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Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: The Interpellation of the Colonial Subject in Multicultural Britain

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ABSTRACT

White Teeth (2000) fictionalises the realities that immigrants experience and reveals how they find themselves caught in a chaotic, fragmented and alienated world and seek to actualise themselves through similar escape mechanisms. Through a close reading of the novel, this article, suggesting that a literary text subjectively mediates actual, imagined or reimagined histories in a given period and manifests specific historical contexts through an aesthetic individualisation of the socio-historical totality, attempts to theorise the concept of double alienation from a Marxist perspective and to justify its arguments in response to recent intellectual and political histories and theoretical interventions. In order to provide a different interpretation of the process of alienation and to discuss the twofold escape mechanisms of the colonial subject, this article will, in this context, mainly focus on Samad M. Iqbal and his two sons, Millat and Magid, and analyse how they internalise the socio-cultural and political orientations of white supremacy, run through a state of loss, atomisation, meaninglessness and powerlessness and struggle to escape from and nullify the negatives impacts of the process of double alienation in the colonial centre.

KEYWORDS

Zadie Smith; *White Teeth*; Marx's theory of alienation; double alienation; escape mechanisms

Introduction

White Teeth (2000) represents the beginning of a complex web of multiculturalism, race and nationality and fictionalises the interplay of many competing narratives of religious fundamentalism, generational differences, ethnic diversity and Britishness. The novel, by showing how its ethnically and culturally diverse characters find themselves caught in a chaotic, atomised, alienated and fractured world and seek to compensate for the sense of meaninglessness and nothingness in order to attain happiness, vividly reveals the clash between the liberal rhetoric of tolerance/acceptance of the other and the reality that immigrants experience. As well as capturing the traumatic effects of migration on first- and second- generation immigrants by means of a narrative strategy using ironic and social commentary in a subtly mocking manner in order to highlight more profound, disturbing and painful issues, *White Teeth*, as an epochal novel, mediates the existential trajectory beginning with a shattering of identity and selfhood and leading to a state of discontent, un-belonging and being torn among past, present and future.

The novel, through the represented experiences of its characters, examines the projection of the private sphere to the public level in contemporary Britain, including the

concept of Britishness as a politically constructed category. Analysing the represented experiences of the characters might, for that reason, help expose specific dimensions of the totality of real life and articulate economic, cultural and political histories in Britain in the twenty-first century. In this context, this study will provide a different interpretation of alienation occurring as an outcome of migration from the colonised periphery to the colonial centre, London, and discuss the characters' twofold escape mechanisms, outward and inward, in connection to the relations of power and the social whole. This study will also investigate the process in which Samad M. Iqbal and his two sons, Millat and Magid, interiorise the social, cultural and political orientations ascribed by white supremacy, run through a state of loss, disaffection, dislocation, meaninglessness, and attempt to escape from and nullify the negative impacts of the process of estrangement.

The concept of double alienation

K. Marx's theory of alienation is based on the argument that individuals run through alienation since they are unable to satisfy their human needs, actualise their human nature and lead a *meaningful* life under existing socio-economic conditions. Concerning this point, Marx (1844) focuses on two concepts: natural man, those natural needs shared by every living entity such as eating or having sex, and species man, those species powers making human beings distinct and unique from the rest of the animal world. As part of Marxian human nature, the concept of species being puts forward the idea that human beings, having a *conscious* life activity, instinctually need to create items or objects in nature in a mentally and physically free, productive, spontaneous, flexible and creative way without being subordinated to someone else in order to manifest and assert their essential powers, which corresponds to the process of the objectification of labour: 'The object of labour is ... the *objectification of man's species-life*: for he duplicates himself not only ... intellectually, but also actively ... and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created'.¹ If the realisation of labour – the process of self-actualisation – is not sustained as an outcome of the division of labour and the appropriation of labour, individuals cannot exercise their own essential potentialities and capacities.² This subsequently leads to their estrangement from their natural functions, productive pleasure and genuine enjoyment, which is revealed in the fourfold alienation of workers in terms of production in Marxist philosophy: (a) alienation to the product of work, (b) alienation to the working process, (c) alienation to human nature, and (d) alienation of one person to another.³

Individuals, unable to actualise their purposive needs for productive activity and to develop their creative talents and capacities lodged in them through the products of their conscious labour activities, experience abstraction and fulfil their intrinsic needs through products in the market. This process of reification/commodity fetishism, which functions as an escape mechanism from the realities, irreversibly results in the commodification of everything related to human beings and social relations and in the transformation of individual existence into a means of physical existence⁴: '[T]he greater this product, the less is he himself ... it becomes a power on its own confronting him'.⁵ In *Criticalique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx comments on the relationship between religion and its illusory fantasies for *the poor*, functional for the ruling class to legitimise the

exploitation conditions, and makes the point that religion is ‘the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of the soulless conditions’ and ‘the illusory happiness of the people’.⁶ As in the case of commodity fetishism, religion, in this context, can also be categorised as an *escape mechanism* through which individuals compensate for their alienated natures and exert, albeit through an *illusory* fulfilment, their intrinsic values and existential being within the oppressive economic realities of the capitalist mode of production.

