

## Dual Identities and the Convivial Self: Rethinking Diasporic Identity in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* Through a Lacanian- Gilroyan Perspective

### Identités double et soi convivial : repenser l'identité diasporique dans *White Teeth* de Zadie Smith à travers une preperspective lacanienne-gilroyenne

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#### Abstract

Based on its significant engagement with intersecting lives across ethnic, cultural, and generational divides, Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* (2000) manifests to uncover her unparalleled style, which interrogates dual identities, (un) belonging and the fragmented sense of self in London's multicultural metropolis. Smith's protagonists cease not to wrestle with fractured notions of selfhood and the elusive quest for coherence in a space shaped by migration and transnational encounters. This paves the way for a novel analysis through the intersecting lenses of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Gilroy's theory of conviviality. Postulating on Lacan's concepts of the split subject and lack and desire alongside Gilroy's notion of the convivial or mongrel self, this article will explore how psychic fragmentation and sociocultural hybridity may possibly converge. By juxtaposing two generations, Smith dramatizes the unattainability of essentialist identity while gesturing towards the probability of convivial futures, wherein the second-generation characters renegotiate their fractured selves by embracing hybridity and relational belonging, redirecting towards Gilroy's notion of the convivial self. Ultimately, this study contributes to scholarship by bridging psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory to demonstrate how the Lacanian recognition of lack is not a dead impasse but rather a precondition for the emergence of convivial selfhood across multiple diasporic generations.

**Keywords:** Zadie Smith; *White Teeth*; the Split Subject; the Convivial Self;

Multicultural London.

**Resumé**

S'appuyant sur son engagement marqué envers des vies qui s'entrecroisent à travers des divisions ethniques, culturelles et générationnelles, le roman *White Teeth* (2000) de Zadie Smith révèle un style singulier qui interroge les identités doubles, l'appartenance et le sentiment fragmenté du moi dans la métropole multiculturelle de Londres. Les protagonistes de Smith affrontent des notions fracturées du moi et la quête difficile de cohérence dans un espace façonné par la migration et les rencontres transnationales, ce qui ouvre une voie pour une analyse nouvelle à travers les perspectives croisées de la psychanalyse lacanienne et de la théorie de la convivialité de Gilroy. En s'appuyant sur les concepts lacaniens du sujet divisé et du manque et désir, ainsi que sur la notion gilroyenne du moi convivial ou hybride, cet article étudie la manière dont la fragmentation psychique et l'hybridité socioculturelle peuvent converger. En juxtaposant deux générations, Smith met en scène l'inaccessibilité d'une identité essentialiste tout en suggérant la possibilité de futurs conviviaux dans lesquels les personnages de la seconde génération renégocient leurs moi fracturés en adoptant l'hybridité et l'appartenance relationnelle. Cela réoriente l'attention vers la notion gilroyenne du moi convivial. Cette étude contribue finalement au champ critique en reliant la psychanalyse et la théorie postcoloniale afin de montrer que la reconnaissance lacanienne du manque n'est pas une impasse, mais une condition préalable à l'émergence d'un moi convivial au sein de plusieurs générations diasporiques.

**Mots clés** Zadie Smith ; *White Teeth*; Sujet divisé ; Moi convivial ; Londres multiculturelle

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the millennium, a significant framework of literature crystalizing around how diasporic subjects may coexist and conceivably subsist within a grey-zone of living with difference while cohabitating with local citizens have come to dawn. The fundamental premise of Contemporary Diasporic novelists, hence, lies in critically interpreting the experiences of the diaspora where engaging the intricate themes of displacement, selfhood and home are to be located at the forefront of their diasporic discourse. Zadie Smith's debut novel *White Teeth* (2000) operates as the chef-d'oeuvre of millennial British

