admiration" for the second-generation migrant Millat is premised on prising him apart from his group. In her stereotype, brown-skinned people" are "the ones who often sell her milk and bread: a functional, service-coded sign. Millat's "beauty" therefore registers not as recognition of a concrete subject but as an unusual exception within the category "brown-skinned", a condition that earns him the Chalfens' special regard. She replaces the recognition of living presence with stereotypical, typified symbols. Thus, social interaction—as a channel for cross-cultural communication—is deliberately reduced to a reenactment of objectified perceptions frozen under the white gaze. Consequently, the subjectivity of the object is entirely obscured and denied. At this point, the differences between Irie and Millat are abstracted from their specific individuals and contexts, becoming deployable resources for expression: they no longer point to living subjects but are used to reinforce the moral image and cultural superiority of the Charbonnier family. Oscar's blunt line—"I hate brown-skinned strangers"—punctures the rhetorical friendliness at once. The stark contrast between the mother's 'welcome' and the child's "loathing" exposed the British bloodline ideology concealed beneath the surface of this Eurocentric, ostensibly enlightened, inclusive, and friendly cosmopolitan family.

Rather than returning to "roots" to rethink identity, Irie becomes further drawn to the Chalfens' ideal of "pure Britishness", shifting her assimilative strategy from body transformation to mimicry on mind. Irie's encounters with the Chalfen family are narrated in third person through

Irie-centered perspective. Within these scenes, neutral dialogue and actions dominate the narrative space, leaving the remainder filled with Irie's internal analysis and imagination, while her sensory descriptions recedes, revealing a split between bodily feeling and consciousness. The split signals a romantic filter through which Irie projects "pure Britishness" onto the Chalfens, so that their supposed inclusiveness and cosmopolitanism largely reflect her own desire, rendering this Irie-centered narration partially unreliable. Authorial commentary intermittently interrupts to expose the projection, as when the text notes that "Irie had lost in her reveries accessing the Chalfens like a romantic anthropologist" (Smith, 2000, p. 322). As in James Joyce's "Araby", where the boy hero projects romantic fervor onto the bazaar and turns it into a stage for love and redemption, Irie similarly imagines the Chalfens as the emblem of ideal Britishness. Her desire lacks a clear object and is fueled by fantasy: "She had a nebulous fifteen-year-old's passion for them, overwhelming, yet with no real direction or object. She just wanted to, well, kind of, merge with them. She wanted their Englishness. Their Chalfishness. The purity of it" (Smith, 2000, p. 328). The narrator's italics on merge and purity stage a conceptual clash that deconstructs "pure Britishness": once there is merging, purity is forfeited; if purity is preserved, merging is made impossible. The immediate reminder of the Chalfens' genealogy—"third-generation immigrants by way of Germany and Poland"—punctures the fantasy of purity and reveals Irie's longing as a projection filtered through an idealizing lens. Irie's completely assimilation draws a sharp line between herself and her Jamaican identity and she equates freedom with cutting the tie with her history, thereby reproducing the colonial binary in which one must choose either the "tangled roots" of the past or the "reason" claimed by Britishness. The scene in which Irie files paperwork for Marcus symbolizes a deliberate "pruning" of ethnic memory and a retention of records certified as rational by Britishness, which sharpens the metaphor of abandonment and selection. The classification and sifting of documents operate as an allegory that fixes "roots" and Britishness into a binary and performs a kind of self-purification. Even so, the narrative sustains an uneasy tension. As she crosses borders, she feels she is "was crossing borders, sneaking into England; it felt like some terribly mutinous act" (Smith, 2000, p. 328), exposing the dislocation produced by mimicry, as an outward sense of rationality and order cannot dispel the inward experience of alienation. In "Araby", Joyce punctures the boy's romantic projection with the bazaar's emptiness and chill, foreshadowing disillusion and epiphany. Similarly, Irie's own disillusion is propelled by Marcus's sustained objectification of her

