Split Identities
Hybridity and Mimicry within the characters in *White Teeth*

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Introduction
The story of *White Teeth* takes place in London, a city which lives in both its past and present. Through its citizens from former colonies, the colonization time becomes vivid once again. Their presence in Britain was welcomed due to a lack of manual labour Britain suffered after the decolonisation. There was a shortage of people in the service industry, and many of those who came to Britain ended up in that field. During the time of colonisation the natives served the colonizer, who was then the visitor. The hierarchy of the master and the servant had now found new ground where it could develop. The former roles of the master and the servant were once again applied, but this time the master was the native and the servant was the visitor. The migration of people from former colonies to Great Britain only changed the geographical space of the colonization, the status between the master and the servant is unaffected. The former colonized came to Britain and, just like the British, they brought their culture and beliefs to a new continent. One can say that they were the new colonizer, an oppressed colonizer without the ability to become the authority. Until then, everyday life in Britain had not been affected by its history that happened overseas. The British in Great Britain had never really been a part of the great empire that the country once was. They had never had an encounter with the colonized and, due to that, they might never have experienced racial stereotyping. Nevertheless, they certainly stereotyped the other that they had only heard of. Because of the colonized migrating to Britain the British were now able to relate to their history. They became affected by each other’s presence, which made it impossible to live in a pure culture. By pure culture I mean a culture that has not become affected by any other cultures. Bhabha states that “pure identity is only possible through the death of complex interweaving of history” (5).

Most literary critics and reviewers have, in their analyses of *White Teeth*, focused on the multicultural and racial issues. This is quite understandable since there are three ethnically diverse families that are being portrayed, and Smith has been awarded for the ways she deals with multiculturalism and racism in *White Teeth*. In addition to this achievement, she also manages to make her characters appear both multifaceted and memorable to her readers. *White Teeth* introduces us to a whole array of personalities and destinies, all vivid and with stories to tell. In her narrative, Zadie Smith reveals what it is like to grow up in multicultural London. She writes about a context that she is very familiar with.

This essay proposes an alternative perspective on some of the most salient themes in the novel by focusing instead on the ambiguous portrayal of some of the family members within the Iqbals’ and the Jones’. There are particularly two themes that form the
core of the depiction of these families. The two themes are hybridity and mimicry. The aim of this study is to explore what the text communicates to the reader about hybridity and mimicry in the portrayal of some of the characters in the two families in *White Teeth*. I will focus on the male characters within the two families, as identity is created differently for men and women. In my opinion, hybridity and mimicry reflects mostly the behaviour of the man in the colonial context. The book has helped me understand the unavoidable effects of hybridity and mimicry, how complex these features are, and what effect they have on people in the multicultural society. Hybridity is a part of us all. To claim a certain culture as pure or claim to be a pure result of a culture is vain: pureness does not exist in that way. Everything is more or less a mixture. The hypothesis in this essay is that all characters in *White teeth* are hybrids, and that mimicry is used by some of them as an attempted camouflage.

**Hybridity and Mimicry**

Hybridity and mimicry are two elements within postcolonialism. This theory studies the “effects of cultural displacement” (Bertens 200). It analyses the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized from a non-Eurocentric perspective. The focus is on how people were affected by colonization and on the resistance towards the colonial power. (Bertens 200) According to some critics, it is not possible for a European to make such an analysis from a postcolonial perspective. Postcolonial critics argue that it is not even possible to make such an analysis if you have been raised through the European schools; however, some of the postcolonial writers and critics have studied at universities around Europe. This, I think, might have affected their ability to view the colonial time without being tainted by a European perspective, and its problems, with giving a fair picture. Nevertheless, people living in the former colonies also face the problem of giving a fair picture, because they might not have been present during that time, and because they, just like everybody else, are affected by the globalization.

The colonial era made us aware of the other, their way of living, their culture. Culture is perceived as everything alien and exotic about the other. (Michaelsen 166) “Culture only emerges as a problem, or a problematic, at the point at which there is a loss of meaning in the contestation and articulation of everyday life, between classes, genders, races, nations” (Kraniauskas 118). Colonial stereotyping is created as the result of an anxious recognition of the difference. The creation is a kind of fear and attraction that is dealt with through denial. (Bhabha 110) Stereotyping is a basic element of colonial discourse. It is used as a source of discriminatory practices for the authorities, a split between different cultures, “mother culture
and its bastard” (Bhabha 111) Colonial authority requires forms of discrimination, cultural and racial, that disallow a stable unit. (Bhabha 111) To prevent the non-Europeans from becoming dark-skinned Europeans, qualities that were typically of the Europeans were created by the colonizer. Westerners were stereotyped as people with high morals who were rational and heroic, especially when it came to war. All these positive attributes were challenged if one of the colonized would have success in the war. They would either be labelled as barbarians, if they were fighting against the colonizer, or as the smartest colonized, who adapt fast to the Western traditions, if they were allies. (Benton 2) To preserve control over the colonized, the British let the colonized believe they were making a difference. The British raised the status of the colonized by allowing them to take part in British legal proceedings. (Benton 7)

