



A Psychological Study of Social Identity in Zadie Smith’s *Swing Time*

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ABSTRACT

The search for identity is the central theme to numerous literary works, often following the protagonist or another protagonist. This research analyzes the protagonist's growth throughout *Swing Time* by Zadie Smith, which, like the majority of published psychological works, is motivated by a search for the individual's "authentic self." It's only appropriate that the protagonist of this author's fifth novel, is experiencing adolescence. The British author, Zadie Smith, uses her highly regarded novel *Swing Time* to probe questions of black people's racial identity and their connections to people of other races. This study also investigates the challenges faced by people of color in the entertainment industry, among critics, and in the pursuit of social and economic mobility. A strong sense of community is difficult for immigrant groups to establish. The difficulties that immigrant communities in contemporary Britain face in assimilating to mainstream culture are depicted in nuanced detail in Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*. The researcher concludes that the narrator's influence from family and her own lack of personal understanding explain her inability to adopt a tolerant and reasonable attitude when confronted with a multicultural society. Smith, who is a diasporic person, uses the protagonist's search for identity to highlight the importance of having a global perspective.

1. Introduction

One of the significant authors of the present generation in England is considered to be Zadie Smith. *Swing Time*, a 2016 publication, is a complex sociological narrative



that deals with themes of class, racism, and gender. Numerous characters in the novel are either black, white, or black and white. The dynamics between classes are far more nuanced than those between races. The reader is taken to the narrator's early years via the book's main storyline. It concentrates on the events that happened in London in 1982 and tells the story of the narrator's friendship with a girl of mixed race named Tracey. The subplot of the story, which is based on the present time and location and revolves on the narrator's fascinating travels, chronicles the narrator's thrilling excursions, which are connected with her ambitious mother's weird dream seeking voyage. The narrator's upbringing and adulthood, as well as northwest London and West Africa, are all referenced often in the story. This aids the narrator in discovering his identity, which is both local and historical as well as modern and global. In some ways, identification—more especially, the identity of the African diaspora in England—was closely related to Smith's motivation for this novel.

Being a Negro in this nation means never to be looked at, as noted black writer James Baldwin put it in reference to black people's interaction with white people. People of European ancestry have the wrong impression about you. *Swing Time* is a perfect example of this, as Baldwin's dialogue is an almost word-for-word replication of Smith's. The narrator, who is also a person of mixed ancestry, states, "What they do see when they do look at you is what they have invested in you." She has a white British father and a black mother with slave ancestry. In the story, the narrator's darker skin is made fun of. In a reiteration of Baldwin's comments, we see how the circumstances surrounding the false white pop diva Aimee, who spends rashly and recklessly for her ambitions, intensify the destruction of the original African Village. Baldwin claims that she has used black peasants as a means to gain fame and fortune. As the narrator's mother explains, the pain and wrath caused by the slave trade are still being felt by the descendants of slaves today, and Smith uses this historical context to make her point. The year 2016 saw the publishing of *Swing Time*, Smith's sixth novel. It has been called "Smith's finest novel yet." by British-American novelist Taiye Selasi, and thanks to her groundbreaking work, Zadie Smith has become and will continue to be one of the most famous authors of the twenty-first century. *White Teeth* 2000, her debut novel, was widely praised. Additionally, she has been



shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Smith has used a wide variety of literary techniques to address heavy topics like racism and racial inequality in her writings. Realist, postmodern, hysterical, and new sincerity are just some of the literary movements she's tapped into in her works. While this book does a thorough job of exploring the role of white culture in racism, it argues that painting all white people with the same brush is pointless. This book argues that there are only two types of individuals in the world: those with good intentions and others with ill intents; race should not be taken into account. On the other side, Smith has consistently portrayed reality through fiction, using methods of realism. She uses many characters of both races to show how people of different backgrounds can be so intolerant of others who are different from themselves.