In his writings, Marx points out that British colonialism had a double mission in India – destructive and regenerating – and needed to create the infrastructure of the material foundation of Western society which would be helpful for a potential progressive social order,⁷ while he also provides a sizable number of theoretical arguments about race, ethnicity and class and articulates racially structured social relations within the dichotomous formation of the exploiter and the exploited.⁸ It is, therefore, not surprising that there are very different and controversial opinions about Marx within different disciplines. On the one hand, he is called as an apologist for British colonialism in India because of his Eurocentric arguments and idealistic predictions based on a flawed historical vision about India, especially in his articles on Indian affairs from 1853 to 1858. On the other hand, he is seen as a revolutionary critic and scholar supporting the emancipation of nearly four million slaves during the Civil War in the U.S. and emphasising that slavery is an inextricable constituent of modern capitalism. This is actually why the relationship between Marxism and postcolonial theory has been both ‘antagonistic and collaborative’ and several different scholars have supported either of the above arguments since the appearance of postcolonial studies as a field in the 1980s.⁹

Focusing on the asymmetries between the two theories and having a discussion about their limitations actually lead to a theoretical impasse. To exemplify, despite analysing the dialectics of race and class within the totality of the social relations of production and offering a universalist scope and ambition for the exploited, Marxism, in its dominant formation, does not seem to *systematically* articulate social, cultural, political and ethnic movements centred around otherised and marginalised identities in relation to capitalism taking on a more multi-cultural and multi-national orientation. It is also unable to *fully* clarify the double victimisation of a ‘black’ working-class person who immigrated to the colonial centre, especially after the process of ‘decolonisation’ in the second half of the twentieth century – ‘black’ here basically refers to a political category including the marginalised and the otherised from many different ethnicities, beliefs, localities, culture or any kind of social groups, especially those migrants from *colonial* backgrounds.¹⁰ This should not, of course, mean that the arguments of Marx about the relationship among race, class and capitalism are not functional or inspirational anymore. Considering the dialectics of time and space, expecting Marx to precisely predict socio-cultural and political circumstances in the twenty first century would not be realistic since Marx was not an oracle providing prophetic predictions. From a different perspective, without a class-centred and anti-Establishment approach, postcolonial theory would not read colonialism in connection to capitalism and globalisation and might, therefore, legitimise contemporary forms of power and be responsible for the neoliberalisation of identity politics.¹¹ It would, in a way, propose the tenets of neoliberalism – including values such as individualism, deregulation and competition – as the ideals of a true emancipation and docile different subjectivities for the global interests of capitalist sovereignty.¹² In other words,

if postcolonial theory does not suggest a feasible and radical alternative world order, it would jump on the 'neoliberal bandwagon' and unintentionally justify hegemonic capitalist notions.¹³

In this context, whether celebratory or elegiac in terms of their overall orientations, such arguments should not be at the forefront anymore and the relationship between Marxism and postcolonial theory should be reconceptualised.¹⁴ This seems to be essential in order to foreground their progressive, revolutionary, radical and challenging aspects and to create a new model for the current global conjuncture in the world. This intersectional model, which is critical of both colonialism and the dilemmas of neoliberalism by means of a materialist mode of reading, might not, then, limit the explanatory power of the two theories. It might locate the root causes of inequality and oppression within global capitalism and juxtapose identity politics with class politics in a radically intersectional manner. The concept of double alienation might, therefore, exemplify the theoretical synthesis of Marxism and postcolonial theory because neither Marx's theory of alienation based on a class-centred approach nor cultural alienation based on identity politics is able to wholly articulate the alienation process of a 'black' working-class person who experiences alienation because of both his/her class position and ethnical background in the colonial centre. Marx's theory of human nature as part of his alienation theory would also help rationalise the foundation of the double alienation process which is a new form of social subjectivity in the contemporary phase of globalisation.

Although it sounds somewhat reductionist, Marx's theory of alienation, including his arguments about human nature, *still* unveils the underlying causes of the process of estrangement. However, his articulation of alienation only within the framework of class is unable to rationalise the alienation process of a 'black' working-class person in the colonial centre, although his implicit conceptualisation of 'escape mechanism' is rather functional. Marx's theory of alienation, therefore, needs to be reconceptualised in order to articulate powerlessness, meaningless, self-estrangement and isolation in relation to social, political and cultural transformations in the neo-capitalist period, which will actually be a foundational notion for my examination of the characters in the novel.