brown body, the seemingly mentor-like scientist. Colonial discourse imposes a double bind: it invites the colonized to refine themselves and move closer to the colonizer's civility, yet it resists that very approximation by invoking ontological difference and presumed inferiority, so recognition is perpetually deferred. Consequently, Irie comes to see that full assimilation through mimicry cannot secure recognition from the Chalfens or from Eurocentric cosmopolitanism. Unlike Samad and Magid, who remain trapped in a binary logic of single affiliation, Irie shows the capacity to construct a rooted cosmopolitan identity because, after disillusion, she keeps renegotiating and hybridizing, and in the wake of disillusion as "a great reinventor of herself" (Smith 368).

IV. IMMIGRANTS' NATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF ROOTED COSMOPOLITANISM THROUGH EMBODIED MEMORY

Drawing on a diasporic Black sensory mode of narration, Irie she re-links the body to cultural memory and autobiographical memory as two embodied modalities of remembrance, reconstructing identity by restoring continuity between past and present. Appiah (1994) defines the rooted cosmopolitan as someone who is attached to a home of one's own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure in the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people. With the individual at the core of liberalism, Appiah makes the concrete person the ultimate object of cosmopolitan ethical concern. Departing from Enlightenment celebrations of abstract reason, he turns to lived experience, adopting a humanist orientation that centers personal freedom and ethical responsibility. In diasporic history, colonial and Eurocentric discourses have long kept migrants' pasts outside "visible history", producing unequal access to the public sphere. Against this backdrop, if cosmopolitan ethics takes the concrete person as its ultimate concern, it must first make the person legible across nesting memberships. Legibility presupposes temporal continuity in a life narrative, hence the emphasis on the individual shifts to repairing ruptures of memory, restoring continuity between past and present. Embodiment builds in part on the work of postcolonial and feminist scholars, such as Frantz Fanon (1970), Luce Irigaray (1985), bell hooks (1990) and Judith Butler (1990), who "have drawn attention to the body as a site of knowledge and contestation and its role in the production of meaning" (Giese, 2024, p. 445). The "turn to the body" in social and cultural research is closely tied to critiques of Western scholarly traditions in which linguistic modes are granted superior epistemic authority. Such privileging

creates uneven opportunities to contribute to processes of meaning-making, particularly in the public domain, and insufficient recognition of the epistemic power of other modes of collective remembering (Giese, 2024, p. 445). In *White Teeth*, Irie's otherness is intensified by the self-styled enlightened Chalfens: their absolute deference to "science" and "truth" as linguistic paradigms functions as exclusionary intellectual gatekeeping, monopolizing discourse while occluding immigrant, sensory ways of producing meaning. Read through Appiah, cosmopolitanism is not merely an attitude of tolerance but a practice of the self: diasporic subjects use body and senses as media to mobilize and repair cultural/diasporic and autobiographical memory as embodied registers, thereby rebuilding temporal continuity across nested affiliations. Only in this way can diasporic subjects hold both "roots" and "the world" and effect present-oriented identity repair within multiple communities. Unlike the Chalfens' meticulously recorded genealogy with a clear timeline and ancestor portraits solemnly displayed, Clara Bowden's Jamaican family history appears fragmented after successive displacements, scattered across "wardrobes, forgotten drawers, and grimy frames" (Smith 399). Such unregistrable diasporic scatter is not the absence of memory but a shift in its media and carriers: when archives, monuments, and objects falter, the body, as an enduring presence across moments of rupture, becomes a crucial site for the construction and transmission of remembrance. The rupture, dispersal, and fragmentation of community further complicate preservation and transmission, hence "bodies mediate relations with close and distant others, and are therefore not simply generative of, or contain memory, but are active in its relational production" (Giese, 2024, p. 447). The body anchors the making, keeping, and passing on of memory, functioning both as a locus of agency and as embedded in social formations and cultural norms; it also changes with time, social shifts, and life's ruptural events, all of which shape mnemonic capacity. Fragmentation, then, is not an endpoint but a trigger for embodied remembrance: where the archive is missing, senses, postures, habits, and everyday rites take up the work of "rewriting" family history.