2. Psychology of Social Identity of Black Race:

Amitai Etzioni (1993, p. 15) argues that, "We suggest that free individuals require a community, which backs them up against encroachment by the state and sustains morality by drawing on the gentle prodding of kin, friends, neighbors, and other community members". *Swing Time* seems to be more concerned to me with opposing connections and points of view, whether they be of an ethnic, social, or intellectual kind. When one is working to create their identity, it may be of great assistance to have a social network that they can depend on. The following three aspects of the narrator's ethnic identity and connections both contribute to and detract from her feeling of belonging in *Swing Time*.

The narrator first learns her specific position through the look given to her by the father and the boy. When he brings two white illegitimate children into the house without realizing it, in her eyes, he transforms into the personification of dishonesty. When the narrator is faced with Emma's gaze and wonders, "How can two such diverse beings arise from the same source?" it is evident that Emma and I have nothing in common with one another at that point in time. Interacting with John, who is the illegitimate son of his father, teaches the narrator that she is different from white people in many ways than simply her skin color alone. John is the kid of his father's affair with another woman. "looking at the child, I realized I could not deny his fundamental rightness. The fact that he was my father's son was readily apparent

to anyone who looked at him. Yes, he is right and I am wrong, but what made no sense was my position" (46).

The extreme belief that the narrator's mother had towards schooling seep into the psyche of the narrator as she develops into an adult. For instance, when describing *Parents' Evening*, the writer says, "I trailed behind her as she made her way round the room, hectoring teachers, ignoring any attempts on their part to discuss my progress" (Smith, 2016, p.42). She describes how she feels a sense of pride and dignity as a result of Mother's strong, radical ideas and behaviors.

The narrator adopts her mother's point of view, profoundly identifies this esoteric word with authority, and appears to know exactly where she belongs. Despite this, the narrator's conscience is frequently unsettled by the conflict between her mother's actions and various attitudes held by society as a whole. By way of illustration, despite the fact that she advocated at Lily's birthday party that blacks and Asians should work together on racial problems, she thinks, Lily is highlighting the relevance of skin tone, this technique incorrectly bounds the application of social behavior. Do you agree? The strategy used by the mother of linking all concerns with racial problems significantly disregards the usual guideline of addressing issues that are unconnected to race.

The narrator's ethnic awareness starts to become more confused as a direct result of the assertions made by her mother. Tracey, one of the novel's other significant characters, acts as a shadow for the narrator and is often considered to be the novel's fundamental topic. The narrator and Tracey had quite different upbringings, despite the fact that they appear very similar to one another. While the narrator's mother is pursuing her education and running for office to become a member of parliament, Tracey was raised in an unconventional family consisting of only one parent. If we take the aforementioned three aspects into consideration, it is abundantly evident that the narrator has not yet defined what she refers to as her "community" nor has she decided whether or not she is one of the "actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized" (Castells 8). There will be no natural formation of a resistance identity if there is not support from the community of ethnic groups, if

there is not a distinct and durable ethnic identity, and if there are not strong ethnic linkages.

3. Analysis:

This is the sixth novel authored by Smith. The Fictional Works category of the National Book Critics Circle Award. Each of the seven episodes focuses on a different aspect of the narrator's life, such as her London upbringing in the 1980s, her college years, and her current position as the manager of an Australian pop singer. Likewise, a Bildungsroman. In a bildungsroman, the protagonist develops throughout the novel. *Swing Time* is about friendship, music, and discovering one's real identity regardless of variety, prejudice, or social class.

In the novel *Swing Time*, two girls of mixed race mature in London. At a London tap dance class, Tracey and the unnamed narrator meet. Tracey is confident and self-assured, unlike the unidentified narrator. In dance class, the partners must discuss their musical preferences and their partner's dancing. Only their race unites them (black and white). Tracey dislikes becoming a parent despite being reared by a white, single mother who was neglectful. Father Louie is incarcerated frequently. Tracey is ignored by the narrator's mother due to her skin tone, and her father has two other children (Smith, 2016, p.48).