After the legislation of the British Nationality Act of 1948 during the Labour government of Clement Attlee, all citizens of the Commonwealth countries were granted British citizenship and rights of entry. This encouraged mass migration flows to be employed as cheap labour force in the labour market after the Second World War and, subsequently, led to discussions regarding the notion of Britishness understood more within the racialized hierarchy of superiority. Considering the syntactic hierarchy of the Western colonial mentality, the colonial subject, assuming themselves as primitive and inferior, sought to prove and actualise their own vital being by internalising the core Western values as dignified, true, genuine and normal: 'The colonized is elevated above his jungle in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards'.¹⁵ This mental and cultural colonisation process is actually one of the occasions that is often fictionalised in contemporary British literature, as in *White Teeth*, because literary works, whether they are concerned with social issues or not, tend to depict imagined and reimagined histories through an aesthetic individualisation of social, cultural and political realities in their specific historical forms. Analysing existing symbolic details, sign systems and nodal points remaining repressed under the ideological layer of *White Teeth* might, for that reason, unearth the cultural, social, economic and ideological

interpellation process of the colonial subject who migrated to Britain after the British Nationality Act of 1948. In this context, articulating the process in which the immigrant characters in *White Teeth* run through estrangement might enable a greater understanding of the victimisation of the colonial subject – *not* the fictional ones – in contemporary Britain. As I pointed out above, neither Marx's conception of alienation theory based on class nor cultural alienation based on devaluing or abandoning one's ethnical background/loss of identity can *entirely* rationalise the alienation process of the colonial subject in the colonial centre. The colonised experience the process of alienation both as part of the working class and as the marginalised colonial subject, and I will refer to this as the process of *double alienation*. In the rest of the article, by drawing on Marxism and postcolonial theory, I will attempt to reinforce my arguments regarding this conceptualisation through some examples from the novel.

The process of double alienation in *White Teeth*

In the novel, the immigrant characters are unable to participate in the decision-making processes of the state/public life, to feel confident due to dislocation, interpersonal mistrust, excessive competition, cultural insignificance and lack of a stable identity, and to become integrated into the mainstream society. Despite the celebration of creativity, freedom and multiculturalism, the immigrant characters struggle to nullify the unpleasantness of double alienation and nothingness in the zone of nonbeing through some similar illusory outward and inward escape mechanisms to those of the white working class such as having casual sex, drinking excessively, living beyond their means, watching sport games, getting high by smoking cannabis or finding peace in commodities. However, unlike the white working class, the 'black' working class *firstly* need to justify their political existence in the mainstream white society and, for that reason, would like to be approved for visibility, self-worth and self-affirmation. In other words, the colonisers create identities through restructuring the epistemological and cultural boundaries of the Orient, and the victimised, as an outsider estranged from themselves, interiorise and perform the narratives of the discursively constructed cultural and political codifications of the colonisers in return for recognition, approval and self-actualisation. Speaking the Queen's English, having casual sex with *white* women, obsession with high table manners or telling heroic stories as a soldier in the British army functions as a *first* means to get rid of the fundamental reasons and manifestations of double alienation, to assert their own existential and intrinsic being and to realise themselves within the boundaries of a class-and-race-ridden society.

Considering the arguments above, Samad Iqbal and his two sons, the three working-class characters in the novel, find themselves ethnically, socially, historically, culturally and economically marginalised, otherised and victimised in an implicit way, although this process functions with a more politically correct rhetoric and discourse as in *the* British racism. These characters, in return, struggle to actualise and prove themselves and overcome the process of double alienation through different escape mechanisms within the boundaries of the socio-cultural and political operation of the relations of production and power. Samad Iqbal, a World War II veteran and a Bengali Muslim immigrant working as a waiter in a restaurant with a crippled hand, for instance, proudly aligns himself with the British Empire with a sense of patriotic duty while fully embracing

his racial, religious and cultural identity. In order to feel significant, valuable and acknowledged,¹⁶ he, as a badge of a ‘great honour’,¹⁷ wishes to fight for and defend a country which is not his and longs to become a hero in the history books of the Empire, which, in a way, leads to the internalisation of the mythos of equality:

I am educated. I am trained. I should be soaring with the Royal Airborne Force, shelling from on high! I am an officer ... I will show the English army that the Muslim men of Bengal can fight like any Sikh. Better! Stronger! And are the best educated and are those with the good blood, we who are truly of Officer Material.¹⁸

In the army, Samad, wearing a Dickinson-Smith’s uniform with ‘shiny officer buttons’ and having a cigarette casually hanging off his lower lip, screams instructions and enjoys commanding an Englishman, telling him what to do and the manliness of this authority.¹⁹ Such a hierarchal power dependence evokes the master-slave relationship between Crusoe and Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* and might be interpreted as a subversion of the systematic interpellation of the Orient as the victimised within an Occidental episteme; however, it essentially perpetuates the hegemonic discourse and narratives of colonial capitalism rather than challenging and deconstructing its binary paradigms.