Due to globalisation the world has become smaller, a culture that is created from a common history within a country no longer exists. According to Spivak the “cultural language is today dominated by space rather than time” (313). This means that culture is based on geographical borders rather than historical events. Too much is interfering in history so the outcome cannot be pure. As mentioned above Bhabha states that “pure identity only is possible through the death of complex interweaving of history” (5). It is not just within the nation’s relation to other nations that the problem of otherness occurs. Nations are confronted with the fact that they are split within themselves. The population within the nation has become heterogenic. (Bhabha 148)

Cultural differences and stereotyping result in two themes that are recurrent in postcolonialism, hybridity and mimicry. Homi Bhabha is one of the leading postcolonial critics of our time. He explains hybridity like this,

Hybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the pure and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination (Bhabha 112).

Central in Bhabha’s work is what actually happens in the cultural interaction between colonizers and colonized. Bhabha argues that the encounter affects both and neither of them
can escape the complex relationship (quoted in Bertens 207). To put a label on people’s
differences, such as black consciousness, Indian soul, aboriginal culture, and so forth is no
longer significant. Their culture is changing because of the encounter with the other and the
stereotyping lacks substance. (Lye, “Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory”) The British have
always been convinced that their presence overseas greatly affected the natives. It was said
that the smartest and most sensitive of the natives immediately started to adopt Western
values. But they were not comfortable with the idea that their own sons and daughters might
in their turn be affected by the cultures they encountered. (Bertens 206-7)

According to postcolonialism, identity is an unstable entity. It is constructed
through interaction with the other. The colonizers get their identity by making the differences
between them and the other visible. The differences have in some sense been constructed
beforehand by the stereotyping of the colonized other. It is not until the colonizer and the
colonized get in contact that the true identities are established (Bertens 207). While colonized
people can feel completely different from the colonizer, in their nature and in their traditions,
they are also different from their own past, since they have become affected by the presence
of the colonizer.

The outcome of these encounters between different cultures is hybridity, a mix
of different cultures. The mix can be interpreted as something positive and dynamic but it can
also be oppressive. (Lye, “Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory”) Although a hybrid is a mix of
different cultures, each component within the hybrid can not be recognised. Because of the
interweaving of history and the hybrid as a result, culture can no longer be identified from the
perspective of knowledge and moral reflection; it has become a much more complex feature.
(Bhabha 37)

According to Bhabha (1994) colonial mimicry can be explained as follows,

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable other, as a subject
of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. In order to be effective
mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.
Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process
of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of double articulation; a complex
strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriates the other as it
visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a
difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of
colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both
Bhabha’s postcolonial usage of the term mimicry represents a realism that is more than representational. He adds, however, that mimicry repeats rather than represents and in that act of repetition originality is lost. What is left is the trace, the impure, the artificial, the second-hand. (Beya 2) Using the technique creates the imperialist reality. Edouard Glissant puts forward that the sense of exclusion from the real is characteristic for the non-Westerners, the colonized. At first, the ones who use mimicry presume that what they are mimicking is real, but when they meet the reality outside the colony they regard themselves as living in a permanent unreality. (quoted in Jensen 86)

The effect of mimicry is camouflage. The imitative camouflage of the mimic man protects him from colonial power at the same time as an interpretation of the power is made which makes it visible and as a result that power is represented. (Jensen 86) Bhabha states that mimicry is not to harmonize with the background. (85) To use mimicry with some slippages will make the colonizer think of the colonized as intellectuals and let them be a part of the society, however if they try to harmonize with the background the colonizer will feel threatened. The colonized were raised in English schools, raised to become mimic men. “Indian in their blood and colour, but English in their taste, in morals and intellect” (Bhabha 87). It scared the British when they realized that the colonized were becoming more like the British.

According to Bhabha, colonial mimicry is all about achieving the hybridity of culture, if hybridity is seen as a triumph. (Lim 51) To actually succeed in becoming a hybrid can be seen as something positive: being a part of the different cultures one is faced with, let it become the most natural thing of ones identity.

Mimicry is explained in a psychoanalytic sense, to imitate is to cling to the denial of the ego’s limitations, to identify is to assimilate conflictually.