Tracey and the narrator talk about their passion for dance and ethnic backgrounds. Tracey's dancing is natural and the narrator understands rhythms and meters. After puberty, adolescents make numerous choices. Tracey embarks on a dancing career. After graduating from college, the narrator becomes the music director of YTV. As her assistant, Amiee employs her. She and Aimee move to Africa in order to assist local females. After her childhood friend, the narrator, goes, Tracey has a tougher time adjusting to adulthood. She feels alone due to the unidentified narrator. She is in awe of the narrator. The women's communication has ceased. The narrator discovers in Africa that Aimee is in love with a young Senegalese man named Lamin and is attempting to assist him in acquiring a green card so that they may return to New York together. Aimee's affection for Lamin was rejected by the narrator. As a punishment for not supporting Aimee during Lamin's courtship, the Narrator is given



arduous African labor in the future. The mother of the narrator joined the legislature and spoke out against the local government of Aimee. Tracey's angry letters alleging conspiracies were discovered by the narrator when she visited her mother. Tracey is confronted by the narrator when she ceases dancing and has three children by three men (Smith, 2016, p. 50-53).

In Africa, Aimee and the narrator encounter Lamin's child. After a brief courtship, the narrator grows close with Lamin. Fern, the Narrator's envious assistant, informs Aimee of the Narrator's affection for Lamin. The narrator is shocked to find that Aimee has adopted a beautiful African boy named Sankofa. The Narrator contacts the media on Aimee's illegitimate adoption to protest his dismissal. Aimee fabricates a circumstance to contradict the Narrator. In London, the narrator and Tracey indulge in sexual dancing. The populace has become hostile towards the storyteller. The narrator visits her mother in hospice as she dies. Her mother encourages her to adopt Tracy's children. After seeing Tracey's scathing emails to her dying mother, the narrator decides not to attend. At the end of the book, the narrator's mother dies. To watch Tracey dance with her children, the narrator avoids her mother's hospice visit. Moving necessitates introspection. It's a quest for answers and a constraint on your expression. It is disproportionate to revivalist critique, according to common opinion. Several individuals appear to have virtually limitless lives.

Self-awareness extends beyond knowing one's likes and dislikes. Included are disposition, persona, and character. Understanding one's strengths and weaknesses is also vital. They seek an explanation, whether immediate or long-term, because they cannot answer the question "Who I am," Because individuals are afraid to share information, they keep everything a secret, even the truth about Mohammed, Egyptian queens, and African monarchs. Shaku Zulu is renowned for his teaching of Zulu warriors (Smith, 2017, 185).

Half of the people of the continent lives in poverty. These individuals have difficulty affording even the bare necessities, such as food, drink, and shelter. Approximately one in five African adults are literate. Even while the number of schools on the continent has expanded, educational quality and total enrolment have declined. This is due to regional and gender discrimination. Social concerns are significantly



responsible for the persistence of poverty. Rather of concentrating on the total quantity of money, investigate how it is distributed. Corruption and gender inequality lead to a widening income disparity and restrict upward mobility chances. On average, African women give birth to too many children. Africa, although having the largest birthrate, remains the poorest continent. Due to the country's fast population increase, unemployment, disease, and hunger are pervasive.

In Africa, raising children is not just the duty of the parents; the community and other variables also play significant roles. Their lifestyle is tailor-made for them. When living with their own children, people prefer to adhere to their set patterns. They lose the ability to make independent decisions in life. Sometimes, moral conviction, competence, love, and personality can affect them. Perhaps they were never exposed to the reality of the culture. Immersion in a culture, however, has a transforming influence on a person's background and sense of self. People appear to lack a shared understanding of who they are. They are just imitators. They mature far more rapidly than children reared in typical families. They learn a great deal of information unrelated to school.

