

Multicultural Zadie Smith

Zadie Smith's representation of multiculturalism in

White Teeth and *On Beauty*



Master Thesis
Western Literature and Culture
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July 2011

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1 Dealing with Life	7
1.1 <u>White Teeth</u>	7
1.1.1 <i>Friendship/Work</i>	7
1.1.2 <i>Family</i>	9
1.2 <u>On Beauty</u>	11
1.2.1 <i>Friendship/Work</i>	12
1.2.2 <i>Family</i>	13
1.3 <u>Conclusion</u>	17
Chapter 2 The Old vs. the Young	20
2.1 <u>White Teeth</u>	20
2.1.1 <i>Older Generation</i>	20
2.1.2 <i>Younger Generation</i>	22
2.2 <u>On Beauty</u>	25
2.2.1 <i>Older Generation</i>	26
2.2.2 <i>Younger Generation</i>	27
2.3 <u>Conclusion</u>	30
Chapter 3 The Environment	33
3.1 <u>White Teeth</u>	33
3.1.1 <i>Millat and Magid Iqbal</i>	33
3.1.2 <i>Joshua Chalfen</i>	37

	3
3.2 <u>On Beauty</u>	39
3.2.1 <i>Carl Thomas</i>	39
3.2.2 <i>Levi Belsey</i>	42
3.3 <u>Conclusion</u>	45
Chapter 4 Paul Gilroy's Theory	48
Conclusion	52
Notes	56
Bibliography	61

Introduction

“State multiculturalism has failed.”¹ This is the opinion of the prime minister of Great Britain, David Cameron. In a speech he has given at a conference in February in Munich he argued that the national identity of the UK should be stronger, in order to prevent people from turning to all sorts of extremism. In his view, “the doctrine of state multiculturalism” and Islamist extremism have a direct relation.² Because different cultures have been encouraged to live separate lives, Cameron thinks the government has “failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong.”³ According to him, the country needs “active, muscular liberalism,” instead of “the passive tolerance of recent years.” He also said that Muslim groups who fail to respect basic British values, should not be getting funding. David Cameron received a storm of criticism, because of the fact that his speech was on the same day that the far-right English Defence League demonstrated in the streets of Luton. This encouraged this movement to believe Cameron supported them and their ideas. This is not the case, but it becomes clear from his speech that David Cameron is certainly against the manner in which multiculturalism is practiced in Britain over the years.

Someone who is not against multiculturalism in practice, but has problems with the representation of this concept in politics and the media, is Zadie Smith: a young English writer, born in London to a Jamaican mother and an English father. She wrote her debut, *White Teeth*, when she was only 24 while she was busy finishing her English literature study at Cambridge University. Smith’s first book, and also the other two novels which came out in 2002 and 2005, received praise from many critics and won a number of awards and prizes. In an interview with *The Guardian* Zadie Smith said about multiculturalism: “Instead of arguing about it as an ideological concept, you might as well deal with it as a reality.”⁴ Also, the big society as a concept does not earn her appreciation: “The big society? I don’t know. I don’t really want to build my own school or my own hospital (...) I think most people would like

their services prepared for them. I am not a great fan of that concept.” So, it can be concluded that Zadie Smith does not think very positive about how multiculturalism and the big society are dealt with by the government and media. In her eyes, people deal with it in a manner which is too forced. Zadie Smit does not support the fact that people are put into boxes. These concepts should not be designed by someone behind a desk, but should just be practiced. This is also how Zadie Smith handles this subject in her novels. She never mentions the subject of multiculturalism, but she deals with it as a reality, and she plays with the fact that her characters are not from the same race and do not have the same religion and origin. Zadie Smith handles the important issues of race and culture with wit, according to Lisa Page in an article she wrote about *On Beauty*⁵. In the same article, Page describes how Smith answers on the question if multiculturalism is a success or a failure: “It’s both things all the time, clearly. But (...) poverty is also an enormous part of it.” Her only goal in *White Teeth* was showing that there are communities who function well in society. The characters in her novel make an effort to understand each other, despite their cultural differences.⁶ As Nick Bentley describes it clearly in an article about multiculturalism in *White Teeth* among others: “Smith’s novel sets out to explore the complex interaction between a range of different ethnicities that make up contemporary British life and in doing so show differing conceptions of and attitudes towards both Englishness and multiculturalism.”⁷ Zadie Smith does not think about multiculturalism as a preconceived theme, but in her eyes it is just the way modern life in London is like.⁸ She deals with it as a reality, and she does not analyse the term in the way critics and academics analyse it.

