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Interweaving Identities: Cultural Synthesis and Societal Dynamics in Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*

ABSTRACT

Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* masterfully engages with global encounters through intricate literary techniques, transcending biases. The novel's interplay of form and content reveals interactive processes inherent in approaching texts as social events. This analytical lens unveils narrative layers and underlying societal currents that shape character dynamics and interactions. The novel's narrative strategy serves as a canvas for weaving diverse cultural threads, challenging conventional narratives. *Swing Time* deftly interweaves elements from a wide spectrum of identities, skillfully bridging the disjointed segments of the protagonist's multifaceted journey. This narrative technique effectively fuses cultural and historical symbols, enabling a synthesis that redefines historical understanding. In navigating global influence, the novel offers a nuanced interpretation of hegemony, intertwining historical epochs and events into a comprehensive framework. In the context of globalization, Smith's intertextual references weave dance history into the narrative, transcending boundaries of race and time, fostering empathy and unity. *Swing Time* challenges norms through multifaceted aesthetic values, prompting introspection and advocating for an equitable society. The present study analyzes the novel's exploration of identity, empathy, and the transformative power of art in shaping a more inclusive world. Through its intricate narrative, *Swing Time* effectively crafts a rich tapestry of interwoven identities, thereby deepening our understanding of the text and the intricate societal currents it engages with. The novel's discourse transcends mere entertainment, provoking readers to reflect on the interconnectedness of narratives across time and space.

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KEYWORDS: Global Encounters, Identity Synthesis, Societal Dynamics, Cultural Resonance, *Swing Time*

“For the world was run by lizards in human form”

(Smith 2016, 80)

1. Introduction

In *Swing Time*, Zadie Smith deftly weaves together the intertwining stories of the unnamed narrator and her childhood friend, Tracey. Their shared love for dance initially binds them, yet their paths diverge as they confront the complexities of race, class, and ambition. As the narrator navigates her journey from their London neighborhood to the glitzy world of celebrity, she grapples with questions of authenticity, belonging, and the price of success. Alongside her personal quest, Smith masterfully explores broader societal issues, from the legacy of colonialism to the commodification of culture. Through richly drawn characters and lyrical prose, *Swing Time* offers a compelling examination of the forces that shape individual lives and collective destinies in our ever-evolving world.

Zadie Smith’s utilization of writing techniques in composing *Swing Time* culminates in a dynamic interplay of diverse global encounters and diverse arts i.e. dance. These encounters serve as the bedrock for the distinct perspective she aims to impart to each individual, transcending any affiliational biases. Delving deeply into the dual lenses of both form and content within *Swing Time* can pave the way for a more profound engagement, declaring that “part of what is implied in approaching texts as elements of social events is that we are not only concerned by texts as such, but also with the interactive processes of meaning-making” (Fairclough 2003, 10). This analytical approach not only unravels the intricate layers of the narrative but also sheds light on the underlying societal and cultural undercurrents that shape the characters and their interactions. Consequently, examining *Swing Time* through these paradigms not only enriches our understanding of the text but also provides a broader context for exploring the nuances of identity, multiculturalism, and the human experience.

Right from its inception, *Swing Time* emerges as a culturally rich narrative that masterfully interweaves elements from a diverse spectrum of identities. This intricate weaving stems from a careful fusion of the protagonist's multifaceted background, encompassing her mixed heritage. “Smith’s novel

advances earlier concerns ... about culture and race, similarly addressing the epistemological uncertainty of identity politics and familial relationships” (McMann 2012, 616). This narrative technique operates as a conduit for the creation of vivid imagery, effectively bridging the disparate segments of the narrator’s personal odyssey. In this sense, the novel not only welcomes a broad array of cultural and historical symbols but also wields them as potent tools for synthesis. This synthesis, in turn, becomes the driving force behind the emergence of an entirely novel perspective, capable of reshaping our understanding of history. Through this lens, the novel transforms our comprehension of collective existence and redefines how we interpret our shared interactions with the world. In essence, *Swing Time* functions as a canvas onto which various cultural threads are intricately woven, culminating in a coherent and enlightening tapestry. This tapestry challenges conventional historical and identity narratives, inviting readers to engage with a more expansive and nuanced perspective on individual and collective stories. The narrative strategy of the novel extends beyond mere entertainment, serving as a profound instrument for fostering critical contemplation. Moreover, it facilitates an ongoing discourse between the past, present, and future, encouraging readers to delve into a continuous dialogue that transcends temporal boundaries. Herein, what Smith carries out “is an attempt to disrupt the narratives forged to define the dominant culture, to hybridize the discourse, to reconfigure the concept of all cultural identities as fluid and heterogeneous” (Williams 1999, 4).