masterworks. The novel's protagonists cease not to wrestle with fractured notions of selfhood within the elusive quest for coherence and unity, paving the way for a novel analytical framework that examines how Psychic fragmentation and sociocultural hybridity converge in Smith's portrayal of multicultural London. *White Teeth* exemplifies, par excellence, key rubrics of the Black British diasporic identity. Through documenting a generational conflict of three culturally diverse families, the Iqbals, the Joneses, and the Chalfens, the novel redirects towards a convivial hybrid selfhood, which offers a profound commentary on characters that embody a movement from melancholic nostalgia toward new convivial modes of belonging. Despite of the thorough scholarship which discuss the novel's multicultural themes and issues of identity, conspicuously absent from the discussion were the psychological and sociocultural factors. By bridging the gap between the socio-cultural theory of conviviality and the intricate world of psychoanalysis, the following study proposes a novel theoretical approach that brings together Lacan's psychoanalysis and Gilroy's concept of conviviality to illuminate the novel's treatment of diasporic identity.

The following study draws on Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts of the split subject- precisely the mirror stage, the symbolic order, and the real realm- in order to project how *White Teeth* dramatizes the fractured and incomplete formation of subjectivity among first-generation immigrants. Of further importance is Lacan's emphasis on lack and desire, which highlights the impossibility of a coherent self. Within the very same vein, Paul Gilroy's notions of conviviality and the convivial self offer a lens for understanding how second-generation characters renegotiate this psychic fragmentation. Together, these frameworks reveal how Smith counterposes generational experiences of alienation

and hybridity, gesturing ultimately towards convivial forms of belonging that resist essence and celebrate multiplicity.

This study, ergo, showcases a novel contribution by arguing that the obstacles to a harmonious society are not simply political or social but profoundly psychological. It posits that Gilroy's convivial project would come to life if only a parallel process of deciphering through the individual's inner workings is conducted within the intricate Black British diasporic milieu. Indeed, this authentically depicts the redefinition of selfhood within the constraints of the host nation, which is inevitably encapsulated by subjects who are constantly reconstructing their selfhood while navigating the complex terrain of transnational global spaces, race and home.

## **2.Remapping Identity Between Lack and Conviviality**

The contemporary diasporic literary reservoir presents a wide repertoire of characters who appear to occupy an in-between space, where psychic fragmentation and cultural negotiation both converge. Within this liminal encounter, gone were the conventional assumptions about identity coherence and social integration, implementing that ontological coherence may not be a merit for successful navigation in multicultural communities. Rather, diasporic intelligentsia redirect towards a more nuanced relationship between identity reconfiguration and convivial belonging; a strategy that necessitates rigorous theoretical tools susceptible of bridging psychological and sociological dissection.

Zadie Smith's inaugural novel *White Teeth* (2000), equated with Jaque Lacan's brand of psychology, offers an ideal literary laboratory for rereading the diasporic condition, as its protagonists' wrestle with what Smith herself describes

as the fractured notions of selfhood. Yet in lieu of illustrating this fragmentation as a malaise or problematic, Smith's narrative suggests that such psychic incoherence may actually weave novel forms of social connection and cultural creativity. This psychic model of identity formation, when associated with Paul Gilroy's notion of convivial coexistence, extends beyond the refrains of lack and desire towards a more fluid form of identity. An equation that has remained at length unexplored in existing scholarship on the novel. The ensuing subsections outline the theoretical aspects that sustain this study.

## **2.1 The Lacanian Split Subject**

Beneath the intricate dossiers of the critical sphere, Jacques Lacan's controversial brand of psychology was enthroned with the emergence of his book *Ecrits* in 1966. His non-traditional compositions contemplate on the extensive readings and rewritings of Sigmund Freud's unconsciousness (Habib,2005, p.589), positioning the subject as an irreversible split entity that is constituted through language, alterity and lack. Due to this dichotomy, which positions subjects between three interrelated realms, a psychic phase known as the Lacanian Triad happens to occur. Lacan's model of infant development documents how a child's attachment to his mother is disrupted once he recognizes himself as different from the others. This paves the way towards a shift from undifferentiated needs to desires postulated by cultural expectations reinforcing identity and cultural entry (Qazi,2022, p.2). Hence, the imaginary order breeds a sense of stability and coherence, whereas the symbolic order incorporates children into cultural norms and laws. The real realm, however, represents a mode of being that exceeds all representation.