To reside in the society in which we exist is to reside in our shared dwelling. The social lives of individuals are among the most important parts of their life. Education advancement is also vital. It links the two potential outcomes of a person's life. A person cannot live happily and have his fundamental needs addressed without society. When individuals wander too far from the conventional path in life, complications develop. It is evident that the narrator is referring to herself and her father when she says, "We all three knew that in divorces the father left, but my father could not leave, there was no question about who...but finally she pulled me to her, hugged me very tightly, and said, your dad and I are going to live as brother and sister" (187). The majority of persons who trade in human flesh do so by selling their own bodies. Women work as flesh merchants because they sacrifice everything for their family, while not understanding the concept of pleasure" (188).

Education is not only about empowering women to become independent and respected members of society; it also equips them with the tools they need to take charge of their own lives and the lives of their families. Women, who are uniquely



qualified to handle the responsibilities of household management, benefit greatly from this trend. Tracey drifts away from the narrator as they float apart. She is ridiculed by the other youngsters, and as a result, she becomes an independent young lady. This change in her conduct reflects how she, as a brown woman, views her odds of thriving as a dancer in a mostly white culture. They struggle for freedom in the same way no matter where they are. Their eyes do not see freedom. Men are constantly needed by them. They are dominated by males because women are viewed as weak. Men use women as sexual objects. Women also struggle for their independence and do not always succeed in achieving it, similar to those fighting with guns in a war.

According to Hall (2011, pp. 222-224), the concept of multiracial identity encompasses more than one's family's collection of races. It is more complex than it appears. Raising children in a society that values hatred and division may be difficult. Raising a mixed-race child in a culture that values inferiority is much more challenging. Maintaining one's genuine identity while seeking refuge inside a racial group is a continual challenge. These youngsters grow up without learning anything about their particular culture. It is terrible that learning the beauty of being bi-racial is not easy. When they arrive at school, their peers begin to notice their racial difference. It becomes apparent that London is a magnificent cultural melting pot, with a variety of skin tones, hair textures, and eye colors. The advantage of knowing their culture belongs to children from a certain background. They probably have a sizable group of children who are similar to them in their neighborhood and places of worship. Children of mixed races often believe they must choose between their two cultures. Parents with multiracial children must assist their kids establish a healthy self-image. First, a child needs an honest family environment to discuss race. Raising "color blind" youngsters is detrimental. It will make people less able to spot racial bias. Children of diverse ethnicities should learn about the world since they observe more than you realize. If students learn to detect bias and cope with discrimination, they'll be more equipped for real life. Even if their child doesn't look Black to them, others will regard them as a minority. Mixed-race children face more intolerance. She singled out



interracial couples of color for their unique perspective. This is a challenging issue because the children are from two hostile cultures and ethnicities.

The white parent must display no bias against African-Americans, not only family members. Open dialogues about race and American history can boost a child's cultural awareness. They won't have to cope with the discomfort of assuming all white people are racists. Students will see a model instance of ethnic cohabitation. The youngster must identify with one of the parent's African-American experiences. Overemphasizing cultural differences risks dividing them. It's upsetting when people see commonalities in your history and life experiences. Mutual respect and collaboration can help a child develop self-awareness. They're not pressured to act. They're most comfortable with diverse folks. The protagonist, like the author, has been taught that choosing one race over another is intrinsically evil (Hall, 2011, pp226- 230).

Identity politics includes anti-racism and sex equality. Each method only addresses one sort of discrimination or inequality (sexism or racism) at a time. Neither type of identity politics is effective for women of color, as feminism's default race is white and antiracism's default gender is male. Feminism ignores racial women. Antiracists ignore black women's femininity. Crenshaw(1991, pp.1241-1242) investigates “how this phenomenon develops in society, politics, and culture? To understand and satisfy their expectations, intersectionality is needed.