In Zadie Smith’s novel *Swing Time*, intertextuality serves as a dynamic mechanism for constructing a narrative that transcends conventional divisions. Through its intricate interweaving of historical dance and art, Smith’s work resonates across generational and cultural spectra, fostering a transformative journey for readers. This journey involves reimagining established frameworks and embracing a more inclusive and empathetic outlook on the world—an outlook that emerges as a testament to the enduring power of artistic expression. By foregrounding intertextuality in our exploration, we delve into how *Swing Time* pays homage to the profound legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, celebrates the cultural and artistic expressions of African Americans, and provides a powerful exposé of contemporary racial tensions. Through its multifaceted prism of intertextual references, *Swing Time* challenges

established norms, prompts introspection, and advocates for a society rooted in unity and equity.

2. Exploring Cultural Resurgence, Identity, and Global Citizenship

As the narrating voice astutely notes, “I am reading about the Sankofa. You know what that is? It’s a bird; it looks back over itself, like this. From Africa. It looks backwards, at the past and it learns from what’s gone before. Some people never learn” (*Swing Time*, 30). This reference to the Sankofa bird introduces the concept of retroactive learning and becomes emblematic of the novel’s core ethos. By anchoring the narrative in this African symbol, *Swing Time* pays homage to the wisdom embedded in history and underscores the importance of looking back to inform our understanding of the present and future. In doing so, the novel echoes the sentiments of a literary-cultural criticism, emphasizing the significance of cultural memory and historical consciousness in shaping contemporary perspectives. In this sense, Williams’ framework invites critical analysis of texts, considering their relationship to the dominant ideology, their engagement with residual elements, and their potential to contribute to emergent cultural and social change (Williams 1976, 97). These residual elements from the past, intricately woven into cultures, offer a lens through which we can gain a realistic comprehension of the present-day landscape. Notably, the narrative serves as an educational tool, embodying pedagogical intent.

The metaphorical incorporation of “The Sankofa... From Africa” operates akin to navigating a hypertext reference, guided by the tenets of Transnationalism and Intersectionality. Transnationalism highlights the interconnectedness of cultures and experiences across geographic borders, while intersectionality acknowledges how race, gender, class, and other identities interweave to shape these experiences. This emblematic portrayal holds profound resonance for the intricate tapestry of Black Diasporas, which are “indeed associated with trauma, separation and dislocation” (Siccardi 2020, 215), encapsulating their intricate voyage in pursuit of meaning and identity that emphasizes and acknowledges geographical and cultural boundaries. This analogy presents a compelling call to action, urging the cultivation of an innovative pedagogy rooted in cultural literacy that transcends individual and

communal interactions – an intersectional approach that acknowledges the interconnectedness of various forms of identity. In this regard, Cuder-Dominguez states that “Smith’s point is that everything and everyone is inextricably bound together by historical ties that stretch far beyond one or two generations” (Cuder-Dominguez 2004, 183). Through the concept of rememory (Morrison 1987, 135), the act of looking back initiates a dialogue with the past, creating a reciprocal exchange that allows for a profound contextualization of our contemporary cultural trajectory.

Herein, the Akan wisdom word, with its intricate components, symbolizes the essence of reclaiming a profound connection to one’s heritage, transcending geographical and temporal boundaries. This notion, seamlessly integrated into *Swing Time*, beckons readers to embark on a journey of reclamation and redefinition. In this context, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the observation that *Swing Time* encapsulates “African American history of oral narratives... revealing much through the spoken word but even more through the symbol” (Gayson 2000, 2). As the narrative unfolds, the symbiotic relationship between rememory, cultural resurgence, and personal reclamation takes center stage, enriching the narrative tapestry and redefining how we engage with both the past and the present. *Swing Time* emerges as a literary embodiment of the Transnationalism concept, facilitating connections beyond national borders, while the act of looking back becomes a transformative catalyst: “Smith demonstrates that younger, transcultural women experience more acute feelings of fragmentation, houses and physical spaces offering hardly any rooting” (Siccardi 2020, 220). It shapes our perceptions, deepens our understanding of histories, and forges a more comprehensive sense of self and community.

Swing Time reclaims the age-old art of storytelling along with its accompanying symbolic structure. Yet, even as it gazes back at the African roots, the narrative extends beyond, incorporating an expedition into the continent driven by the aspirations of an outreach development endeavor. The protagonist and Aimee, a globally famous Australian pop star known for her cultural influence and charitable projects, embark on the ambitious venture of establishing an aid project in the Gambia. This venture unveils yet another layer of symbolic significance, intertwining with the essence of the Sankofa concept. However, Aimee’s initiative is fraught with complications and controversies, as

it touches on themes of cultural exploitation and cultural appropriation. The Sankofa is embodied through active engagement, as it takes the form of a mission aimed at combating poverty and fostering progress. The narrative's resonance with the Sankofa is strikingly evident, mirroring the quest for a return to ancestral origins, but now it takes place on the terrain of addressing social inequalities while grappling with the ethical implications of cultural interactions.

For a cultural scheme to provide an effective model of identity, it must be presupposed... that identity is culturally rooted, causally determined and ultimately invariable... After all, it is patently absurd, and inhumane, to expect identity to kow-tow meekly to the call of one culture to the exclusion of another. (Sell 2006, 35)

This fusion of purposeful action and historical reflection signifies a profound transformation. It is not just a tale of personal development, but an exploration of the intersection between individual agency and communal progress—a narrative thread that transcends time and resonates with the soul of the Sankofa concept. In essence, *Swing Time* channels the essence of the Sankofa through a modern lens, binding past, present, and future aspirations within its intricate narrative tapestry.