In his 1949 essay *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience*, Lacan presents the idea of le stade du miroir or the mirror stage. He elaborates that between six and eight months, an infant recognizes its reflection in a mirror, experiencing what he calls “a jubilant assumption” (Lacan, 1949, p. 2) of its image. This marks the moment when an infant misrecognizes its reflection as a unified self, interrogating a ceaseless quest to reach wholeness that can never be attained. Conspicuously, this stage is disturbingly full with mixed feelings, needs and desires that can only be fulfilled by the mother’s existence. This process is a *méconnaissance* or misrecognition, wherein the subject begins to define oneself not from within but rather through the other gaze. Subsequent to the mirror stage is the imaginary realm, which is a construction of illusions that establish patterns of harmony, relationships of identity and resemblance among figures and people (Rasheed and Hamad 2024, p.154). It is the sphere of the ego that traps the individual in a cycle of alienation. An account that reflects diasporic individuals attempt to attain a stable identity amid the vortex of fragmented histories, bilingual milieus and multicultural coexistence.

Subsequently, the infant enters the symbolic order, that is associated with language, culture and laws. Lacan defines the symbolic order as “the framework of linguistics that structures our experience and shapes our sense of self” (qtd in Rasheed & Hamad 2024, p. 154). In this formative period, the acquisition of language indicates the child’s incorporation into this phase. It is an order that imposes meaning yet simultaneously alienates the self from reaching unity and coherence. Instead of being whole and substantial, the self occurs in a series of displacements constructed by linguistic and cultural norms. Tyson explains the

matter in plain words that “in entering the Symbolic Order — the world of language — we’re entering a world of loss and lack” (Tyson, 2015, p.30). According to Lacan, the human desire is shaped by societal norms within the symbolic order, which in turn constructs subjectivity and identity. This order, guided by external forces, propels the unconscious and continually fuels desire. In the very same respect, the diasporic split subject exists within the realm of the symbolic order that necessitates negotiation between the inherited cultural discourse of the homeland and those of the host-land.

The real launches as the third and most intricate of Lacan’s tripartite registers, ensuing the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders. In Seminar XI, Jacques Lacan defines this stage as the impossible realm that resists naming, and it is above or beyond language. The real often manifests through trauma, anxiety or moments of psychic disintegration. It posits that ideologies are not immutable truths, but rather social constructs embedded in a random and chaotic existence. Lacan maintains that this understanding merely showcases the reality beneath these societal ideologies lies beyond human control. Thus, the trauma of the real reveals that true reality, underlying society’s constructed ideologies, is a reality that represents a dimension beyond human comprehension, articulation or control (Tyson 2015, p.32). Within the context of diasporic subjectivity, the real emerges whenever identity, language or belonging confront the reality of the elusive quest for total coherence. The diasporic subject encounters the real through migration trauma, cultural displacement, and generational ruptures that manifest as psychological fragmentation and repetitive symptoms.

## **2.2 The Lacanian Identity Between Lack and Desire**

The perennial quest of wholeness that a subject undertakes finds stark explanation withing the Lacanian psychoanalytic brand of desire and 'object a'. Postulating on Lacan's theory, identity formation is intricately based on 'manque a etre' or lack of being. It is the desire of self-fullness an individual repeatedly attempts to satisfy in order to fill a "hole in the self" (Chen, 2011, p.47). The unconscious memory of fulness that occurred after the mirror stage- the stage of loss- is tightly related with traumatic irreversible loss. Concomitant with this, earnest desires are projected in the form of desired objects or scenarios; a desirable quality that Lacan coins as "object a" or "object petit a". When floating that issue on the surface, the Lacanian individual is entrapped into a never-ending labyrinth for object a, seeking feelings of self fulness and completeness. Life becomes more like a deserted milieu swallowing every attained desire to push those individuals to quest for another object. Within this opacity, the concept of the gaze is significantly inevitable. Lacan describes this concept as the anxious state of the mind coupled with the persistent self-awareness that one can be seen and watched by the others (Lacan, 1978, p. 72). This visibility puts the mind under anxious pressure, as it confronts the threat that arises from the other's gaze. In continuation of the aforementioned points, the diasporic subject's nostalgia for origin and wholeness operate as the unattainable object a of an identity torn between longing and belonging. In *White Teeth*, the second- generation immigrants translate that abiding sense of lack into a possibility of convivial belonging.