It is from between them, where the letter of the law will not be assigned as a sign, that culture’s double returns uncannily neither the one nor the other, but the imposter to moch and mimic, to lose the sense of the masterful self and its social sovereignty. It is at this moment of intellectual and psychic uncertainty that representation can no longer guarantee the authority of culture; and culture can no longer guarantee to author its human subjects as the signs of humanness. (Bhabha 137)
This catalog of the debris of the migrant soul defines a negative baggage, so to speak, enumerating what has been lost, broken, left behind, forgotten; it is a litany of loss, disruption, and discontinuity. Migration is not only the birth of a new self, but the death of an old one: “to be born again, first you have to die” (Gane 23). Migration, as a process of death and rebirth, is thus also a form of reincarnation (Gane 23).

**Samad Iqbal**

Hybridity and mimicry are, without a doubt, two strong themes in *White Teeth*. It is in the character Samad Iqbal that both of these issues are most pronounced.

Before the war, Samad’s only encounter with the English was in what was then colonized India, where he was the colonized. In his life he had always lived under English rule: the English affected him and he affected them.

Samad’s act of mimicry changes from being a well-working tool to become useless depending on the presence of the cultural stereotyping. The effect of his mimicry takes different turns in his life. Until the Second World War we do not know much about his life and how he made use of mimicry, although you are giving certain hints that show that he in fact used mimicry in what was then India. One of them could be the fact that he voluntarily took part in the Second World War. When he, in the war, became positioned in a tank with Englishmen he was not aware of the impact these men were going to have on him. To Samad’s disappointment, the Englishmen in his tank did not correspond with his expectations of the English; the colonizer, also affected by hybridity, had not represented the typical English. It was not only a disappointment that hit him, it was also the fact that he realised that he had been living in an unreality. He was faced with the fact that the world he had been mimicking was not the reality. Since he was taken by surprise he let his guard down and allowed himself to become affected by the colonial stereotyping that was present in the tank. His identity was already created by others; he was already labelled as the Eastern man. In India, one can presume that Samad had mimicked the white man; however, being exposed to colonial stereotyping his act of mimicry is challenged.

Samad thinks that the English are ignorant, since they do not seem to care about the colonies and because of their lack of knowledge of the east. ‘Sultan’ is the nickname given to Samad in the tank. It is given to him because of his acts and his philosophies are interpreted by the others as an attempt of being superior. He makes it worse by being annoyed by the English ignorance and gives them a lesson in geography and history.
It’s not historically accurate, you know. It is not, even geographically speaking accurate. I am sure I have explained to you that I am from Bengal. The word “Sultan” refers to certain men of the Arab lands (WT 85).

The presence of the English makes mimicry powerless, which makes Samad’s role in the tank inferior and results in him trying to uphold his cultural identity by being superior when it comes to knowledge about the world.

Samad seeks every opportunity to gain his power of mimicry back and as soon as the others are gone he seizes control over mimicry. This time he goes as far as becoming the authority. When the Russians arrive at the village, the opportunity comes to mimic the authority trying to become a hero, by introducing himself as the captain and Archie as the lieutenant he takes one step closer to becoming the authority. With the role as captain he takes command and leads an expedition, an expedition that was initiated by the Russians. The act of pretending to be the captain is just an act of mimicry. When Archie calls him Captain Iqbal he gets annoyed and refuses to answer.

Even between Samad and Archie mimicry is present, the way their relationship is expressed is reminiscent of the colonizer’s relationship with the colonized. Samad’s act of mimicry is successful in their relationship, because the greater knowledge he possesses about the world, which makes Samad come off as superior. The conversations that Samad takes part in during the war define Samad as English. He knows how to act in different situations, a skill he has practised when growing up in colonized India, a skill he uses when mimicking the white man. On one occasion Samad tells Archie that “one strong man and one weak is a colony” (WT 92). One might wonder if he is referring to their relationship. Archie is perceived as ignorant and weak by Samad. The reason for Archie’s being interpreted as weak and ignorant is his inability to hide his feelings of fear and attraction for the other and his lack of knowledge of the other.

In England Samad faces a new challenge, similar to the one he experienced in the tank, when it comes to mimicking the English. Once again there is a lack of content in the act of mimicry. Although he has experienced difficulties getting accepted by the English during the war this seems to be forgotten. To become more like the English he leaves the immigrant-dense neighbourhood, East End, and moves to the more liberal Willesden Green. There is a regression in his mimicking act that remind us of the time in the tank, the frustration he felt when not being able to use mimicry with success, and the same frustration makes its appearance in the context of the school. Although he attends weekly school council
meetings and helps organise concerts, he does not possess the power to affect the outcome of the meetings. The discussion about the Harvest festival becomes an important issue for Samad. During this meeting, he tries to convince the others of the importance of celebrating festivities from other cultures. As a counter argument Mrs Owens pronounces that the harvest festival is more about community than religion. Samad appeals against it by answering “a man’s god is his community“ (WT 130). Even though he puts a lot of effort in trying to act like the authority, he is never able to influence the outcome.