Significantly, the narrative unveils a profound symbolic yearning for the acquisition and comprehension of one's historical roots – residual elements, a sentiment embodied by the protagonist's mother within the novel. She personifies this desire as both a black woman and a feminist, immersing readers into the intricate political landscape of Thatcherite Britain. Subtle allusions within the text hint at the influence of conservative policies, as echoed in the evocative line: “If all the Saturdays of 1982 can be thought of as one day, I met Tracey at ten a.m. on that Saturday, walking through the sandy gravel of a churchyard, each holding our mother's hand” (*Swing Time*, 9). This line resonates with conservative policies of the time, particularly those under Margaret Thatcher's government, which emphasized traditional family values, individual responsibility, and a return to a more disciplined societal framework. The imagery of walking through a churchyard and the focus on familial bonds subtly reflect the era's sociopolitical climate, where conservative rhetoric often idealized a nostalgic past and promoted stability through traditional structures. This symbolic motif resonates deeply, serving as a conduit for exploring the

intricate tapestry of identity, history, and politics. Within this literary framework, the mentioned line provides a subtle yet impactful touchstone. It encapsulates the essence of time, merging multiple Saturdays into a singular day, symbolizing the broader amalgamation of experiences, events, and policies. In this sense, the narrative intertwines the personal and the political, fostering a multidimensional understanding of history. It not only invites readers to comprehend the characters' struggles and journeys but also prompts them to contemplate the intricate web of political decisions that echoed through society:

Mother was a feminist. She wore her hair in half-inch Afro, her skull was perfectly shaped, she never wore make-up and dressed us both as plainly as possible. Hair is not essential when you like Nefertiti. She'd need no make-up or products or jewellery or expensive clothes, and in this way her financial circumstances, her politics, and her aesthetics were all perfectly –conveniently matched. (*Swing Time*, 9-10)

Should this resonate as a reflection of the closure of the welfare system prevalent during the Thatcher era and the subsequent imposition of austerity measures on specific households, the narrator, in her adolescence, beckons us to examine the other predicament. She does so by juxtaposing her own situation alongside that of Tracey and her mother, thereby initiating a comparative exploration. If we consider the narrator's mother from the perspective of her strongly resonant ideological stance, which profoundly influences her life decisions and principles, her convictions become apparent. As the narrator, now an adult and an assistant to Aimee, the Australian pop star, progresses, this perspective is somewhat validated:

there might be any practical divergence between my mother's situation and her own did not seem to occur to Aimee, and this was one of my earliest lessons in her way of viewing difference between people, which were never structural or economic but always essentially differences of personality. (*Swing Time*, 111)

As though aiming to blend the cultural boundaries between her Jamaican mother, embodying what Paul Gilroy refers to as “the intellectual endeavor to press original African time into the service of their attempts to come to terms with diaspora space and its dynamics of differentiation” (Gilroy 1993, 197), and Aimee, who seemingly represents the emerging global unity transcending all

colors and disparities, yet whose actions often reveal a pattern of capitalistic exploitation of these very differences, the narrator characterizes Aimee as:

The palest Australian I ever saw – sometimes without make-up on she did not look like she was from a warm planet at all, and she took steps to keep it that way, protecting herself from the sun all times. There was something alien in her, a person who belongs to a tribe of one. (*Swing Time*, 97)

The aspiration to amalgamate diverse attributes to highlight human value can be identified in Aimee and the mother, representing the quintessential embodiment of humanity, a utopian essence that Aimee carries as if she belongs to “a tribe of one” (*Swing Time*, 97). However, it is within the narrator herself, rather than Aimee, where the most profound indications of cultural transcendence manifest in its most comprehensive form—a voluntary detachment from conventional affiliations, given that we are essentially global citizens shaped by numerous influences. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the “exposure to English values” and the absence of the native culture have left many immigrant women, including the protagonist's mother, with no images of themselves in the post-global West (Upstone 2009, 154). The surreal conversation between them underscores this issue from all angles, representing a reflective response from a second-generation immigrant grappling with the complex implications of British nationality and ancestry:

I noticed she did not have an Australian accent not any more but neither was quite American or quite British, it was global: it was New York and Paris and Moscow and LA and London combined. Of course now lots of people speak this way but Aimee's version was the first time I heard it. (*Swing Time*, 95)

Her voice resonates like that of a global citizen, almost indiscernible in terms of a singular and fixed cultural origin. It beckons to be discovered beyond the confines of conventional boundaries. The framework of globalized identities that *Swing Time* introduces derives its foundations from the real-world complexities of contemporary concerns, which Zadie Smith also portrays through Aimee's initiatives aimed at reaching out. In *Swing Time*, a meaningful platform emerges for collaboration and worldwide unity spanning continents and diverse cultural perceptions. As the narrator reflects upon her role as both observer and pivotal figure in this newfound existence, the novel becomes a stage for probing this new life she unexpectedly uncovers:

If I had come of an age at an essentially buoyant moment in the history of England, a period in which money had new meaning and uses and the “freebie” had become a form of social principle, unheard of in my neighbourhood and yet normal elsewhere. “Freebism”: the practice of giving free things to people no need of them. (*Swing Time*, 88)

The aspiration for a purposeful existence and the drive to connect with other communities contribute significantly to the narrator’s inclination to disapprove of “most things with a cold streak of defensive pride” (*Swing Time*, 89), leading her to form a distinct political perspective that diverges from Zoe’s, her supervisor in the charitable organization where she works. Zoe, who represents a more conventional and perhaps pragmatic approach to their philanthropic work, often clashes with the narrator’s idealistic and critical views. This dynamic highlights the tension between different ideologies and approaches to social issues within the narrative. *Swing Time* reveres Aimee as a symbol of social equity, a notion that Smith underscores:

The songs no one heard, the words, she wrote- banal aphorism, usually (“The Arc of the Moral Universe is Long it Bends towards Justice.”) – no one but me ever read. Only in that chat room did she seem to be in the world, though it was such a bizarre world, filled only with the echoing voices of people who had apparently agreed with each other. (*Swing Time*, 92-93)

This positions the narrator as a fortunate collaborator in Aimee’s endeavors for African outreach. Moreover, functioning as a custodian of history and art, the narrator undertakes the task of connecting her own experiences with a historical timeline of dance, tracing its evolution from the 1930s to the contemporary era. Paul Gilroy’s insights into black expressive cultures provide a crucial framework for understanding the complexities of cultural identity and heritage in the novel. He argues that cultural traditions are not transmitted as fixed essences but rather are constantly reshaped through breaks and interruptions. As Gilroy states,

The syncretic complexity of black expressive cultures alone supplies powerful reasons for resisting the idea that untouched, pristine Africanity resides inside these forms, working a powerful magic of alterity in order to trigger the reception of absolute identity.

Following the lead established by Leroi Jones, I believe it is possible to approach music as a changing rather unchanging same. Today, this involves the difficult task

of striving to comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilising flux of the postcontemporary world. (Gilroy, 101)

This perspective, emphasizing the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural identity, highlights that traditions are continually reinterpreted and reinvented in response to contemporary challenges, resonating with the artist's dedication to social justice. This commitment finds its embodiment in Aimee, epitomized by her alternate name “Alias Truthteller Legon” (*Swing Time*, 92). This phase of the narrator’s journey mirrors a significant chapter in the history of racial concerns in the United States.

For the world was run by lizards in human form: the Rockefellers were lizards, and the Kennedys, and almost everybody at Goldman Sachs, and William Hearst had been a lizard, and Ronald Reagan and Napoleon—it was a global lizard plot. (*Swing Time*, 80)

This remarkably critical viewpoint regarding global influence and economic structures provides a distinct left-leaning interpretation of the world, offering insight into hegemony by intricately interconnecting various historical epochs and political events, thereby constructing a comprehensive framework (*Swing Time* 94). If the underlying predicament of the world revolves around the supremacy of the liberal system across time, spanning from the era of Napoleon to the contemporary period, *Swing Time* consequently aims at confronting and challenging the various corrupt systems that have consistently molded the present state of the world.

3. Narrative as Bridge: Exploring how the narrative constructs bridges between cultural divides

In the contemporary landscape, “Africa” remains a strategic resource for Western constructs, often utilized to establish a counterpoint that validates and defines Western identity. However, within the context of globalization, novel economic and cultural appropriations have emerged, encompassing both benevolent and malevolent aspects. Under the pervasive influence of

globalization, “Africa” has evolved to accommodate the neo-imperialist influences of both Eastern and Western powers:

The concept of cultural purity with its concomitant intolerance is thus rendered obsolete and restricted to the most recalcitrant modernist positions for which homogeneity and uniformity are the rule. Hierarchies and binary oppositions are avoided by the postmodern conceptualization which sustains heterogeneity and relativity to beat ritual naturalization of difference. (Acquarone 2008, 216)

Zadie Smith subtly references these contemporary phenomena by placing her narrator in a fictional African nation, where she serves as an assistant to Aimee's philanthropic initiatives. In *Swing Time*, the protagonist embarks on a visit to a former slave port with the hope of uncovering a profound realization about her identity. However, “oppressed because of her gender, race, and class, the narrator is deprived of a self that could tell a coherent story. She has no self, no name, no voice; she only exists as a shadow of others” (Quabeck, 2018: 462). The once haunting slave port has undergone a transformation into a tourist destination, catering to the interests of African Americans, Australians, and Europeans. This repurposing has stripped the site of its potential for spiritual enlightenment, rendering it a superficial and gaudy commercial attraction. The narrator instead looks for what is felt not collected:

The kind of information I was looking for, which I felt I needed to shore myself up, I dug out instead from an old, stolen library book – The History of Dance. I read about steps passed down over centuries, through generations. A different kind of history from my mother's, the kind that is barely written down – that is felt. (*Swing Time*, 100–01).