### **2.3 The Gilroyan Convivial Self**

Of further significance is the implementation of foundational Sociological basics into literary criticism. Paul Gilroy's conceptualisation on diaspora and



cultural negotiation pictures a diasporic community, where racial, stereotypical and cultural differences coexist regardless of the need to erase indigenous individual identities. Gilroy's theoretical underpinnings find vivid expression in his concept of conviviality, which, par excellence, complements Lacan's Psychoanalysis by redirecting concern towards how multicultural coexistence enables rather than dismisses social integration. Conviviality, as Gilroy defines it in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2004), alludes to the processes of everyday coexistence and exchange among diverse cultural backgrounds, turning multiculturalism into an ordinary aspect of Britain's social urban spaces (Gilroy, 2004, p xv). Gilroy's perspective projects an in-between milieu where a potential site for harmonious relationships and cultural transformation is indeed plausible. It merits consideration that the state of conviviality is not necessarily a harmonious resolution of cultural difference. It is the hybrid state between 'being' and 'becoming', where the ongoing negotiation inevitably retreats into hostility or segregation. Such an opaque quality weaves conviviality with Lacanian apprehensions on the instability of identity and the endless quest for wholeness. In the very same respect, difference is not a hindrance to be solved but a condition of communal resilience.

Part and parcel of Gilroy's perspective is the concept of the unfinished hybrid self, which can be comprehended in opposition to static singular identities. Characterised by an ongoing process of negotiation and synthesis, this concept signifies an identity that is inherently fragmented and constantly evolving (Gilroy, 1993, p. 1). The diasporic experience per se exemplifies this process. It highlights how linguistic and cultural practices bridge multifaceted identities, in which bilingualism and code-switching embody the hybrid essence of multicultural

subjectivity. Hence, diasporic subjects ceaselessly reconfigure their identities through interactions across multiple cultural spheres, echoing Lacan's assertion that a subject is never fully unified nor complete. This aligns with Lacan's view of a subject that is never fully unified and perpetually conditioned by the complex interrelation of the imaginary, symbolic, and real orders. Gilroy's notion of the convivial culture explains, "a culture that is flourishing in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities around the world—to discover a new value in our ability to live with difference without becoming anxious, fearful, or violent" (Gilroy, 2004, p xi). The convivial self, thus, refuses notions of unity, and it inhabits instead a state of multiplicity and hybridity as modes of existence.

Aforementioned, both theorists position identity and social relations as a continuous chain of achievements rather than stable states. When placed beside Lacan's notion of lack, Gilroy's convivial self reframes fragmentation as a generative mode than pathological. The Lacanian accounts of the divided subject can be paired with Gilroy's conviviality. This helps to decipher diasporic identities as produced through symbolic structures, melancholic attachments, and situated practices of coexistence. Gilroy supplies a social-cultural description of how diasporic people live together in postcolonial cities. Bridging both perspectives foregrounds a theoretical remapping of diasporic identity, where the subject's psychic lack no longer signals despair but possibility. The negotiation between desire and hybridity shapes a new selfhood grounded in interdependence. This convergence of psychoanalysis and postcolonial thought underpins the analytical reading of Irie Jones's character in *White Teeth*, where inner psychic splits and public practices of cohabitation co-produce diasporic subjectivities gradually unfolding into convivial belonging.