Samad’s obsession with revisiting the Indian Mutiny and retelling the heroic story of his great grandfather, allegedly the leader of the Mutiny, is another instrument – also an outward escape mechanism – not to be nobody or nothing in a new locale and to be socially and culturally recognisable through having ‘a bit of history’ in *his* blood.²⁰ Although Samad, claiming that there would be no Gandhi without Pande, allows us to hear the two versions of the story, thus revealing the impossibility of *the* truth and challenging the official rhetoric of British colonial historiography, this is a defiant reaction rather than a revolutionary or anti-colonial one. The objective of Samad is actually not to ‘write back’ to the Empire by means of an alternative discourse, but to align himself with the strong, to get rid of his feeling of inadequacy, powerlessness, inferiority and cultural isolation and, unlike his friend, Alfred Archibald Jones, a white working-class person, to sustain his political existence in the colonial centre:

Samad puffed up with pride ... Naturally, you will get these pretty English academics trying to discredit [Mangal Pande], because they cannot bear to give an Indian his due. But he was a hero and every act I have undertaken in this war has been in the shadow of his example.²¹

The episode in which Samad convinces Abdul-Mickey, who is of Arab descent, to display the portrait of Mangal Pande in his Pool House is, in a similar way, related to Samad’s desire to create his own sphere of dominance and power and to gain autonomy through recognisable iconic images as the signifiers of the legitimacy of his arguments. As in the scene of writing IQBAL between one leg of the bench and the other a few months after arriving at Britain, Samad, through a primitive impulse, primarily aims to make *his* name permanent and to give ‘a souvenir of his youth’ to his grandchildren in a strange land²²: ‘I wanted to write my name on the world ... like the Englishmen who named streets in Kerala ... like the Americans who shoved their flag in the moon’.²³ Although Rebecca Dyer points out that ‘Samad manages to revise the “text” of London through his storytelling’,²⁴ Samad, internalising the cults of the money-oriented world such as egocentrism and social-property relations, is solely concerned with asserting his existential being and intrinsic values through the story of his great grandfather and

with seeking for recognition, tolerance and respect; as a consequence, he is unable to propose an anti-colonial, progressive and emancipatory framework to critique and resist the colonial historiography.

Samad's failure to economically, existentially and culturally actualise himself leads to his systematic ostracisation from the mainstream white society and, subsequently, to his religious seclusion. Despite his attempts to masturbate with his left hand, which is forbidden in Islam, and to have an affair with the red haired music teacher, Poppy Burt-Jones, his increasing attachment to Islam functions as an inward escape mechanism in order to escape from the economic problems and the so-called cultural corruption in Britain and to console his economic, moral and social crises²⁵: '[This] is not motivated by a desire for righteousness; rather, he latches on to religion as a spiritual remedy to fight off his disenfranchisement as an immigrant'.²⁶ In his first years in London, Samad rarely refers to himself as a Muslim; however, in direct proportion to his level of double alienation, Samad clings to his religious affiliation more and even starts to pray five times a day. This might, from a different perspective, be interpreted as a reaction against Anglicisation, assimilation, existing power relations or epistemological degradation exerted on his identity through monolithic markers of *the* nation. Nevertheless, considering that Samad eventually accepts the Bengali-British identity, his religious and ideological transformation is *also* a means for soft resistance against the delegitimisation of his own roots and for the glorification of his identity for public recognition and approval within the boundaries of the discursive essentialist constructions of the victimiser, which is, again, a defiant attitude.

The use of language by the colonial subject is fundamentally significant since it is the medium through which 'a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated' and 'the conceptions of "truth", "order", and "reality" become established'.²⁷ It is a battleground over the relations of power between the standardised form of English – the institutional representative of the Establishment – and preserving the specificity of the pre-colonial culture and language. Conforming to the use of a more acceptable speech pattern rather than resisting the systematic imposition of colonial language and manipulating its linguistic forms might metonymically stand for the reinforcement and the internalisation of the discourses of the orientalist mentality. Considering this argument, Samad, as an immigrant aiming to raise his children in the tradition of his Bengali Muslim heritage, conservatively and ironically prefers to speak the Queen's English by judging others' English: 'Is that English? That is not English. Only the immigrants can speak the Queen's English these days'.²⁸ This is, in fact, more about the fact that Samad assumes the Queen's English to be more refined and sophisticated and that he would like to be acknowledged through his 'proper' use of English by the 'civilised' white men, which is another example of the process of outward escape mechanism for the colonial subject. His pathological obsession with recognition is an explicit consequence of the collapse of his own actuality and ego since he attempts to create a dialogical cultural space between himself and the colonial centre through his mastery of English and to enjoy a certain position of dignity, honour and self-esteem which would only be given by *them* in the white world.