Herein, all through the text of the novel, the pervasive presence of power knows no borders, saturating every aspect of existence. This power's enduring and extensive nature resists being confined to a single point of rememory, such as the old slave port. Rather than viewing it as merely another memorial to suffering, the narrative recognizes the complexity and breadth of its influence.

All paths lead back there, my mother had always told me, but now that I was here, in this storied corner of the continent, I experience it not as an exceptional place but as an example of a general rule. Power had preyed on weakness here: all kinds of power – local, racial, tribal, royal, national, global, economic – on all kinds of weakness, stopping at nothing, not even at the smallest girl child. But power does that everywhere. The world is saturated in blood. (316)

The narrator actively seeks an alternative historical viewpoint distinct from the perspective that shapes her mother's limited political activism. Zadie Smith has expressed her intention to delve into her own and her narrator's experience of "double consciousness" in *Swing Time*, a concept coined by Du Bois that maintains its relevance for a new era (Du Bois 1994). This exploration is achieved by the narrator through retrospection on the past, especially its interactions with the history of dance—an ever-evolving phenomenon transcending Africa, Europe, and America. The narrator's quest for identity, which leads to moments of revelation, is refracted through a mature comprehension of the world. Consequently, the narrator transforms into a conduit for comprehending history's intricacies.

The protagonist, whose name remains undisclosed, embarks on a profound quest concerning the intricacies of black identity. However, this journey lacks agency and is subjected to the capriciousness of historical circumstances, leading her to be figuratively "pulled this way and that" (Ellison 462). The pivotal realization for Smith's character arrives when her involuntary association with Aimee culminates, marking the conclusion of her servitude. This juncture prompts her to engage in mature introspection, which invites an extended evaluation of the protagonist's internal conflicts, contributing to the multifaceted portrayal of her development.

Smith effectively integrates and customizes the concept of double consciousness, to resonate with her portrayal of the protagonist's inherent dual identity due to her biracial background. The narrator's mother, driven by an aspiration for "uplift," undertakes the responsibility of equipping her daughter to navigate the complexities of a world marked by racial distinctions. This is reflected in her discontentment towards the sexually charged dancing exhibited by Tracey and her daughter in front of their childhood peers. The mother's concern extends to the potential interpretation of such a performance within the context of their white middle-class social environment, emphasizing her vigilance in preparing her daughter for the nuanced dynamics of race and class. Zadie Smith's perspective can be characterized as a "trans-historical transnationalism," a framework through which dance operates as a conduit for timeless and cross-cultural interactions:

The ersatz dance step—four steps backward, one step forward—describes the neoliberal subjects' relationship to diminishing access to wealth and wellbeing by

literalizing the economic metaphor of the ladder (which one ascends or descends linearly) and also as a dance step (which becomes even more potent a metaphor in her more recent novel *Swing Time*. (Arnett 2018, 2)

These connections span diverse historical contexts, traversing continents from Africa to the harrowing Middle Passage, and extending from the era of the Harlem Renaissance to the modern iconography of Michael Jackson. Smith confirms the impact of different traditions on her identity, with an “audacious hope that a man born and raised between opposing dogmas [...] could not help but be aware of the extreme contingency of culture” (Smith 2009, 149). This interplay of dance also encapsulates the intricate nuances of cultural and artistic appropriation. For Smith's protagonist, whose identity is shaped by her mixed racial heritage, a moment of revelation surfaces during her adult years. Specifically, her recognition that Fred Astaire, in the film *Swing Time*, enacts a tap routine while wearing blackface serves as a poignant illustration of American appropriation of black culture, an act rooted in the minstrelsy tradition that emerged during the nineteenth century. This revelation underscores the profound complexities inherent in cultural exchange and exploitation. In this sense, McClure through his discussion on the texts written by Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and Michael Ondaatje proposes the “identification of a body of “postsecular fiction” whose characteristics include ... a commitment to progressive, liberal values” (McClure 2007, 3).

In *Swing Time*, the protagonist's perspective is rooted in the conviction that physical agility and elegance surpass all other modes of portrayal, encompassing both literary and historical dimensions. This newfound awareness profoundly disrupts her previously held, illusory perception of her own subjectivity, revealing her as a passive “object” serving the agendas of others (*Swing Time* 427). This recognition mirrors her role as a subordinate embellishment to Aimee, embodying the emblematic image of cosmetic diversity employed to address “underrepresentation” within Aimee’s expansive corporate domain (*Swing Time* 426).