### 3. Between the Lacanian Split Subject and the Convivial Self

#### 3.1. First Generation Melancholia: Split Selves and Nostalgia

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* stands as a canonical and intellectually stimulating novel which weaves an intricate tale of two families at the span of 25 years in Post War London. Smith's narrative notably sketches characters with an extraordinary transgenerational dialogue that interrogates self-fragmentation and dual identities in North London's metropolis. The first-generation immigrant characters, the Joneses and the Iqbals families, represent an atypical pairing yet they encapsulate an intertwined multiethnic melange of the diasporic melancholia. Through vivid readings of each character's nostalgic attachments and psychic dislocation, Samad and Alsana Iqbal, namely, all showcase how each one of them remain trapped into the Lacanian Imaginary order. Their diasporic identity is hence built upon a fundamental inevitable lack of self-wholeness which in fact never existed. Those ceaseless attempts to fill in this unavoidable voidness models them as the ideal Lacanian split subjects.

Samad Iqbal's character is intricately anchored in a nostalgic longing for an idealised Bengali past; a sentiment most acutely manifested through his obsession with his late great-grandfather, Mangal Pande. Instead of being immersed within the tangible realities of his present- his occupation as a waiter, his marriage to Alsana and his daily life as an immigrant inhabiting North London- his identity is tied to an idealised ancestor in order to cling into a source of meaning. As Smith pens, "Samad asks to have his great-grandfather Mangal Pande's picture on the wall" (Smith, 2000, p. 183). This passage captures the Lacanian split subject at its finest, wherein Samad formulates an Imaginary ego-ideal grounded in the image of

Pande, seeking a sense of wholeness and coherence that his own fragmented self lacks. However, this imaginary invention is repeatedly exposed as fragile just as Samad realizes that his once upon a time mythological family contradicts with historical truths. If Pande was not a hero, then Samad was not the great-grandson of a hero (Smith, 2000, p186). Acknowledging the bitter fact about his family's past, which might have been fabricated and falsified, Samad experiences a hunting psychic crisis. This exposes him as the perfect model of Lacan's fragmented subject whose identity has been constituted on fantasy rather than pure reality. According to Rasheed and Hamad, such experiences expose the futility of the characters' attempts to sustain coherent selves, as reality, repressed memories and the inescapable influence of the symbolic order continually shape their subjectivities (Rasheed and Hamad, 2024, p. 158). Another fantasy or idealised personification is his obsessive religious piousness, which highlights a desperate attempt to secure symbolic coherence through faith. The narrative, though, happens to unmask this piety when his affair with his white English music teacher, Poppy Burt, comes to light. This shocking revealment exposes the deep breach between his imagined self and his long repressed desire for assimilation and sensual fulfilment beneath the English society. Another layer of irony bridges its way with Samad's arrangement to send his son Magid back home, "No doubt about it, on reflection, sending Magid back was the best thing" (Smith, 2000, p.162), revealing his nostalgic fixation on an ideal fabricated homeland and his endless quest for the Lacanian 'object a'. For Samad, lack can be certainly fulfilled only to stumble few years later upon the horrid fact when Magid returns more culturally tied with English values than Milan, his twin brother, who remained in London. A Lacanian irony that

underscores how the Symbolic order (language, culture, education) inevitably shapes subjectivity regardless of spatial location.

When situating Samad's character in Gilroyan terms, his melancholia arises from his incapability to mourn the loss of a pure and uncorrupted Bangladesh- a fabricated and idealized homeland which merely exists within his imagination. Bouharrou argues that the narrator projects the feeling of unbelonging and uprootedness experienced by the immigrants of the twentieth century via the term 'original trauma' which seeks to capture the emotional and mental repercussions of the diasporic experience (Bouharrou, 2023, p8). A diasporic character like Samad experiences that 'original trauma' of unbelonging and unhomeliness where neither the homeland nor the host country succeeds to provide ontological coherence. Formed by lack and desire, Samad's identity fails to evolve into Gilroy's notion of the convivial self as his melancholic attachment to a falsified homeland and refusal of assimilation blocks any possible engagement with hybridity, conviviality and thus cultural exchange.