One of the academics who studied the topic of multiculturalism is Paul Gilroy. He is someone who is very interested in this subject and who has done a great amount of research in this field. Gilroy is a widely praised academic in Cultural Studies and according to the website of the London School of Economics, where he works as a Professor, his work on

racism, nationalism and ethnicity is best known.⁹ In one of his books, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?*, he explores how successful (or unsuccessful) Britain has been in creating a multicultural society. Paul Gilroy acknowledges that the multicultural society in Great Britain has failed, but he advocates what he calls ‘conviviality’ which is a way of different cultural groups living next to each other. According to this academic, Britain suffers from a melancholic mood which finds its roots in its imperial past. By looking critically at this past, Paul Gilroy thinks it must be possible to let it be a guide for the multicultural future.

What I would like to do in this thesis, is to examine how Zadie Smith represents multiculturalism in two of her novels, namely *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*. How do the main characters and their families deal with their lives and their problems? How do they deal with friendship, love, work and each other? This will come up for consideration in the first chapter. Since there is a clear distinction in both novels between the older and the younger generation, I wonder whether or not there are differences between them when it comes to this dealing with life. Does it matter that the children are of mixed race? These questions will be discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. The fact that one of the characters grows up in a prosperous environment, but pretends to come from the street in *On Beauty*, and twins are separated in *White Teeth* raises the question what the effect is of one’s environment on their ideas and values. This is something which will be tackled in chapter three. On top of all this, I will examine Paul Gilroy’s views about multiculturalism. What does his theory on the multicultural society in Britain comprehend? In the final part of this paper I want to be able to answer the main question of my thesis: How does Zadie Smith represent multiculturalism and its accompanying problems in *White Teeth* and *On Beauty* and how can this view be compared to Paul Gilroy’s theory?

Chapter 1: Dealing with Life

In this chapter I will try to answer the question of how the different characters deal with life, when it comes to friendship, work and family. First I will deal with *White Teeth*, later *On Beauty* will come up for consideration.

1.1 *White Teeth*

British, Jamaican, Bengali. Muslim, Jehovah's Witness, Jew. These are the nationalities and the beliefs of the different characters in *White Teeth*. The novel revolves around the British Archie Jones and Bengali and Muslim Samad Iqbal, who have fought in the Second World War together. Archie marries the almost thirty years younger Jamaican girl Clara, daughter of a Jehovah's Witness, and they become parents of Irie, while Samad's marriage is arranged. His wife, Alsana, is also from Bangladesh and she gives birth to twin sons: Millat and Magid, who are the same age as Irie. Besides these two multicultural families, there are also the Chalfens, who are of Jewish-Catholic descent, and they would like to be considered as intellectuals. With all these different origins, religions and views on life, it is sometimes difficult for the characters of *White Teeth* to understand each other.

1.1.1 Friendship/Work

Samad Iqbal is, as said, one of the main characters of the novel. Originally he comes from Bengal (nowadays called Bangladesh) and he aims to be a devout Muslim. Together with Archie he fought in the Second World War in Eastern Europe. Samad certainly does not hide the fact that his great-grandfather was Mangal Pande, who was the first to shoot a bullet in the Indian Mutiny of 1857. This fact is of great influence on Samad and each time he

notices an occasion to start talking about his great-grandfather, he will. Because he is related to such an important person, he feels he is too good for being an ordinary soldier:

“I mean, I am educated. I am trained. I should be soaring with the Royal Airborne Force, shelling from on high! I am an officer! Not some mullah, some sepoy, wearing out my chappals in hard service. My great-grandfather Mangal Pande’ – he looked around for the recognition the name deserved but, being met only with blank pancake English faces, he continued – ‘was the great hero of the Indian Mutiny!’”¹⁰

Boasting about the importance of his great grandfather, Samad hopes to acquire respect from his fellow soldiers and hopes to gain the same importance as his ancestor had. But, unfortunately for Samad, no one had ever heard of Mangal Pande. After the war he first goes back to Bengal, where he marries Alsana who was promised to him even before she was born. After their wedding they emigrate to England where Samad becomes a waiter in his cousin’s restaurant, which is not a very satisfactory job for him.

Archie also did not end up with a job of importance and prestige: he became a paper folder. Before that, he had been a track cyclist. The problem with that job was that he did not improve himself. Each lap he cycled lasted exactly 62.8 seconds. Archie participated in the Olympics three years after the war, and he reached the thirteenth place, but no evidence exists of that, because a secretary missed his name while transcribing the list. All this makes Archie Jones very average. He does not have a special job, he does not shine in anything and he makes decisions at the flip of a coin. He decides to kill himself after flipping a coin, and also the decision to kill Dr. Sick depends on the toss of a coin. In an article called “Chance and Gesture in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* and *The Autograph Man*: A Model for Multicultural Identity?”, Jonathan P.A. Sell investigates the logic between determinism and chance. Sell states that Archie surrenders to chance, while Samad is a strong believer in cultural determinism. For example, English Archie will never satisfy a woman, just as Samad himself

would never eat pork because “It’s in our cultures ... Maybe deeper. Maybe in our bones.”¹¹ Samad also believes that he can never escape his past, he reasons that “Our children will be born of our actions. *Our accidents will become their destinies.*”¹² However, “perhaps in an attempt to avoid moral responsibility” Samad turns to Archie’s methods. On the flip of a coin he decides to send Magid to Bangladesh, and with this method he decides to end his affair with Poppy, one of the teachers of his sons.¹³