As a mimic man in the novel, Magid, brushing his teeth six times a day, ironing his underwear and sitting down to breakfast with David Niven, also makes an effort to speak in perfect Queen's English, and this is, again, related to the assumption that he will be whiter, closer to being a real human being and 'more English than the English'.²⁹

in the eyes of *them*. Such a feeling of linguistic anxiety and inferiority complex reveals itself in the scene in which Abdul-Mickey, having a strong Cockney accent, is fascinated by Magid's stylistic use of posh English:

Speaks fuckin' nice, don't he? Sounds like a right fuckin' Olivier. Queen's fucking English and no mistake. What a nice fella. You're the kind of clientele I could do wiv in here, Magid, let me tell you. Civilized and that. And don't you worry about my skin, it don't get anywhere near the food and it don't give me much trouble. Cor, what a gentleman.³⁰

Magid's excellence in English helps him sound intellectually credible and functions as a cultural capital for social mobility – his involvement with Chalfenism and the Future-Mouse project – in order to actualise himself both as a middle class person, although he is, from a Marxist perspective, a working-class person, and as an integral part of the colonial centre. Through his pretentiousness and mimicry, Magid essentially struggles to overcome the ideological self-image of being an outsider and to escape from the melancholic symptoms of his rootlessness, disaffection, dispossession, working-class identity and double alienation within the stifling material conditions of urban life in the colonial centre. In other words, Magid illusorily projects his desire of belonging, unity and wholeness to the approval of *them* in England and, for that reason, exerts his existential being through the signifiers of the upper class's Englishness and its cultural, social and ideological rituals in a fantasy space in order to move into the symbolic world of recognition.³¹ Mimicry, the desire for a recognisable other in relation to the metonym of presence and visibility, might, in this context, be classified as another outward escape mechanism functional for the political existence of the colonial subject since it offers an illusory comfort and particular identity through which the colonial subject assume that they are part of the ruling nation.

In stark contrast to his brother, Millat, described as a 'good-for-nothing son' by his father,³² rejects Western values and virtues with anger, does his best to be a good Muslim as a reaction to the upper class's Englishness, participates in demonstrations with his Muslim identity, rallies against Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and even joins a fundamentalist Muslim organisation, KEVIN, in an attempt to be more visible and reverse his inferiority complex in the colonial centre:

[Millat] knew that he ... was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs ... gave all the jobs to his relatives ... worshiped elephants and wore turbans ... [H]e knew he had no face in this country, no voice in the country ... Millat recognised the anger, thought it recognised him, and grabbed it with both hands.³³

Despite being aware of the fact that mafia movies are an extension of Hollywood cinema and exemplify the degenerate state of the Western capitalist culture, Millat idolises and models himself on white actors, and his use of English, unlike his father or his brother, reminds the readers of that of a gangster: 'I just say, yeah ... You got some problem, yeah? Speaka da English? This is King's Cross, yeah? One for Bradford, innit?'.³⁴ Even after becoming a devout supporter of KEVIN, he keeps using the language of mafia movies, which is not his voice, and seeks to persuade himself and others of his significance and existence and of 'his involvement with some type of criminal counterculture' in order to grant himself 'a degree of gangster credibility' and to compensate for his state of identity crisis, directionless anger and double alienation.³⁵

In the novel, before identifying himself with KEVIN, Millat becomes part of a new breed gang, Raggastani, and the members of it, a mix of many youngsters from a variety of different backgrounds, cultures, beliefs and ethnicities, are united under the same roof of a new identity practically constructed through a *uniform*, including wearing bandanas, enormous trousers and baseball caps, and initiation rituals, including walking in a very particular way in which the left side of their bodies assumes a kind of loose paralysis. The Raggastanis speak a combination of Jamaican patois, Bengali, Gujarati and English – a compelling portrait of multicultural London – and use Raggastani as a unifying force to express their shared oppression through physical violence, to defiantly stand against the perceived injustices of contemporary Britain and to feel more significant by attempting to subvert the remnants of colonial mentality in the public sphere:

People had fucked with Ranil, when he sat at the back of the class and carefully copied all teacher's comments into his book. People had fucked with Dipesh and Hifan when they wore traditional dress in the playground. People had even fucked with Millat, with his tight jeans and his white rock. But no one fucked with any of them any more because they looked like trouble.³⁶