Alsana Iqbal, just much like her husband, inhabits a fractured diasporic consciousness and performs melancholic attachment through domestic rituals. Sewing for Alsana is an embodiment for the unattainable process of stitching together hybrid cultural fabrics as she negotiates her sense of identity through ambivalence and irony. Alsana's fragmented self is translated through humour and code switching, which eventually become her own mode of survival. Her recollections of Bengladash, albiet sparked with sarcasm, denounce a similar failure to redirect her present self towards conviviality. This melancholic dimension of the first-generation experience entraps the diasporic subject within a state of permeant perplexity, challenging any celebratory narratives of

multicultural co-existence. At the contrary, this experience finds jubilant acceptance beneath Second generation characters. This state of existential displacement and bewilderment is not merely sociological but thoroughly psychic, engraving the Lacanian lack at the very core of diasporic identity

### **3.2. Irie Jones Psychic Fragmentation: The Futile Quest for Wholeness**

While *White Teeth* closely sketches first-generation melancholia through nostalgic fixation on a lost homeland, it situates the second-generation experience within a labyrinth of psychic fragmentation and an anxious demarche for coherences and self-integration. Irie Jones, the novel's mixed-race protagonist, exemplifies this fragmentation most vividly. Deprived of a fixed origin, Irie's sense of identity is not anchored in a revocable past but emerges from the impossibility of coherence. Being positioned as neither fully Jamaican nor fully English, neither Black nor white, her search for identity falls beneath the Lacanian logic of lack and desire. Her narrative trajectory is enthroned with repeated efforts to secure a sense of wholeness through bodily transformation, romantic desire and intellectual aspiration. Yet each endeavour merely reaffirms the futility of the quest for a unified self.

Throughout her narrative, Irie manages to recognize her difference from other people who belong to other races. Her relationship with her own body functions as the prime site of psychic split, where racialized aesthetics intersect with the Lacanian desire. Irie, indeed, was positioned into a childhood spammed with racial stereotypical comments forcing her to think of herself as "wrong" and "ugly". This created a perpetual sentiment of unbelonging to the English society

birthing a teenager who sees her reflection in the mirror as ugly because she is large, with braces, prominent buck teeth, glasses and a dark skin tone (Smith, 2000, p. 170). Instead of perceiving her beauty as “a Jamaican hourglass”, she strives to look like an English rose (Smith, 2000, p.197). As a result, Irie’s identity remains suspended between her conscious self-image and unconscious desires, echoing the deeper malaise between her Caribbean heritage and British upbringing. This internal division is further exacerbated when her English teacher’s racist remark shatters any grain of optimism, forcing her to confront the painful realization that she occupies no place within the English society. In direct dialogue with Lacan’s concept of lack and desire, the protagonist endeavours to fit in by assimilating to English standards. The drastic scene at the hair salon, in which she seeks to straighten her hair, “Straight hair. Straight straight long black sleek flickable tossable shakeable touchable finger-through-able wind-blowable hair. With a fringe” (Smith, 2000 p. 202), stages the internalization of white beauty norms. The repetition of the word “straight” unveils a deeper Lacanian dynamic; the body as the site where lack is most viscerally experienced. The failure of this transformation- the resistant texture of her hair- symbolizes the impossibility of wholeness within the diasporic subject.

Smith’s narrative technique mirrors the mechanisms of the mirror stage most acutely through Irie’s fragmented internal monologue and her encounters with other characters. Irie’s ongoing struggle with her mixed ethnic background and bodily-self-perception is rendered vividly through Smith’s repetitive use of mirror imagery, which dramatizes Irie’s alienation. When Irie “caught an unfortunate glimpse of herself in the scratch and stain of the hall mirror” (Smith, 2000, p.214), the reader happens to witness a moment which crystalizes around

the protagonist's alienation from her own reflection. The metaphor expands to the national landscape, "There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land" (Smith, 2000, p. 197), proposing that her psychic dislocation enthrones her cultural exclusion. Both images evoke Lacan's Mirror Stage, exposing identity as an interminable cycle of misrecognition shaped by external gazes and unattainable desires.