When he realizes that mimicking the English is pointless, he mimics the Muslim man. In the company of Alsana he tries to be a Muslim, trying to give Alsana a guilty conscience. The more English Alsana becomes, the more Muslim Samad tries to become. Samad feels ashamed of the wife he has brought from Bangladesh, she is not at all acting like the typical Bengal woman that he wants her to be. The clothes she wears are questioned by him, without him really reflecting over his own clothes. He is wearing a jogging suite with a baseball cap. When she questions his way to dress, he counters with the argument

The difference is what is in here,’ not looking at her, thumping just below left breast bone. ‘You say you are thankful we are in England, that’s because you have swallowed it whole’ (WT 199).

It is ironic that he claims that what is inside that counts, if you reflect on his previous performances, where he struggles to appear as a Muslim man.

Samad has a constant struggle with being a pure product of the Muslim culture, as if he presumes that there could be only one right way. He has not always lived by the assumption that an area is occupied by only one pure culture, he tells Archie about the entity of stereotyping

if you ever hear anyone speak of the east….hold your judgment. If you are told “they are this” or “they do this” or “their opinions are these”, withhold you judgement until all the facts are upon you. Because the land they call “India” goes by a thousand names and is populated by millions, and if you think you have found two men the same amongst that multitude, then you are mistaken. It is merely a trick of the moonlight (WT 100).

Although he declares this, he uses stereotyping himself towards other cultures, it is as though
he does not believe what he once stated. The reason for his using stereotyping could be to understand the English more easily and to keep them at a distance.

As mentioned above, according to Bhabha, stereotyping is created as the result of an anxious recognition of the difference, the creation is a kind of fear of and attraction to the difference. This fear and attraction are current in Samad’s life, his attraction to his sons’ teacher and his fear that he and his family will become corrupted by England. His curiosity makes him want to be a part of it, but at a safe distance. Samad recognizes the similarities between his own and the English culture but because stereotyping is present it makes it easier to accept the differences. Samad’s hostility towards everything English increases with the time he spends in England. The hostility is an effect of trying to handle the disappointment of being betrayed by the country he once fought for and the feeling of being nobody, not being able to make a difference. What makes the feeling even stronger is that he realises that he is not of any importance for England. He concludes that the English way of living is a sin.

He realises that he is not the pure outcome of a culture, his acts of mimicry have resulted in a man with a mixed identity, a hybrid. His understanding of him not being pure makes him want to commit suicide. He says to Archie

What am I good for Jones? If I were to pull the trigger, what will I leave behind? An Indian, a turncoat English Indian with a limp wrist like a faggot and no medals that they can ship home with me (WT 113).

In England he does not want to live in East End he does not want to become one of the immigrants. Subconsciously he is more influenced by English customs, while consciously he fights against it. Hybridity can be interpreted as something positive and dynamic, it can however also be oppressive as I have mentioned earlier in the essay. Samad does not let hybridity become a positive and dynamic attribute. His anguish at recognising himself as a hybrid results in a battle within him that becomes all about keeping his identity, the one thing that he believes is true. He feels like his identity is threatened by the new country, still, he stays with his family in London. A lot of things in Samad’s acts reveal the hybrid he has become.

Samad is aware of the effect the English culture has on him, so every time he interpret his own acts as English he tries to compensate for it by doing the right thing and act as a proper Muslim. His attraction to his sons’ teacher develops into a relationship. Her
appearance represents everything English. However, she is fascinated by the East, which makes Samad feel special. But feelings of guilt haunt him, not for the fact that he commits adultery, but the fact that he betrays his past, his culture, and his religion. In the war Samad tells Archie that he is not a religious man, he claims that he never had the strength. However, in a country that challenges his identity, it becomes important to him to hold on to the things that represent what he feels is his identity. So to justify his feelings he states, “to the pure all things are pure” (WT 137) But he knows that he is not pure, his identity is a mix, he cannot be referred to as a pure Muslim. He knows he is living by the rules of the Koran, but he is not a religious man. He goes to the mosque and tries, by his acts, to become a true Muslim, yet despite all the effort he puts into acting as a proper Muslim his heart is not in it. Instead, Christianity is used to justify his acts, he asks for forgiveness. This conflict leaves Samad confused and exhausted. The advice is given to him to let go of religion, because it is not healthy to feel guilty.

It is not guilt. It is fear. I am fifty-seven, Shiva. When you get to my age, you become concerned about your faith, you don’t want to leave things to late, I have been corrupted by England, I see that now – my children my wife, they have been corrupted. I think maybe I have been frivolous, maybe I have thought intellect more important than faith. And now it seems this final temptation has been put in front of me. To punish me, you understand Shiva, you know about women (WT 144).