Within the narrative framework created by Smith, the protagonist assumes the role of a mirroring doppelgänger to various artistic forms of expression. Despite her absence of a discernible ‘voice’, her unique interpretative prowess allows her to unveil the profound emotional truths encapsulated within a song

(*Swing Time* 25). This portrayal emphasizes her function as a mediator, existing as a conduit for truth without agency or intent. Only as the narrative nears its conclusion does she acknowledge the wisdom inherent in her mother's politicized consciousness. Returning to Tracey with a spirit of forgiveness and responsibility, she acts upon her mother's dying wish, demonstrating her newfound agency. This journey of self-discovery and reconciliation culminates in her commitment to aiding Tracey, motivated by the desire to shield her vulnerable children from the pitfalls of the past and prevent its recurrence. This transformation showcases the protagonist's evolving sense of purpose and responsibility, rooted in the lessons gleaned from her complex journey.

As the narrative unfolds, a glimmer of hope emerges for the protagonist, centered on the profound realization that the formative experiences of childhood intricately shape individuals into who they are. This awareness underscores the need to confront and transcend the traumas that linger, serving as barriers to healing. A sense of redemption is found through the act of extending care to others, shifting the focus away from oneself. In the narrative crafted by Smith, this transformation signifies the protagonist's liberation from her role as a mere functionary, an expendable appendage within Aimee's realm.

This pivotal moment marks her resolute departure from the confines of Aimee's world. Instead, she takes a decisive stride towards embracing her connection with Tracey and the children who genuinely require her assistance. This transformation reflects a shift in her priorities, where the focus shifts from serving a powerful figure to providing crucial support to those in need. Through this evolution, the protagonist embodies the potential for personal growth, healing, and ultimately, redemption, signifying a hopeful trajectory for her character within the narrative's complex tapestry. Within the narrative of *Swing Time*, the protagonist navigates a world in which the concept of motherhood becomes inextricably entwined with racial dynamics. Notably, Zadie Smith, who herself has previously explored themes of motherhood in her acclaimed novels such as *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*, adopts a nuanced approach in *Swing Time*. Here, she addresses the intersection of motherhood, sexuality, and racialization within a historical framework.

In this exploration, Smith employs an inclusive perspective that resists exploitative narratives associated with race, nationality, and gender. Remarkably, she accomplishes this feat without resorting to the oversimplified discourses of

the post-black or the postracial. Instead, Smith skillfully unveils the intricate layers of identity construction within a global milieu. Through *Swing Time*, she crafts a narrative that is both an act of relinquishment and reclamation. Within this narrative framework, the central character grapples with her personal history, an essential step towards replacing the individualism emblematic of the millennial era with a nurturing ethos aligned with fostering the upcoming generation. Smith's narrative tactfully dissects the complexities surrounding motherhood, race, and identity, offering readers a thought-provoking analysis that transcends conventional narratives of post-racialism and reveals the multifaceted dimensions of identity formation in our interconnected world.

Swing Time aspires to forge a novel realm of reality upon the remnants of antiquated and conceivably fading truths. The manifold array of voices exposing racial biases subtly parodies the postmodern inclination to reject absolute truths, thereby highlighting prejudiced discourses and rhetoric of self-absorbed cultural representation that wield transformative power over global dynamics and interpersonal human connections. Through a strategic repositioning of the sensitive nodes within racist discourse, Zadie Smith presents an exceptional opening to disrupt analogous discourses that traditionally serve as demarcations between diverse cultures. Moreover, she accentuates the distinct competing cultural entities within the global realm of identity: "Smith's characters are busy in the attempt to determine their sense of self and find an identity beyond religious, gendered, political, or racial categories, and the narrator of *Swing Time* is no exception" (Quabeck 2018, 468). This shift effectively transforms archaic dichotomies into novel connections or even orchestrates an innovative narrative that mirrors the contemporary geopolitical landscape, ultimately subverting established norms. This narrative strategy allows Smith to penetrate the core of ingrained societal assumptions and cultural prejudices, unearthing the potential for a renewed awareness and inclusive understanding that extends beyond prevailing divisions. The synthesis of divergent voices within the text thus becomes an instrument of destabilization, challenging established narratives and fostering a nuanced dialogue that contributes to reshaping the discourse on race, identity, and the complex interplay of cultures in a rapidly evolving world. The narrator grapples with "emplotted narratives" that will "never succeed in bringing concord to

identities which are diachronically heterogeneous [...] in a haphazard universe of constant flux” (Sell 2006, 38).

If the essence of the multicultural novel lies in the pursuit of establishing social and cultural concordance, the nuanced manner in which reality is addressed in British novels since 1980 imparts upon them a political significance that goes beyond engendering heightened conflict. Instead, it introduces a novel approach for resolving societal predicaments within an environment where the cohabitation of disparate cultural entities can no longer be evaded. The literary landscape of British novels post-1980 unveils a strategic departure from overt confrontations, opting for a subtler engagement with reality that transcends surface-level conflicts. This nuanced approach offers a distinct avenue for addressing the complexities arising from the coalescence of diverse cultural frameworks: “Smith demonstrates that although in past times ethnic identity could be signified and maintained by cultural markers such as dress, food, specific cultural traditions or even language, today these distinctions are nebulous” (Walters 2005, 317). Rather than igniting exacerbated turmoil, these narratives contribute to forging innovative resolutions to the social crises that emerge when varying cultural bodies intersect. The contemporary British novel thus emerges as a vehicle for constructive exploration and dialogue, seeking to bridge gaps, dismantle barriers, and foster coexistence amidst cultural diversity. This shift in narrative strategy reflects the evolving societal landscape, underscoring the imperative to move beyond polarized stances and instead navigate uncharted pathways towards inclusive harmony.