Another millstone in Irie's psychic fragmentation as a creole hybrid, is her romantic encounter with the Iqbal twins, Millat and Magid. Her desire for the twin brothers is rooted in a yearning for belonging and a longing for recognition and a desire. The following passage, "Irie's child can never be mapped exactly nor spoken of with any certainty. Some secrets are permanent" (Smith, 2000, p. 385), describes Irie's inability to distinguish between the Iqbal twins in the moment of intimacy, extending biological ambiguity. Symbolically, it underscores that the "object a" of desire is ultimately irrelevant, that what she seeks is not a particular person but the fantasy of wholeness itself. The Child's biological hybridity literalizes unstable origins and genealogies, reproducing the condition of split subjectivity across the next generation. Eventually, *White Teeth* showcases that second-generation diasporic identity is about enduring the ongoing condition of psychic fragmentation, where identity remains perpetually in flux. A probability where mixed-race, Britishness and otherness may possibly collide.

### **3.3. Redirecting Towards Conviviality**

While Smith juxtaposes two generations, she simultaneously gestures towards the probability of convivial futures, wherein the second-generation characters renegotiate their fractured selves by embracing hybridity and relational



belonging. This shift signals a redirection towards Paul Gilroy's notion of the convivial self. Gilroy's concept of conviviality offers a crucial counterbalance to Lacanian emphasis on melancholia and fragmentation in *White Teeth*. Conviviality, as theorized by Gilroy, refers to the everyday modes of social interaction through which individuals of diverse backgrounds coexist, share social space, negotiate cultural difference and forge provisional solidarities (Gilroy, 2004, p.44). In *White Teeth*, convivial encounters appear vividly when melancholic and fragmented subjectivities face one another within shared urban space.

The experiences of the younger generation in London's multicultural metropolis, most notably those of Irie Jones, best exemplify the concept of the Convivial self. Throughout the episodic encounters with her mixed-race identity, Irie grapples with the tensions of her hybrid heritage and gradually forges a renewed sense of belonging. Positioned as neither fully Black nor white and neither Jamaican nor English, Irie's interactions with individuals from various backgrounds enables her to reconfigure identity as fluid and constantly negotiated within the mechanisms of daily encounters. Her character's development reveals the mundane chase of great expectations, paralleling her gradual ability to embrace a multicultural identity. An achievement that remains largely inaccessible to the first-generation individuals, for whom cultural dislocation breeds nostalgia and loss, yet it constitutes Irie's sole mode of survival as a creole girl. Her acceptance of hybridity, articulated through various key scenes, reconfigures what was once experienced as a mark of fracture and handicap into an empowering mode of self-definition and resilience.

Neena, Millat's aunt, provides the initial catalyst for Irie's journey towards self-acceptance, when she showed her poignant disapproval of her new hair,

lunging her to reconfigure the way she perceives herself worth. Her reproach “You’ve got to re-educate yourself. Realize your value, stop the slavish devotion, and get a life, Irie.” (Smith, 2000, p. 210), signals a critical instant in Irie’s awakening. Moved by their conversation, Irie steps decisively to reclaim her authentic identity by removing all of her artificial hair to embrace her short, Afro hair. A powerful gesture of rejecting imposed beauty norms and racial stereotypes and stepping outside the Mirror stage. Irie’s grandmother, Hortense, occupies another pivotal role in Irie’s journey towards self-realization. Through her uncompromising way of being and her resistance to English beauty and racial norms, Hortense becomes a role model of confidence, resilience and diasporic pride. Her retelling of Jamaican culture and traditions bridges a sense of belonging for Irie, where Jamaica became her newfound obsession, overshadowing her interest in English norms. Her grandmother’s affirming words, “You built like me, big, you know” (Smith, 2000, p.283), further grounds her bodily acceptance and Jamaican heritage as a source of pride rather than shame. Both incidents highlight a demarche from alienation to affirmation as a gateway to her mongrel self.

Irie’s conciliation with both her Jamaican and English heritage indicates a profound psychological and sociological rebirth. One that registers her imperceptible movement outside the refrains of the Lacanian realm of the symbolic towards the convivial subjectivity articulated by Gilroy. This escalating embracement of her mixed-race identity urges Irie to resist the persistent demand for coherence. Her reconfiguration of hybridity facilitates her transition from being a split lost Lacanian subject to a convivial one, who does not locate meaning in mirrored validation but rather in intercultural coexistence, multiplicity and the everyday enactments of belonging. Despite these challenges, the novelist paints a

hopeful portrait of a harmonious, multicultural London, reimagining the diasporic condition as an open site of negotiation, where identity flourishes relationally rather than coherence or melancholic fragmentation.