Tracey has three kids. Different dads raise each child. She's dated many men. Nobody likes her. She raises her kids alone as her mother did. She suffers alone with no one to aid her. She's apparently living alone. Since only her best friend loves her, she needs her help. Drift might separate them for years. Their hearts are inseparable. Tracey doesn't want a family and isn't married. She's dating Lam. She's gotten no breaks. Survival requires her mother's help. The narrator visits her home to discuss her problem. Her genuine buddy Tracey won't contact her again. She acts like she and her mother are incompatible. According to the text, "You are part of a different system now. You're the type who thinks they can rule the world. In any case, I am not under your command." She is mentally ill and relies on the narrator for survival” (Smith, 2017, p.218).



In every period of her life, the narrator has relied on others; she has never been self-sufficient. Tracey once looked up to her. Regardless of her preferences, she always does what she says, "Without her best friend Tracey, the narrator has no purpose in life. Even though she dislikes the latter, she can't imagine her life without her. Never feeling at home anywhere, and always following in her boss's shadow, the narrator wanders the globe. Her mother tries to teach her about different cultures, but they don't have enough experiences to connect" (Smith, 2017, p.253).

The narrator is envious of Tracey's independence and wisdom, not realizing that Tracey's upbringing with a single white mother and a constantly-incarcerated black father forced her to grow up independently and responsibly. In London, Tracey is treated as a white youngster of mixed race. It was a familiar figure from my own school days; girls like her have always perplexed me, and they still do" (Smith, 2017, p.288). The Narrator is accepted in the village and mansion. The Narrator wants to feel accomplished because of Tracey. Unlike Hawa, Tracey is happy with her "village life," driven less by a need to escape the estate than by a need for independence within it. Despite her talent as a student, she can only dance in the chorus line.

The narrator writes, "A gift for seeing that seemed to have its only outlet and expression here, in my living room, in front of my television and which no teacher ever saw and no ever managed to successfully register or even note and of which, perhaps, these memories are the only true witness and record" (Smith, 2017, p.298). The narrator can't help but see Tracey as a success story because she stays exactly where she started: in the same apartment, watching the same movies, and feeling the same things. Tracey, having forged her own way and returned to the familiar's temple, is seen in the final shot doing what she loves and surrounded by the people she loves.

4. Conclusion:

Zadie Smith's tale, which can be found in her best seller novel *Swing Time*, is a recording of the narrative that she wrote. It includes both aspects of nostalgia, comedy, and tragedy. The identities of persons who are part of the black diaspora in England are a major topic that is covered in depth in this novel, *Swing Time*. The fact



that identity is relative and pluralistic rather than singular and unchanging is revealed, which is also the reason why she is having such a difficult time figuring out who she is. "The novel's playful treatment of time keeps the narrator's ambivalence about her own life from temporarily calcifying into something approaching despair" (Charles 2016). By emphasizing the lessons that were learnt through the protagonist of *Swing Time*'s fruitless endeavor to create his or her identity, Smith underlines the value of having an open mind and an inclusive perspective. This serves as a timely reminder of the importance of always maintaining an open mind and mindset. Identity is developed as a "production," which is never finished and is always in the process of progressing; this "production" cannot be influenced by one's past in any manner, as it has no bearing on the construction of one's identity. I assume that the narrator will approach the impending events with a level head and an accepting attitude because they have encountered a number of obstacles in the past, which has led me to believe that the narrator has gained some perspective as a result. It's possible that she's hit the ceiling of what we may call her "*swing time*" in this sense.

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لیکۆلینە وەهێه کی دەروونی له ناسنامە ی کۆمەلایەتی له (سوینگ تایم) ی زیدی سمیت