Through the shift from vision to smell, Smith foregrounds an Afro-Caribbean tradition of co-inherence with environment: where maroons once "escaped the plantation by the senses", Irie returns to racial memory by the senses, repairing the colonial fracture and rethreading the continuity between roots and routes. To heal the colonial fracture and to retrieve racial specificities, Ferdinand advances the notion of forming a body in the world, which calls for "a sensually immersive relation to the earth rather

than forms of mapping grounded in a dominant visual epistemology aligned with conquest and the Enlightenment's epistemic revolution" (Hosbey, Lloréns, & Roane, 2022, p. 3). By exposing the material and imaginary relations "through which our bodies are at once the trace-bearers and the tracers of a world beyond the modern double fracture" (Ferdinand, 2021, p. 205), he makes the body the starting point for engaging the world. In the Atlantic histories of marronage, flight is not merely a narrative of escape but an embodied cartography centered on the senses. Maroons "read the land into routes" by attending to topography, vegetation, the sound of water, smell, and wind, thereby producing counter-maps and survival knowledges against slave-catching. This sense of route, mediated by smell, touch, stride, and rhythm, does not rely on genealogical descent. It circulates performatively through techniques, habitus, and remembrance, and thus forms what we may call a sensory survival lineage. The Maroon is presented as a symbol of political resistance against colonial regimes through the presence of their image in Caribbean literature and through many monuments, and through the names of rivers and roads dedicated to them in the Americas (Ferdinand, 2021, p. 148). Irie mirrors this sensory method as a return to racial memory: in seeking her Jamaican forebears, she lets landscape and scent lead her:

And in the morning it wasn't Italianate vineyards out there any more, it was sugar, sugar, sugar, and next door was nothing but tobacco and she presumptuously fancied that the smell of plantain sent her back to somewhere, somewhere quite fictional, for she'd never been there. Somewhere Columbus called St Jago but the arawaks stubbornly re-named Xaymaca, the name lasting longer than they did. Well-wooded and Watered. (Smith, 2000, p. 400)

Here Smith's tricolon—"sugar, sugar, sugar"—with its clipped cadence, produces the pressure of monoculture; "next door was nothing but tobacco" juxtaposes another cash crop that profits empire while erasing local biodiversity, composing a landscape disciplined by the plantation economy. The passage is not neutral exotica but a return to colonial memory: heavy like a chain, "this all belonged to her, her birthright" (Smith 400). Smith italicizes belonged not merely to heighten tone but to convert "belonged to her" from neutral reportage into a positional counter-narrative claim. Building on the prior colonial tableau—"not Italianate vineyards but sugar ... and next door nothing but tobacco"—the italics reinscribe a production space that empire had recorded as someone else's property as her birthright, using typographic emphasis to perform a semantic counter-mapping that resists the dispossessive logic which expels migrants' pasts

from "visible history". Plantain is not indigenous to Jamaica, yet it has been indigenized as a vehicle of everyday foodways and cultural memory. It stands in sharp contrast to sugar and tobacco in the novel: sugar and tobacco index the plantation economy's macro-landscape and coerced labor, the visible and outward "field", whereas the smell of plantain rises from kitchens and street fryers as a proximate olfactory experience that carries family, community, and daily livelihood, the smellable and inward "home". The narration thus performs a sensory shift from the colonial grand tableau of vision to the intimacy of smell and bodily memory, loosening the visual epistemology on which conquest relies, while activating olfactory "involuntary memory" that affords a felt arrival at a place she has never visited. Crucially, as a migrant crop, plantain signifies routes rather than a single root, aligning with the rooted-cosmopolitan pairing of "roots/routes". In this way the text replaces the cash crops' "field-smell" with plantain's "kitchen-smell", translating external historical violence into a habitable everyday temporality and opening a pathway for Irie's return to racial memory. While sparked by sensory cues, Irie's imagined Jamaica is completed when material things connect memory to the body, so as to rewrite imperial "external proofs" into private testimony embedded in everyday objects. She marks, files, and tucks fragments—birth certificate, war reports, clippings—under the sofa, "as if their abundance would, while she slept, pass through the fibres and seep into her body" (400). This act relocates memory from the paper index to embodied practice, turning the home into a micro lieu de mémoire where the sofa's fibres figure a conduit between matter and body. The narrative thus shifts from reading pages to remembering with the skin, staging an olfactory-tactile, involuntary mode of recall. Once domesticated, those documents cease to be merely visual texts and become material mediators that carry Jamaican traces into present London life. Accordingly, the novel does not urge a departure from London to seek an essentialized "root", but within the global-city dwelling it uses material mediation and sensory practice to make paper archives and embodied memory mutually attest—thus turning from rootless assimilation to rooted identification.