Samad tries to explain things that happen to him as a punishment, afraid that his deeds will result in him going to hell. He will not leave religion out of it and interpret the things happening to him as a midlife crisis that could happen anywhere. “I don’t wish to be a modern man! I wish to live as I was always meant to! I wish to return to the East” (WT 145). Returning to the East would be the solution, England is corrupting his family. As mentioned before, Spivak states that the cultural language is today dominated by space rather than time, so by returning Samad believes that he will be living in a pure culture. The struggle he has is due to his split identity. Shiva asks him “And who…can pull the west out of ‘em once it’s in?” (WT 145).

Many things in life symbolises Samad’s split identity. When he is going out he packs two shirts, one that symbolizes the West, the one he uses when he meets Poppy, the other one he uses when he goes to the mosque, it is the shirt that represents the pure. It
symbolises the West and the East of him. He wants others to see him as the Muslim, the intellectual and religious man. The shirt he wears when he meets Poppy is always tucked away in a plastic bag, as he tries to hide it the same way he tries not to reveal his Western identity. Although he wants to pass as the man from the East, the East scares him. When he takes the bus to visit Poppy he feels uncomfortable when he watches

with dread (....) as white fades into yellow fades to brown, and then Harlesden Clock comes into view, standing like Queen Victoria’s statue in Kingston – a tall stone surrounded by black (WT 164).

Samad feels English on the inside but does not look English. He chooses to act the way he thinks the English expect a man from Bangladesh to act. The conversation that takes place with Mad Mary reveals the split man that lives in the body of Samad.

-we are all having difficulties in this country, this country which is new to us and old to us all at the same time. We are divided people, aren’t we” (WT 179). “We are split people. For myself, half of me wishes to sit quietly with my legs crossed, letting the things that are beyond my control wash over me. Nevertheless, the other half wants to fight the holy war. Jihad! And certainly we could argue this out in the street, but I think, in the end, your past is not my past and your truth is not my truth and your solution – it is not my solution (WT 179).

The holy war, Jihad, is explained in Western terms, he wants to take action into own hands, like the English who do not leaving anything to fate.

The act of being superior in the relationship with Archie is a cover for an insecure split identity. He does not want to be called Sam as it makes him sound too English. He is afraid that the English might have affected him, made him into hybrid. However, when he discusses his return home to Bangladesh with Archie he has doubts of who he is

–what am I going to do? Go back to Bengal? Who would have such an Englishman there? To England? Who would have such an Indian? (WT 112).

Samad’s relation to England and Bangladesh is symbolised in his relationship to
his sons: Magid, whose flaws Samad cannot see due to the distance, and Millat, towards whom he directs all his anger and frustration. “Two sons, one invisible and perfect, frozen” (WT 216). “This son Samad could not see. And Samad had long learnt to worship what he could not see” (WT 217). Samad's two sons are his two lands, and we learn over and over again of his hatred for everything Western. Samad could not see the English flaws when he was in Bangladesh and not the flaws in Bangladesh when he was in Britain.

**Magid and Millat**

Magid and Millat are the two sons of Samad and Alsana, two sons caught between two cultures. They are second-generation immigrants, which mean that they are brought up with the English culture as well as the culture of their parents’ home country. Neither culture appears as a threat at the beginning, the two different cultures might not even be defined as such, since culture is interpreted as something exotic and alien. The sons are leading two different lives, one at home and one in school with their English friends.

Magid who is the eldest by two minutes attempts to blend in. He tries to mimic the English by calling himself Mark Smith among his friends, participate in a chess club, and calling Alsana mum instead of amma.

Magid really wanted to be in some other family. He wanted to own cats and not cockroaches, he wanted his mother to make the music of the cello, not the sound of the sewing machine; he wanted to have a trellis of flowers growing up one side of the house instead of the ever growing pile of other people’s rubbish; he wanted a piano in the hallway in place of the broken door off cousin Kurshed’s car; he wanted to go on biking holidays to France, not day-trips to Blackpool to visit aunties: he wanted the floor of his room to be shiny wood, not the orange and green swirled carpet left over from the restaurant; he wanted his father to be a doctor, not a one-handed waiter; and his month Magid had converted all these desires into a wish to join in with the Harvest Festival like Mark Smith would. Like everybody else would (WT 151).

This quotation reveals Magid’s way of interpreting the English, he stereotypes them as the typical middle-class English. Magid finds it important to participate in the English traditions. To avoid being left out and seen as different by the others, he mimics every thing he interprets as English, he knows how to dress and how to act.
Magid’s obsession with everything English continues when he moves to Bangladesh, where the act of mimicry can progress without being questioned. Mimicry as a camouflage is successfully used by Magid. In a letter to his parents, he explains his view on fate, how he believes that not everything can be blamed on fate, like the colonies have done in the past. He continues by adding that the English never left anything to fate, they took matters into their own hands.