پوختە

گەر پان بەدوای ناسنامەدا ناوەندیکە بۆ چەندین کاری ئەدەبی، زۆربە ی کات گەران بەدوایی ناسنامە ی پالەوان یان پالەوانیکی تر دا دەبێت. ئەم توێژینە وەهێه گەشە ی پالەوان بە درێژایی پۆمانی سوینگ تایم له لایەن زیدی سمیت شیدە کاتە وە که وەک زۆربە ی کارە دەروونیە بەلاوکراوەکان بە گەر پان بەدوای "خودی رەسەن" ی تاکە وە هانداو. شایەنی باسە که ئەمە پینجەمین پۆمانی ئەم نووسەرە یه وە ئەمە پینجەمین پۆمانی هەرزە کاری نووسەری بەریتانی زادی سمیت. پۆمانە بەهێزە که ی سوینگ تایم بە کار دینیت بۆ لیکۆلینە وە له پرسیارەکانی ناسنامە ی رەگەزی رەش پێستەکان و پە یووەندیەکانیان بە خەلکی رەگەزەکانی ترە وە. هەر وە ئەم توێژینە وەهێه هەوێک دەدات بۆ لیکۆلینە وە له و هەر پەشانی که خەلکی پێست رەش له پیشە گەری رابواردن و لە نێو رەخنە گران و له بەدواداچوونی جوولە ی کۆمەلایەتی و ئابووریدا رووبەر و دەبنە وە. هەستێکی بەهێز بۆ کۆمەلگا قورسە بۆ دامەزراندنی گرووپە کۆچەرەکان ئەو بارگرا نیانە ی که کۆمەلگا کۆچەرەکان له بەریتانیای هاوچەر خا رووبەر و دەبنە وە له کاتی جوولانە وە ی زەدی سمیتدا بە وردە کارییەکی وردە وە وینا دەکرین. ئەو توێژینە وەهێه

بهوه دهگاته ئه و نهجمهه كه كارىگهه گيرهه وه له خيزان و نهبوونى تىگهه يشتنى تايبهه تى خوئى كه ناتوانى خوئى روون دهكاته وه له گرتنه بهرى هه لوئىستىكى خوڤاگرانه و لوئىكى، كاتىك رووبه رووى كوومه لگايه كه فره كه لتورى ده بىته وه. سمىث كه كه سىكى كوچبه ره، پالهوانى روئمانه كه سوينگ تايه بو ناسنامه به كارديئيت بو تيشك خستنه سهه گرنگى هه بوونى تىڤروائىنىكى جيهانى له سهه ناسنامه..

الملخص

البحث عن الهوية محور للعديد من الاعمال الادبية، غالبا يتبع الشخصية الرئيسية او اي شخصية اخرى. هذا البحث يشرح نمو الشخصية الرئيسية طوال رواية الوقت المتأرجح للكاتبة زادي سمىث من كافة النواحي. التي تعمل كغالبية الاعمال النفسية المنشورة، هي مدفوعة بدافع البحث من اجب ذاتية الفرد للمؤلف، انه مناسب بحيث ان الشخصية الرئيسية للكاتبة في الرواية الخامستها الخامسة من بين اعمالها، يعيش تجربة قلة الخبرة المسرحية البريطانية. زادي سمىث تستعمل روايتها العالية الاعتبار .. الوقت المتأرجح،، للتدقيق في أسئلة الاشخاص السود عن الهوية العنصرية وتواصلهم مع الناس من الاجناس الاخرى. هذه الدراسة تقوم ايضا بجهد للتحقق في المصاعب التي يواجهونها من قبل الناس الناقدة للترفيه والحركة الاجتماعية والاقتصادية. يصعب على الجماعات المهاجرة تكوين شعور قوي بالانتماء للمجتمع. الصعوبات التي يواجهها الجماعات المهاجرة في بريطانيا المعاصرة للاندماج مع التجاه الثقافي العام تم تصوير تفاصيلها الدقيقة في رواية زادي سمىث،، الوقت المتأرجح،،. الباحث يستنتج تأثير وجهة نظر الكاتبة من خلال العائلة وعدم تفهمها الشخصي، يوضح عجزها عن تبني سلوك متسامح عند المواجهة مع مجتمع متعدد الثقافات. سمىث والتي هي شخص شتات وتستعمل سعي الشخصية الرئيسية من اجل الهوية لتوضيح اهمية امتلاك تفهم عالمي شامل.