Despite the fact that Millat does not even know how to pray properly,³⁷ he, afterwards, joins a militant group, the Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation (KEVIN). The adherents of KEVIN, fuelled by anger due to xenophobia, otherisation, marginalisation, debasement and economic inequality in the colonial centre, call themselves the true followers of Islam and would like to use Islam as a means for the politicisation and mobilisation³⁸ of the Islamic community in London and of those feared and ridiculed in the press; however, they, in reality, act like 'thugs in a gang' and, in this way, would like to make their own 'mark' in 'this bloody country'.³⁹ Millat also views this extremist group as a weapon in order to revenge 'the long, long history of us and them', to write the five-inch script written by his father on a bench 'BIGGER',⁴⁰ to put his stamp on history with no misspelling unlike Pande and to be acknowledged and become more visible in the national domain.

The tendency of the colonial subject towards group identification constructed through a common of plural meanings and symbols around race, ethnicity, identity, locality and religion might, in this context, be classified as another outward escape mechanism instrumental for nullifying entrapment, demonisation, inferiority, ostracisation, double alienation and the need of belonging and exerting, albeit through an illusory mode of actualisation, existential being and intrinsic values. Rather than seeking for opportunities to eradicate capitalism and its oppressive and dehumanising conditions, such isolated and self-segregating organisations attempt to undermine social hierarchies, cohesively strengthen solidarity through dynamic and distinct cultural, religious and racial ties, demand to have a domination over the processes shaping their day-to-day experiences by means of community organisations, and control the immediate conditions of their own communities. This collective consciousness does not deconstruct or undermine the stereotypical images of the colonial subject in the dominant culture and does not create an alternative discourse to the populist formations and racist commentaries of the colonial mentality. This exemplifies the fact that one-dimensional postmodern identity politics is unable to suggest a progressive and revolutionary prescription for the destructiveness of the ideological hegemony of white supremacy.

After reading the final leaflet of KEVIN on Western women entitled ‘The Right to Bare: The Naked Truth about Western Sexuality’, Millat starts to think that his partner wants men to look at her and intentionally ‘prostitut[es] herself to the male gaze’.⁴¹ In order to grasp a full intellectual understanding of KEVIN and the Quran and to purge himself of the taint of the West, Millat, in a pretentious way, even adopts an ascetic life by cutting down on his habit of drinking alcohol and hanging around with ‘white girls’⁴²; however, he, thinking that his religion is, unlike Christianity or Judaism, not based on faith, but on intellectuality, often gets a thorough oral sex from one of his partners without touching her at all, ironically revealing his dilemma between his sexual instincts and his adherence to the rules and restrictions of KEVIN. In another scene, Shiva joins KEVIN for women, particularly for *white* women, since women love his beard, are impressed by his new asceticism and tell him that he has ceased to be a boy at thirty-eight; and he, as a member of KEVIN, gets more ‘pussy’ than he has ever had as a ‘kaffir’.⁴³ Such relationships, lacking real depth and spiritual connection, actually provide sensual and momentary pleasures that help the colonial subject enjoy themselves away from the realities of the process of double alienation in the colonial metropolis and construct masculinities through performatives speeches and physical actions. They restore their manhood through the sexual conquest of women, especially white women, and gain mastery over the bodies of them in order to illusorily get over the sense of despair, anger and humiliation as well as his ‘slave mentality’ and ‘colour complex’,⁴⁴ which functions as another outward escape mechanism for the colonial subject in the novel: ‘When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilisation and dignity and make them mine’.⁴⁵ They, objectifying women as a source of fleshly fulfilment, seek acknowledgement through white women, whom they perceive as the embodiment of the existence of the superior white culture, and achieve ‘a symbolic victory’ by making white women dependent on them.⁴⁶ As in the other forms of escape mechanisms, this is also a defiant reaction conforming to the stereotypical representation of the colonial subject in which they are attributed sexual power and potency and reduced to the position of sex objects.