1.1.2 Family

Religion is very important to Samad. He wants his sons to grow up as good men and good Muslims. After having a brief affair with one of his sons’ teachers, he does not want his children to make the same mistake he has made: “I kept thinking: how can I teach my boys anything, how can I show them the straight road when I have lost my own bearings?”¹⁴ He feels his sons are beginning to rebel and in order to save at least one of his children (both of them is too expensive) he sends Magid, without Alsana knowing, to their home country, Bangladesh. This way, Samad hopes Magid will grow up properly as a devout Muslim. Unfortunately for him, nothing turned out the way Samad had hoped for. Magid grows up to be an atheist and scientist, while Millat becomes an Islamic fundamentalist and member of a Muslim brotherhood. They both rebel, perhaps unconsciously, against their father. Alsana, on her turn, rebels against Samad as well, because he basically kidnapped one of her sons without her knowing:

“Alsana had decided to stop speaking directly to her husband. Through the next eight years she would determine never to say *yes* to him, never to say *no* to him, but rather to force him to live like she did – never *knowing*, never being *sure*, holding Samad’s sanity to ransom, until she was paid in full with the return of her number-one-son-

eldest-by-two-minutes, until she could once more put a chubby hand through his thick hair. That was her promise, that was her curse upon Samad, and it was *exquisite* revenge.”¹⁵

Although Alsana is thirty years younger than Samad, she is the boss in their marriage. She has a huge temper and she wins discussions by hurting Samad. Samad sincerely wants what is best for his family, but instead of achieving this, he makes bad decisions, and does not communicate with his wife. Alsana on the other hand is also part of the problem, because she cannot deal with her problems in a mature way. Instead of talking to Samad, she tries to handle things by fighting with her husband.

Archie Jones is the softy of the novel. He does not actively take decisions, he passively lets things happen. In other words: he surrenders to chance. *White Teeth* opens with the – on the flip of a coin decided – suicide attempt of Archie on New Year’s Day, after his first wife left him after thirty years. Archie is trying to gas himself in his car, on the terrain of a halal butcher, who eventually stops him from killing himself. This way, Archie conceives the idea that life says convincingly yes to him, so he is ecstatic and extremely cheerful to say yes to life as well. Driving through the neighbourhood, he decides to ring the bell of a house with a striking sign which welcomed people to an ‘end of the world party’. Archie finds himself on the afterparty where he meets Clara and within six weeks they are married. Clara is a Jehovah’s Witness, but she abandons her religion when she meets her first boyfriend Ryan Topps. However, her mother, Hortense Bowden, takes her religion very seriously and decides to stop speaking to her daughter after she marries white Englishman Archie.

Besides the Joneses and the Iqbals, there are also the Chalfens. They do not appear in *White Teeth* until the twelfth chapter, where they come in contact with Millat and Irie when these two are caught smoking marijuana with Joshua, one of the Chalfens’ sons. The headmaster determines that, as a punishment, Millat and Irie should go to Joshua’s house

twice a week to join in a study group. Joyce Chalfen, a horticulturalist and writer, is married to Marcus, who works as a genetic engineer. From the first moment that Millat walks in their house, Joyce is fascinated by him. She sees him as a charity case and she does not seem to notice that he abuses her generosity. Millat smokes, drinks and swears in her house, but Joyce does not seem to mind and she even pays him for things he does not perform such as babysitting or washing the car. Her maternal instinct is very strong, since she has four sons to take care of, and she loves to take care of everything and everyone. However, she is not very interested in Irie, who is therefore more attracted to Marcus. Irie is keen on learning about his work in genetic engineering with mice and Marcus offers her a job in organising his papers after she notices how messy his study is. Irie agrees, because she likes to learn about Marcus' job, she loves the Chalfen family and so she enjoys being around them: "she *wanted* it; she *wanted* to merge with the Chalfens, to be of one flesh; separated from the chaotic, random flesh of her own family and transgenically fused with another."¹⁶ Alsana and Clara however, are not too pleased with the fact that their children spend so much time at the Chalfens. Although Irie's and Millat's grades improve greatly, Alsana refuses to thank Joyce for all the time she spent with her child, for in her eyes Millat's grades went up because of his Iqbal brains. Clara is not as stubborn as Alsana, so she goes to the Chalfen house to meet the woman who helped her daughter. She does not like the fact that Irie spends so much time away from home, but above all Clara wants what is best for Irie.