Swing Time adeptly engages with the underlying cultural crises that are molding our contemporary world, utilizing hypo-textual references to serve as a poignant parody of the process of decontextualization followed by a subsequent reconceptualization of race and ethnicity on a global scale. Considering the inauguration of this novel kind of ethnicity, “rerooting would be foregrounded in the western cultural map; immigrants’ bodies could no longer be historicized, bodily stereotypes would no longer be considered sights of disgust... and nomadism and miscegenation [would] appear as figures of virtue” (Taheri 2018, 3). Smith’s narrative strategy effectively dismantles and reconfigures prevailing notions, subtly delineating the world into fresh perspectives and sensibilities. It is important to note that while the narrative

does not completely obliterate established stereotypes and biases, it navigates the delicate balance between acknowledging their existence and redefining them. In doing so, Smith astutely disrupts the latent and emerging dimensions of cultural conflicts, instigating a transformative process of reimagining temporal dynamics and modes of communal coexistence. This engagement transcends a mere revisionist exercise; rather, it serves as a foundation for constructing a renewed societal 'time' and a harmonious way of shared existence. Dominic Head states that – regarding *White Teeth* – “we are all hybrid post-colonials, biologically as well as culturally and the pursuit of pure ethnic origins is a pointless objective” (Head 2003, 114). *Swing Time*'s narrative trajectory, following a path already explored by the writer in her previous works such as *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*, signifies an active intervention that calls for a reconsideration of the trajectory of cultural interactions, allowing for the simultaneous coexistence of past and present while forging a trajectory towards a more inclusive and harmonious future.

Smith's divergence from perpetuating conventional racial symmetries is epitomized in her theoretical alignment of chaos theory and postmodernism. Considering what Hayles suggests, as “the postmodern turn toward fragmentation, rupture and discontinuity” (Hayles 1991, 11), Zadie Smith alludes to the resonance between her refusal to adhere to established racial norms and broader theoretical commonalities shared by these disciplines. Just as chaos theory challenges deterministic models, postmodernism disrupts established narratives. Smith's act of refusing racial replication aligns with similar suspicions of globalization voiced by influential theorists spanning Jacques Derrida (*Signature*) to Frederic Jameson (*Postmodernism*) and Jean François Lyotard (*The Postmodern Condition*), as well as Lucy Irigaray (*The Sex*). This intellectual lineage underscores the emphasis on iterative techniques and recursive looping as strategies to disrupt and destabilize systems, fostering unforeseen conclusions. In aligning her narrative approach with these theoretical paradigms, Smith not only subverts racial norms but also aligns herself with a larger intellectual tradition. This strategic fusion, woven into the narrative fabric of her work, resonates with a broader intellectual impulse to challenge established paradigms and stimulate critical engagement.

Functioning as an empirical embodiment of the multicultural ethos she aims to construct within her literary works, *Swing Time* stands as a richly layered

narrative. This intricate tapestry leads readers on a journey that traverses contemporary sensibilities and intercultural connections via humanitarian initiatives aimed at transcending geopolitical boundaries. These endeavors are seamlessly interwoven with references to the History of Dance, an emblematic allegory that symbolizes the fusion of cultures. Through this narrative construction, Zadie Smith crafts a dynamic portrayal that invites readers to gaze upon both mainstream and marginalized cultural contexts. The boundaries of difference are artfully blurred, revealing an underlying essence of universal truth—a resonance of empathy and friendship that transcends geographical and cultural confines, fostering a collective yearning for an improved global sphere. In “Dance Lessons for Writers,” Smith delves into the parallels between writing and dance, exploring how rhythm, movement, and choreography inform the creative process (Smith, 2016). By drawing inspiration from Smith’s reflections, we can deepen our understanding of *Swing Time*’s thematic resonance and narrative structure. Just as dancers meticulously choreograph their movements to convey emotion and meaning, Smith intricately orchestrates the interplay of characters, themes, and symbols in her novel, infusing each page with a rhythmic energy that mirrors the fluidity of dance. Moreover, Smith’s essay prompts us to consider the embodied nature of storytelling, highlighting the physicality and sensory experience inherent in both dance and literature.

Central to *Swing Time*’s distinctiveness is the absence of overtly violent scenes. This absence assumes a pivotal role in conferring upon the novel a unique attribute—the ability to project an alternative world, characterized by its emphasis on interpersonal affection and compassion. By eschewing violent portrayals, Smith engenders a distinctive narrative atmosphere that underscores her narrative’s core aspiration: the cultivation of a world rooted in love and mutual understanding. In doing so, she echoes her overarching thematic pursuit of a harmonious and complex coexistence across diverse identities. This stylistic choice not only contributes to the novel’s individuality but also reinforces its underlying message—the transformative power of love in shaping a world that transcends divisions. Through *Swing Time*’s narrative intricacies and its nuanced portrayal of cultural exchange, Smith skillfully imbues her literary work with a profound call for empathy, connection, and the cultivation of a world steeped in compassion.