Samad is devastated, that his son, the Muslim leader, is arguing like an Englishman. As time goes by Magid appears more English, even his broken nose makes his appearance more English. Magid gets to meet one of the most famous Indian writers Saraswati, “Samad thinks that this man is an English licker of behinds, a colonized throwback” (WT 287-88).

Magid’s return to England arouses a lot of mixed feelings. The son that was supposed to return as the Muslim leader returns as an English leader who wants to change the future by taking part in the study of the futuremouse, a DNA study, instead of leaving the future to its fate. Magid has never experienced all the racist stereotyping and exclusion that his brother has faced, therefore he cannot relate to the upset feelings the mouse provokes in his brother and his father. In Bangladesh he could mimic the English manners without being questioned, he was English. All the effort Magid has put in becoming English pays off, everything about him articulates Englishness. He rewrites Marcus Chalfen’s work into elegant English and explains the proper behaviour on interviews. What gives his mimicry away is his difficulty adapting to the present English manners, like his old fashioned way of being polite. The English he is mimicking is the stereotype of the English that took shape in the former colony. Mickey at O’Connell’s thinks that Magid’s spoken language sounds like the Queen’s English. The white suit Magid is wearing makes him look like a colonizer.

Although he appears as English, things in his behaviour reveal ambivalence in his identity. Though he takes matters into his own hand, he does it with reverence. Even as younger man he made silent protests against things when he thought that he was not treated with justice. When Samad tries to prohibit the children from taking part in the Harvest festival, he is faced with a silent protest from Magid.

Millat’s experiences are totally different from his brother’s, he has been facing stereotyping before. On one occasion in school, their teacher Poppy asks Millat what kind of music he likes; Millat answers, without hesitation, Bruce Springsteen, which leaves Poopy looking troubled. “Millat’s face fell, troubled that his answer did not seem to be the right one” (WT 156). Later on in life he becomes affected by it again, the incident is certainly not the
only occasions when he has been a victim of racial stereotyping. This time his reaction is not the same due to his being labelled as a Paki his whole life.

‘You look very exotic. Where do you come from, if you don’t mind me asking?’
‘Willesden’ said Irie and Millat simultaneously’
‘Yes, yes of course, but where originally?’
‘Oh’ said Millat…”You are meaning where from am I originally’
Joyce looked confused, ‘Yes originally’
‘Whitechapel’ said Millat (WT 319).

Millat understand what she means by originally, he recognizes the way he is being stereotyped. However, his way of answering the question reveals that Millat is tired of being labelled as a foreigner.

Millat, who remains in London, adopts his father's hatred for the West, or, more specifically, learns hatred for all the racist stereotyping and exclusion he is faced with. In his confusion of identity, Millat wanders from one extreme to the other. As his cousin, Neena puts it: “Look how confused he is. One day he is Allah this, Allah that. Next minute it is big busty blondes, Russian gymnasts and a smoke of the sinsemilla” (WT 284). Millat does not attempt, as his father does, to differentiate himself from the British by his use of register. It is likely that Millat feels English, which would be natural as he was born and raised in London, and just wants to be accepted.

Millat didn’t need to go back home: he stood schizophrenic, one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden. In his mind he was as muck there as he was here. He didn’t require a passport to live in two places at once, he needed no visa to live his brother’s life and his own (WT 219)

Instead of trying to blend in and make use of mimicry, which he knows is going to fail, he does the opposite. He joins a gang called Raggastani, where internal language is a mixture of Jamaican patois, Bengali, Gujarati and English. The group consists of a great mix of cultures, a hybrid within itself, “Their ethos, their manifesto, if it could be called that, was equally a hybrid thing: Allah featured, but more as a collective big brother than a supreme being (WT 231).”

The youngsters gather to express their hatred against the English, whilst getting a
feeling of belonging. The boys in the gang had all been bullied when they were younger because of their appearance. Instead of trying to blend in, as they had tried for many years, they now try to stand out as much as possible, make themselves a reputation as the bad guys. The frustration of not being seen as English expresses itself in trying to put fear in the English society.

Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people’s jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all the jobs to relatives; the he could be a dentist or a shop owner or a curry-shifter, but not a footballer or a film-maker; that he could go back to his own country; or stay here and earn his bloody keep; that he worshipped elephants and wore turbans; that no one who looked like Millat, or spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat, was ever on the news unless they had recently been murdered. In short, he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in this country, until the week before last when suddenly people like Millat were on every channel and every radio and every newspaper and they were angry, and Millat recognised that anger, thought it recognised him and grabbed it with both hands (WT 234).