White Teeth is also centred on a young mixed-race woman, Irie, and her struggle to conform to an imposed ideal of beauty and femininity ascribed through cultural and social icons in order to become more visible and to feel more significant in a racialized society. In a scene, as a half-white and half-Jamaican woman, Irie, feeling lost, fat and ugly, decides to fight her genes and her ‘wrongness’ and to have straight and dark red hair by beating each curly hair of hers into submission.⁴⁷ She goes to the hairdresser which is full of ‘desperate wretched patients’ with Afro or half-caste hair⁴⁸; however, her hair, in the end, comes out dead, dry, splintered and stiff like the hair of a cadaver. She, then, goes to a shop called Roshi’s Haircare, gets eight packets of number 5 black hair with a red glow and has it plaited to her own hair at P.K.’s Afro Hair: Design and Management. The internalisation of the values of institutionalised colonial discourse and practices based on racial origin, in a way, leads to the self-otherisation of Irie’s own body – the process of disembodiment – and to the assumption that her skin colour is inherently the problem. Seeing herself through the eyes of the mainstream white society, accepting the practices of the dominant racial significations and normative norms and stereotypes and, therefore, having insecurities about her own racialized body result in inferiority complex, self-hatred and self-abjection. Contrary to the fetishistic

image of exotic femininity, Irie is portrayed to despise her own black body, symbolising the epidermalisation of her inferiority, to use the term of Frantz Fanon (1986), and she requires a white approval in order to suppress and avoid the dynamics based on her external realities. Irie's mimicry of the narrowly Western definition of beauty, in this context, functions as an outward escape mechanism from the process of double alienation, which creates another dialectical power dynamic and negotiation between the coloniser and the colonised in multicultural Britain.

Despite thinking that she looks more terrible after having long, straight and dark red hair, Irie gradually comes to realise her potentials and confidence, makes peace with her own body and sleeps with both Magid and Millat within a matter of hours. This suggests that Irie, unable to secure her liberation from social and cultural practices of the racialisation of the concept of beauty, illusorily compensates for her state of victimisation, fragmentation and double alienation, seeks validation and struggles to actualise herself by maintaining sexual relationships with multiple men, which is, again, a defiant resistance and an escape mechanism since it cannot challenge the ideological hegemony of dominant ideologies.

Conclusion

Marx's theory of alienation is still able to articulate the *fundamental* reasons of the process of estrangement in contemporary society; however, since capitalism has taken on a more multi-cultural orientation in the second half of the twentieth century, it needs to be reconceptualised in order to set up a theoretical framework through which the double alienation process of the colonial subject in the colonial centre might be refined and developed in a systematic way. Suggesting that a literary text subjectively fictionalises actual, imagined or reimagined histories in a given period and manifests specific historical contexts through an aesthetic individualisation of the socio-historical totality, this study analyses the domestic, cultural, social and political inclinations of the characters through a close reading of *White Teeth* and justifies and reinforces the arguments regarding the concept of double alienation in response to recent intellectual and political histories and theoretical interventions. The colonial subject in the novel, as in the cases of Samad, Magid and Millat, experience double alienation in relation to their racial and cultural backgrounds and socio-economic class positions and struggle to get over the unpleasantness of this process by means of similar illusory outward and inward escape mechanisms in order to be visible and to feel significant in the zone of nonbeing. Although they tend to react against the delegitimation of their own roots for the sake of the glorification of their racial and cultural identities for public recognition, the cultural and political codes of this 'resistance', in fact, remain locked within the boundaries of the isolated, self-centred and individualistic sphere of postmodern capitalism, and the resulting impasse, intensifying and universalising the conditions of double alienation, defiantly legitimises the discursive continuity of the orientalist mentality.

Notes

1. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 1844, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Economic-Philosophic-Manuscripts-1844.pdf>, 32.