#### **4. The Convivial Self as a New Mode of Diasporic Belonging**

The overlap between Jacque Lacan's model of Psychoanalysis and Paul Gilroy's Sociocultural lens of conviviality finds its vivid expression in *White Teeth's* everyday urban London. Convivial practices are translated as articulations of Lacanian lack and nostalgic attachments, where the symbolic order shapes psychic and everyday multicultural interactions. The convivial self, in *White Teeth*, embodies a new mode of diasporic belonging, that transcends both nostalgic melancholy and the ceaseless quest for wholeness. This model of selfhood is not merely grounded in national origin but in the relational practices of everyday life in multicultural arena. In lieu of trying to resolve conflicts or reach a unified self, the concept of the convivial self celebrates multiplicity and difference, fostering novel forms of solidarity.

As Smith's narrative shifts smoothly between characters, generations and history, the probability of this convivial encounter is fortified. The first-generation characters in *White Teeth* remain inevitably trapped in Lacanian Imaginary identifications as they are unable to achieve the symbolic integration that would allow them to inhabit their present lives fully. Samad and Alsana's obsessive nostalgia for Bengal, for instance, represent the impossibility of getting over their past. Their split subjectivity can never be satisfied because it seeks the fantasy of wholeness itself. In Gilroyan terms, this first-generation melancholia represents a refusal to mourn imperial loss. The Lacanian insight, on the other hand, persists

that everyone is constituted by lack, driven by desire for an impossible wholeness and trapped between imaginary fantasies and symbolic realities. The question *White Teeth* poses through its second-generation characters is whether an alternative form of subjectivity can exist. One that is not rooted in melancholic attachments to lost origins but instead welcomes hybridity and the convivial practices of multicultural urban life. Yet this possibility may only see light when this youngest generation confront rather than reject what their parents bequeaths in them.

For Irie, the intersection of Lacanian notions of lack and desire along with Gilroyan concept of conviviality operate as a transformative mechanism of self-negotiation. As a diasporic individual entrapped within the Lacanian logic of fragmentation, Irie personifies the psychic dislocation passed down from her parents' generation. However, through her reconnection with Hortense's Jamaican heritage and her growing awareness of her plural cultural inheritance, Irie begins to move beyond the melancholic fixation on lost origins. In this juncture, the diasporic identity is not perceived as a fixed wholeness attained through reflection or lineage, but rather reimagined as a reciprocal process of coexistence that is maintained via relationships and shared milieus. Irie's story, ergo, redefines diasporic belonging as a relational practice rather than a resolution of inherited trauma. This path culminates in the New Year's Eve scene, where the novel orchestrates an encounter among multiple generations and ethnicities in a single, chaotic yet jubilant moment. The convergence of mixed-heritage characters exemplifies the emergence of a convivial social order which dissolves racial, cultural, and ideological limitations without the need of assimilation. In this vein, Conviviality does not offer a solution to the question of identity per se, rather it

articulates as an alternative framework that refuses to announce identity as a site of crisis or deficiency.

## 5. Conclusion

To put it quite plainly, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) highlights a labyrinthine bricolage of intertwined trajectories of race, culture and heritage, that reconfigure contours of the millennial diasporic belonging. Each character fits fluidly within Lacanian and Gilroyan perspectives, remapping the psychic and social terrain of belonging across two generations in Multicultural Britain. The first-generation characters fall beneath the Lacanian model of the split subject due to their nostalgic attachments to idealized origins. The novel's portrayal of Irie Jones, en revanche, as a member of the contemporary generation, reflects a redirection towards unconventional ways of belonging anchored in Gilroy's Convivial selfhood. The study ultimately doesn't plainly decode the psychic tension between nostalgia and hybridity, but most significantly highlights the positive interactions of the modern generation as they navigate identity through coherence and cohabitation.

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