Notably, intertextuality emerges as the cornerstone of *Swing Time*'s narrative prowess, bestowing upon it a robust and multifaceted artistic essence. This intricate network of textual references engenders a hybrid artistic resonance, which, in turn, nurtures a distinct sense of coherence within the narrative fabric. Particularly noteworthy is the historical underpinning of dance, a lineage that extends beyond the confines of race and temporal gaps. This lineage serves as an intricate tapestry, enabling the construction of a profound unity whose web of influence has the potential to serve as a source of inspiration for the younger generation, fostering a paradigmatic shift in their perception of the world. Within this framework of thought, Smith eloquently underscores the imperative of reexamining prevailing hegemonic structures—those formative in shaping the contours of the modern world—through the lens of art. This concept is encapsulated in her narrating voice: "The stuff, like Billie Holiday? Or Sarah Vaughan, Bessie Smith, Nina. Real singers. I mean, not that – I mean I feel like it" (*Swing Time*, 97).

Evidently, *Swing Time* harnesses the power of intertextual intersections to establish a multidimensional foundation upon which its narrative unfolds. This strategic interweaving of references from diverse sources enriches the text with layers of depth and resonance, fostering a sense of interconnectedness that reverberates across the narrative spectrum. A pivotal illustration of this dynamic interplay lies in the narrative's exploration of dance history. This exploration underscores the transcendence of traditional demarcations such as race and temporal context, underpinning a lineage that resonates across generations: "for Smith, tradition, like religion, is an opiate that obscures reality, keeping its user ever in a drug-induced fog" (Gustar 2010, 340). By engaging with dance's historical evolution, Smith masterfully crafts a narrative that bridges cultural divides, highlighting the harmonious convergence of human experiences and aspirations through the medium of artistic expression.

Moreover, this resonant interplay of intertextuality encapsulates a transformative potential, particularly for the burgeoning generation. The unity woven through references to dance's historical lineage nurtures a shared cultural heritage that has the capacity to reshape the lenses through which the young perceive the world. By embracing the narrative's tapestry of intertextual influences, the youth can access a broader, more inclusive perspective that transcends the limitations of traditional boundaries. As Smith advocates, the

reinterpretation of established paradigms through the prism of art carries the potential to evoke profound realizations, resonating with the power of authentic voices like Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Bessie Smith, and Nina Simone.

4. Conclusion

Concludingly, *Swing Time* harnesses intertextuality as a dynamic mechanism for constructing a narrative that transcends conventional divisions. Through its intricate interweaving of historical dance and art, Smith's work not only resonates across generational and cultural spectra but also fosters a transformative journey for readers. This journey involves reimagining established frameworks and embracing a more inclusive and empathetic outlook on the world—an outlook that emerges as a testament to the enduring power of artistic expression.

Swing Time pays homage to the profound legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, a pivotal movement that played a significant role in the struggle for black emancipation in the United States. This celebration serves as a poignant reminder of the movement's symbolic resonance as a call for national unity, transcending the agonies inflicted by history both within the United States and on a global scale. Through its narrative tapestry, *Swing Time* provides a stark portrayal of the enduring ravages of racial conflicts that continue to pervade contemporary society. Moreover, the novel operates as a multifaceted prism, refracting an array of aesthetic values that challenge and question the imperative of amalgamating diverse voices that vehemently contest racism as a prevailing political structure.

Rooted in the cultural and artistic expressions of African Americans during the 20th century, *Swing Time* offers a poignant response to the systemic injustices perpetuated against black individuals. By celebrating this legacy, *Swing Time* underscores its pivotal contribution to the struggle for black emancipation, amplifying its symbolic role as a beacon of hope for a nation plagued by historical turmoil. This commemoration, however, goes beyond national boundaries, extending its influence to the global stage, as it underscores the universality of the quest for unity and justice despite historical scars.

The novel's portrayal of racial conflicts resonates as a stark reminder of the ongoing struggles that persist in contemporary times. Through its narrative canvas, *Swing Time* unfurls a powerful exposé of the continuing racial tensions that afflict societies across the world, demonstrating the enduring relevance of its themes. This depiction serves as an indictment of the persisting prejudices and systemic inequalities that demand continued dialogue and action for transformation.

Furthermore, *Swing Time* operates as a multifaceted prism, refracting diverse aesthetic values that challenge established norms and compel reevaluation. Within this prism lies a pivotal interrogation of the imperative to amalgamate voices that stand in staunch opposition to racism as a pervasive political construct. By weaving together an intricate narrative fabric that encompasses an array of perspectives, *Swing Time* pushes readers to consider the nuances and complexities of racial narratives. The novel, thus, transcends a mere critique of racism, evolving into a dynamic discourse that seeks to uncover shared human experiences, prompt introspection, and ultimately advocate for a society rooted in unity and equity.

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