2. Sercan Hamza Bağlama, *The Resurrection of the Spectre: A Marxist Analysis of Race, Class and Alienation in the Post-War British Novel* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), 50–54.
3. (Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 29–32).
4. Karl Marx, *Capital I*, 1867, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>, 48.ss.
5. (Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* 29).
6. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, translated by Joseph O'Malley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 3.
7. Karl Marx, 'The Future Results of British Rule in India,' *New-York Daily Tribune*, 8 August 1853.
8. Karl Marx, *The North American Civil War*, 1861. <https://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1861/10/25.htm>.
9. Subir Sinha and Rashmi Varma, 'Marxism and Postcolonial Theory: What's Left of the Debate?' *Critical Sociology* 43 (2017): 545.
10. John Solomos and Les Back, 'Marxism, Racism and Ethnicity,' *American Behavioural Scientist* 38:3 (1995); Gilroy, Paul, *Three Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 2002).
11. A. Dirlik, 'Response to the responses,' *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 1:2 (1999); V. Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Spectre of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013); V. Kaiwar, *The Postcolonial Orient: The Politics of Difference and the Project of Provincialising Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).
12. Mustafa Özbilgin and N. Slutskaia, 'Consequences of Neo-Liberal Politics on Equality and Diversity at Work in Britain: Is Resistance Futile?,' In *Management and Diversity: Thematic Approaches*, edited by J. Chanlat and M. Özbilgin (Chicago: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017).
13. G. Desai, 'Editor's Column: The End of Postcolonial Theory? A Roundtable with Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Gaurav Desai, Mamdou Diouf, Simon Gikandi, Susie Tharu, and Jennifer Wenzel,' *PMLA* 122:3 (2007): 641; M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire* (Massachusetts: Harvard, 2000), 146.
14. N. Srivastava and B. Bhattacharya, 'Introduction to The Postcolonial Gramsci,' in *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, edited by N. Srivastava and B. Bhattacharya (New York: Routledge, 2012).
15. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 19.
16. On another occasion, Samad's two sons, Millat and Magid, go on a bus trip that takes them to the house of Mr. Hamilton, an old guy from 'a different class' (169) who describes black people as 'nigger' (171), 'poor bastards' (172) and 'dark as buggery' (172) and suspects that Millat and Magid will rob him. During the visit, Mr. Hamilton, talking about his memoirs regarding the Second World War, forgets the presence of the colonial subject and even claims that there were 'no wogs' (172) in the British army and that the Pakistanis fought in the Pakistani army. In order to persuade Mr. Hamilton that his father 'played for England' (172) in the war, Magid furiously states that his father was shot in the hand, has medals and is a 'hero' (173). This, again, exemplifies the fact that Millat and Magid, as outsiders identifying themselves with the British Empire, would like to be approved and recognised by the coloniser in order to overcome the process of double alienation they undergo and to feel significant and more powerful in the colonial metropolis, which is an example of outward escape mechanism.
17. Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 88.
18. (Smith, 88).
19. (Smith, 109).
20. (Smith, 99).
21. (Smith, 99).
22. (Smith, 115).
23. (Smith, 505–6).
24. R. Dyer, 'Generations of Black Londoners: Echoes of 1950's Caribbean Migrants' Voices in Victor Headley's *Yardie* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*,' *Obsidian III: Literature in the African Diaspora* 5 (2004): 97.

25. In the novel, swearing, drinking Guinness, having a friend who is a non-believer, masturbating, longing for another woman or anything associated with Britain is considered to be corrupt by Samad (149). He depicts the Western world consisting of individuals who would exchange faith for sex, sex for power and fear of God for self-pride (207). The reflections of this corruption process are, according to Samad, noticeable in the daily lives of Muslim children growing up in Britain. Millat, for example, farts in the mosque and chases blondes; Khandakar has a white girlfriend and wears mascara in the evenings; Kurshed smokes marijuana and wears baggy trousers; Khaleda has sex with a Chinese boy before marriage; and Bimal studies drama in the university (218).
26. Z. Esra Mirze, 'Fundamental Differences in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*,' in *Zadie Smith Critical Essays*, edited by Tracey L. Walters (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 188.
27. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 7.
28. (Smith, 181).
29. (Smith, 406).
30. (Smith, 449).
31. Nick Bentley, 'Re-Writing Englishness: Imagining the Nation in Julian Barnes's *England, England* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*,' *Textual Practice* 21 (2007): 486.
32. (Smith, 286).
33. (Smith, 234).
34. (Smith, 230).
35. J. Linn Watts, "'We are divided people, aren't we?' The Politics of Multicultural Language and Dialect Crossing in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*,' *Textual Practice* 27 (2013): 864.
36. (Smith, 232).
37. (Smith, 460).
38. In his study entitled 'Pluralism, Race and Class in Caribbean Society' (1978), Stuart Hall (361), exploring the functions of race and identity within a new conceptual space, points out that race, ethnicity and identity operate in a mutually reinforcing hegemonic fashion to position 'blacks' towards challenging dominant structures in an ideological way as well as towards disobedience, rebellion and resistance. As a 'class' of the oppressed, the marginalised and the otherised, 'blacks' become aware of their structured subordination and are, for that reason, potentially inclined to stand up to exploitation, opposition and injustice that they experience within the colonial centre. The case of Mo, Mohammed Hussein-Ishmael, the Muslim butcher in the novel, is, in this context, a precise manifestation of the potential radicalisation and mobilisation process of the culturally and racially subordinated colonial subject. Mo, the owner of a traditional halal shop, experiences numerous physical attacks and encounters real violence. He is stabbed, loses the tips of three fingers and has both legs and arms broken, and his feet is set on fire and his teeth is kicked out by those 'white youths' (473), which might, in a way, be a consequent of Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech and the subsequent anti-immigrant violence. Mo, feeling 'emasculated' (472), decides to join KEVIN in order to get his 'payback' (473) and to go and beat 'the shit out of some of these people' (474), which is another defiant reaction in the novel.
39. (Smith, 295).
40. (Smith, 506).
41. (Smith, 372).
42. (Smith, 286).
43. (Smith, 502).
44. (Smith, 375).
45. (Fanon, 63).
46. Ashley Dawson, *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 38.
47. (Smith, 267).
48. (Smith, 275).

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