Millat makes his escape to different organisations and groups, as a teenager he comes in contact with an organisation called KEVIN. KEVIN is an extreme Muslim group, which gives Millat a feeling of belonging. The ironic thing about the group is that the founder of the organisation was not Muslim from the beginning. He was a man with radical opinions who studied Islam at university, a man who did not fit into society. Even the name KEVIN reveals the hybridity that exists within the group, the letters stands for Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation; it is argued that the name is Allah’s and cannot be changed, yet the name has a very English sound.

At first Millat is not captured by KEVIN’s vision, to get his attention one of the members says “‘You could have what I have instead of this terrible confusion you are in, instead of this reliance on a drug specifically imported by government to subdued the black and Asian community, to lessen our power’ (WT 296).” The more time he spends in KEVIN, the more of a fundamentalist Millat becomes. He does not always agree with the opinion of the organisation, but it is a place where he can give vent to his anger and frustration. Leaflets are given to him with propaganda about the white girl’s negative impact on the Muslim man.
Millat is not convinced, as his attraction to English girls is something that he cannot give up. Millat uses the same phrase as his father, can’t say fairer than that, when there is something that he ought not to do. A sign of Millat's frustration is when KEVIN is planning its demonstration against the futuremouse project, which deals with the dilemma of controlling the DNA. Plan A is to stand up half way through the presentation and quote Sura 52 in Arabic. The problem is that no one understands Arabic. To make the audience understand the quotation, it has to be translated into English, which will make the message lose some of its purpose. This plan is interpreted by Millat as lame, he wants more action. He takes matters in his own hands and brings a gun to the presentation, an act of the West, not to leave anything to fate.

The Chalfens have a great effect on both Magid and Millat. Although Millat tries not to become affected by the Chalfens, his way of speaking does, it becomes a mix of Chalfens’ way of speaking and the street talk of KEVIN.

Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, English or Bengali; he lived for the inbetween, he live up to his middle name Zulfikár, the clashing of two swords (WT 351)

Magid and Millat represent the East and the West of Samad, with some recurrent slippages. Although they are identical twins, their reactions in similar situations is totally different. Millat does not seem bothered by their father’s attempts to influence in their lives and decide what they ought to do and not, while his brother gets upset and responds with a silent protest when it comes to the harvest festival.

The busses the children and their father catch on the day of the Harvest festival symbolise where they are heading in life. The children catch the westbound bus and Samad catches the eastbound. Magid and Millat are becoming more and more English, whilst Samad struggles to keep the east within him. As the children approach the final destination the colours turn brighter and brighter and, as mentioned before, the colours outside Samad’s bus turns darker and darker. When children get off the bus in the bright West, a game starts between them where the principle idea is to lay claim on things that they want to have in their possession, a game that is reminiscent of the colonial time, when the colonizer claimed everything of interest. In this game the roles are changed, the East comes to the West and makes its claims. Compared to the fear Samad feels when he gets off his bus, the children seem cheerful.

As a desperate attempt to salvage his sons from the corruption the family is
facing in England, Samad decides to send his sons to Bangladesh. Unfortunately, Samad's economic situation allows him to send only one of his two sons. Faced with this limitation, Samad chooses to send Magid, because he has the brain and will then adapt better and he wants to keep Millat for the reason that he is the best striker Willesden Green had seen in decades. The act of keeping Millat is an act of hybridity. The irony of this is that the son Samad sees as the perfect son, the natural leader, the smiling Buddha and the natural Muslim, is turning out to be the natural Englishman. “Your brother will lead others out of the wilderness. He will be a leader of tribes. He is a natural chief” (WT 216). Millat finds this funny because chief in northern London is slang for fool or arse. Which wilderness is Samad referring to, the one in Bangladesh or in England?

The children’s attempt to be a part of the West can easily be spoiled if they are faced with colonial stereotyping, something they become aware of at the harvest festival. At this festival, which involves charity work, the children from the East will help the white man from the West, and as soon as they knock on the white man’s door, the roles of the master and his servants are once again applied. The man’s behaviour offends the children in different ways, Magid tries to be the peace maker, while Millat reacts with anger. The man’s way of stereotyping the coloured man is one of the first times the boys are confronted with the fact of being labelled because of their appearance, in such an obvious and offending way. Their English identity is questioned which make them feel like foreigners in their own country.