Unlike Samad's nostalgia that clings to "roots" and the past as a route of flight from London, Irie stitches past and present, homeland and London, through sensory, autobiographical memory, thereby constructing a rooted cosmopolitan identity. Memory is a complex system that can produce an illusion of a momentary return to a lost past, while also articulating the complex relationship between the past, present, and future (Pachau, 2023, p. 28). It is also a process of reconstruction, as we constantly

draw from our past experiences to interpret and make sense of the present, and to plan for the future. By mobilizing autobiographical memory, Smith enables Irie to stitch past and present together through the senses, thereby forging her identity. Autobiographical memory, marked by auto-noetic awareness, is intensely individual, saturated with the rememberer's perspective. Smith's Irie-centered sensory narration stages her retrospective gaze after moving beyond "rootless mimicry":

With every fresh crunch came the memory of previous crunches. She was permeated by familiar smells: wet woodchip and gravel around the base of the tree, newly laid turd underneath the cover of soggy leaves. She was moved by these sensations. Despite opting for a life of dentistry, she had not yet lost all of the poetry in her soul, that is, she could still have the odd Proustian moment, note layers upon layers, though she often experienced them in periodontal terms (Smith, 2000, p.459).

In this episodic recollection, the crunch of leaves, the feel of damp sawdust and grit, and the smells they release jointly propel Irie's remembering. What matters is not the objects' objective memorability but Irie's ascription of new significance across the continuity of her own time. At this moment in Irie's Proustian reverie, episodic memory couples with oral pain: the "stabs like an exposed nerve" and "a severe malocclusion, the pressure of one tooth upon another" are not merely physiological sensations but an embodied manifestation of repressed affect, distorted intimacy, and misaligned identity precipitated by the activation of episodic recall. The image of the exposed nerve indicate that Irie's reminiscences of her many "firsts" with Millat carry a strong auto-noetic sense of time and affective load. Here, memory is ratified by pain rather than by language. Toothache, as an outlet of sensory memory, stitches together the moments she shared with Millat—first buying cigarettes, the first joint in the park, the first kiss in a storm. Experiences that ought to read as freedom and intimacy now return as acute discomfort. The pain does not originate in the events themselves but in the structural conflicts that the recollection activates in the present. Within Smith's layered constellation of dental imagery, Irie's "toothache" is an echo of the *White Teeth* motif. Teeth function as a central emblem across characters' developmental arcs: Clara's chipped tooth figures her break from the strictures of a religious household; the subsection "Samad's Root Canal" crystallizes his fixation on religion and ethnic memory; Alsana likens the assimilationist Chalfens to "a British bird with teeth" pecking at Irie, the Jamaican "seed" cast abroad. Irie's episode stages an identity conflict through the oral sensorium: teeth, as a normed organ, demand straightness, alignment, and proper occlusion,