You might think that the immigrant can change to whichever path that lies before him or her, but Millat and Magid are trapped in the temporal instant. Immigrants cannot escape their history. Millat, who is faced with the colonial stereotyping, does not mimic the English, it would be too complicated. His behaviour would not be accepted. The identity of Millat is constructed through the interaction with the English. Through the interaction Millat realises that, although the differences between him and the English are not evident to him, they already exist between them. To imitate the man whom he is presumed to be protects him from the feeling of exclusion. Jensen (2004) states that the imitative camouflage of the mimic man protects him from the colonial power. Magid, on the other hand, is not faced with the same kind of stereotyping. His identity is constructed through the interaction with the people from Bangladesh.
Archie

Archie is a man who does not appear to be very colourful. His strategy in life seems to be just to tag along. Archie’s appearance labels him as typically English, but many things in his behaviour do not show a typical Englishman. He has a strong fascination with the exotic and when he has an encounter with Samad for the first time he cannot bridle his curiosity.

Back to the day when they were first assigned to each other, Samad Miah Iqbal…and Alfred Archibald Jones…, the day Archie involuntarily forgot that most fundamental principle of English manners. He stared (WT 83).

This is same reaction as the coloured man had when he had his first encounter with the white man. Archie’s fascination seems to take over his consciousness, his ability to accomplish anything has vanished.

The fascination turns to an act of mimicry, he lets Samad become the authority while he becomes the subject. Although he makes vague attempts to protest against Samad, some way or another Samad gets his way. “Samad looked pointedly at Clara and Archie, sitting sheepishly on the other side of the hall, and two more hands moved slowly above the crowd” (WT 131). The way Archie acts towards Samad indicates that he has respect for him, the kind of respect the colonized has for the colonizer.

Colonial stereotyping has affected Archie even though he is English. His fascination with the exotic is interpreted by others as strange: not the fascination as such, but the fact of being frank about it. People at work find him a little bit odd, they find his behaviour peculiar. When the company where he works is having a party, he is told that it would be better if he stayed at home. The reason is his wife’s skin colour, her presence would make the others uncomfortable. As compensation Archie is given vouchers, he accepts the vouchers without any arguments.

Archie cannot be perceived as a typical Englishman, nor can he be perceived as anything else, he is a hybrid. One thing that symbolizes the hybrid is the Indian sweets; they are a mix of sweet and spicy with two different colours.

Fate is mentioned earlier in the essay where Magid thinks that leaving things to its fate is the Eastern way of dealing with problems. This is just what Archie does, leaves everything to fate, every time when he ought to make a decision he flips a coin. When Samad gives him the order to shoot the hostage they have taken during their expedition, discussed
previously in the essay, Archie leaves it up the coin. He avoids having to answer for his actions. The coin flipping is somehow a calculated move which prevents him from revealing his true intentions, if he in fact has any intentions. If not, the act could be a way of avoiding revealing his lack of belief.

Perhaps the most ironic fact in the novel is that it is Archie who releases the FutureMouse. He, who is the most generic of all the characters, and the most neutral, brings about the final solution. He releases what all the multicultural characters have so vigorously fought for, control. This fatalistic manoeuvre of Archie's does, however, put him in his place. It is the first time Samad realises that the oppressed friend of his, Archie, never really has been the oppressed. Beneath the surface of the mimic man there is a man that in silence works against the oppression. Archie has not obeyed orders from the authority. Once again by he disobeys by letting the mouse go.

**Conclusion**

*White teeth,* as we can conclude from the present study, is a novel which does more than describe fictitious events and fictitious characters. In its very structure we find a wide range of issues that are vital to an understanding of the immigrant’s life in Britain. The approach of this essay was to take a closer look at the issues hybridity and mimicry, and how hybridity exists in and mimicry is used as an attempted camouflage by the male characters in the novel.

Mimicry is used by all the characters in one way or another; it is not always done successfully. Samad does not succeed in using mimicry as camouflage, when it comes to mimicking the English. His oldest son experiences no problem using mimicry as a camouflage; however, his the younger son struggles with it, just like his father. The reason for the struggle is being affected by the racial stereotyping, which prevents the act of mimicry from developing. Magid, growing up without the insulting treatment, succeeds with his mimicry. Archie’s fascination for the other, for the exotic, results in him mimicking the Eastern man. His camouflage towards his friend Samad is successful.

Another issue that could not have been excluded is hybridity. We all become affected by the culture we are surrounded by and so do the characters in *White Teeth.* Although some of them try to fight being a split identity, the hybrid within them is evident. The characters may try to fight being affected by the other culture by making obvious declaration against it, by acting like a typical Eastern man; nevertheless, their acts reveal the hybrid within.

As we have seen in *White Teeth* the characters become affected by the different
cultures that are present, which results in a split identity, a hybrid. Mimicry is not always used successfully by the characters, it can be used with success at some occasions, when there is no presence of racial stereotyping. Hybridity is something that exists within us all, we cannot avoid being influenced by other cultures. In further studies it would be of interest to make an analysis of the female characters and their use mimicry and hybridity
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