emblematising social discipline over conduct, desire, language, and even modes of remembering. Malocclusion thus reveals the diasporic tension: on the one hand a drive for alignment with the *White Teeth* standard; on the other, a more complex cultural-ethnic-affective system that resists incorporation. It is precisely this somatic sting that catalyzes Irie's decisive turn: from passively suffering alienation to actively awakening the resistance potential latent in "misalignment". As Appiah argues, local attachment and openness to the world are not mutually exclusive: one can be deeply rooted and hospitable to elsewhere. In this sense, cosmopolitanism can be reconciled with place-based belonging. The claim rests on the species-level fact of migration—humans descend from ancestors in different parts of Asia and Africa and have dispersed across the globe: "We have always been a traveling species" with "the nomadic urge is deep within us" (Appiah, 2023, p. 215). After constructing rooted cosmopolitan identity, Irie as no longer needed to "extract the extra tooth" but learned to live with misalignment, which reorients identity toward a rooted hybridity capable of bearing pressure and asymmetry at the juncture of colonial history and personal experience.

Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism keeps Rousseau's moral primacy of the person but relocates authenticity from inner withdrawal to relational making. Hence it naturally leads to mnemonic repair in diasporic life: only by stitching past to present within nested communities can one be both rooted and open to the world. From being the main actor of a more or less coherent life story the individual derives a sense of continuity in time which ... is part of any conception of the authenticity or fulfilment of an identity (Ferrara, 2002, p. 79). In *White Teeth*, Smith scales this framework to urban practice: Irie "didn't want to be involved in the long story of those lives, but she was, and she found herself dragged forward by the hair to their denouement, along the high road—Mali's Kebabs, Mr Cheung's, Raj's, Malkovich Bakeries" (Smith, 2000, p. 419). Multiculturalism foregrounds group identity, yet this emphasis on minority identities and cultures can, in a globalized Britain, splinter the social field into multiple mutually incompatible communities. By contrast, cosmopolitanism is articulated at the level of the person: the self is made within nested affiliations—family, neighborhood, and cross-ethnic interactions—with the city as both the medium and the site of identity formation. Transcending the limitations of multiculturalism, *White Teeth* is neither dedicated to "protect[ing] minority rights" (Walkowitz, 2006, p. 121) nor narrated "across several continents, regions, or national territories" (125) simply for displaying an ostensible mixture. Here, the bodily tug of being "dragged by the hair" sutures the self to a

semantic map of the neighborhood: each shop-name is a diasporic index (Middle Eastern, Chinese, South Asian, Eastern European), carrying smells, tastes, and social memory that pull “the long past she wished to avoid” into the unfolding present. The metaphor of hair also intertexts with earlier scenes of bodily discipline: hair once straightened by a white aesthetic now becomes the sensory conduit by which the neighborhood “pulls” the subject, exposing the external-to-internal mechanics of identity. It is made evident that both roots and routes define Irie Jones’s sense of subjectivity since she intermittently hovers between a commitment to her racial origins back in Jamaica and her attachment to Britishness as a second-generation immigrant to attain self-identification.

V. CONCLUSION

For the first-generation Bengali immigrant Samad, a pursuit of ethnic, cultural, and moral “purity” collides with the liberalized sociocultural present, producing his paralyzed feeling of not being able to enter the new “home” or go back to the old one. By contrast, the second-generation Magid and Irie, suspending ancestral memory, seek recognition through mimetic assimilation to “pure Britishness” under hegemonic discourse; both trajectories fracture the subject’s sense of temporal continuity. Smith focuses on the distinct experiences of individual migrants, thereby amplifying a polyphonic immigrant voice. Immigrant writing hence ceases to be a highly formulaic symbolic representation, instead becoming the fluid expression of vibrant individual lives, marking a move beyond narrow nationalism toward a cosmopolitan ethic of conviviality. Through sensory practice and embodied memory, Irie rethreads roots and routes, converting a passive narrative of otherness into active self-narration and furnishing a concrete, livable ground for a rooted cosmopolitan identity. Taken together, Smith roots the co-presence of ethnicity and cosmopolitanism in the ever-interwoven histories of empire and diaspora, offering a distinctive instance of writing back to empire.

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