1.2 On Beauty

On Beauty's characters are as diverse as those in Zadie Smith's first novel. The plot of this book hinges upon two contrasting families. The Belseys consist of white British Howard, married to African-American Kiki, and together they have three children: Jerome, Zora and

Levi. Howard's professional opposite is Monty Kipps, a Trinidadian, who is married to Carlene, Caribbean as well, and they have two children, Michael and Victoria. Whereas the Belsey family has always considered itself liberal and atheist, the Kippses are ultra-conservative Christians. I will here focus more on the Belseys than on the Kipps family, for the simple reason that the Belseys are more prominently present in the novel.

1.2.1 Friendship/Work

The two main male characters of *On Beauty*, Howard and Monty, are everything but friends. Howard thinks he and Monty are opposites, but actually they are more alike than he thinks. Monty has an affair as well, with the difference that his wife, who is dying of cancer at the time, does not know. They work in the same professional field, but in all other areas they seem to be opposites. Monty wrote a book about Rembrandt, which is the same subject Howard is researching as well, but "Howard's book on the same topic remained unfinished and strewn across the floor before his printer on pages that seemed to him sometimes to have been spewed from the machine in disgust."¹⁷ Monty's book proved to be very successful, which is why Howard feels threatened by his rival, and jealousy plays a role as well. Howard realistically knows that Monty wrote a good book, but that fact turned Howard's disliking of Monty into hate:

"Howard had always disliked Monty, as any sensible liberal would dislike a man who had dedicated his life to the perverse politics of right-wing iconoclasm, but he had never *really* hated him until he had heard the news, three years ago, that Kipps too was writing a book about Rembrandt."¹⁸

Despite the animosity between their husbands, Carlene and Kiki build up a close friendship. They both are mature enough to set aside their differences and past troubles. The Kippses

were so kind to offer Jerome a place to stay when he was in London, but when he wanted to ask Victoria to marry him after they made love once, it all became a little awkward. Kiki wants to offer her apologies for everything that happened in the past, but Carlene responds with “I hope you won’t offend me (...) by apologizing for things that were no fault of yours.”¹⁹ Kiki finds an equal in Carlene, because she is a prosperous black woman as well, living in the same neighbourhood. However, Carlene dies of cancer as the novel progresses and Kiki loses her companion, which makes her terribly upset.

1.2.2 Family

In the beginning of *On Beauty*, Howard and Kiki’s marriage problems are central to the novel. Howard cheated on his wife, and while Kiki thinks it happened just once with an anonymous woman, it was in fact a three-week affair with an old friend of both Howard and Kiki, who is at the same time a colleague of Howard. To Kiki, it is not easy to forgive him, but she does. However, when she finds out it was Claire Malcolm who slept with her husband, something breaks on her side: “‘A little *white* woman,’ yelled Kiki across the room, unable now to control herself. ‘A tiny white woman I could fit in my *pocket*.’”²⁰ This drives an even bigger wedge between Howard and Kiki, since he does not always understand his wife. Kiki is a black woman in a generally white society and Howard does not realise how hard this must be for her:

“‘You think it’s normal. Everywhere we go, I’m alone in this... this *sea* of white. I barely *know* any black folk any more, Howie. My whole life is white. I don’t see any black folk unless they be cleaning under my feet in the fucking café in your *fucking* college. Or pushing a fucking hospital bed through a corridor. I *staked my whole life* on you. And I have no idea any more why I did that.’”²¹

Howard admits that he does not know what Kiki means: “‘I can’t understand you,’ he said, looking at her at last. ‘You’re not making any sense to me.’”²² He does not realise how his wife is feeling, but he also does not take a whole lot of trouble in trying to empathise with her. With his comments he does not help himself, but he generates even more of Kiki’s annoyance. When Kiki says: “‘You married a big black bitch and you run off with a fucking leprechaun?’”²³ Howard replies that he didn’t, alluding to the fact that he married a slim Kiki. Of course, he does not receive Kiki’s sympathy when he says this, but he creates even more anger on her side. Howard does not see anymore how beautiful his wife is. This is something also Kathleen Wall notices in her article “Ethics, Knowledge, and the Need for Beauty: Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty* and Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*.” Zora thinks Kiki is less attractive in Howard’s eyes due to her weight, but in particular the two women who have affairs with Howard, comment on Kiki’s beauty.²⁴ Claire mentions at the party how great Kiki looks and says she should be in a fountain in Rome, while Victoria tells Howard she finds Kiki amazing and looking like a queen. Besides by criticising Kiki’s weight, Howard also generates Kiki’s annoyance by talking in a certain way to his wife. There is a gap between Howard’s academic background and his family life at home. When he fights with his wife, he shifts to the academic modus and says things like: “‘Nothing... the onus is on me, I know that. It’s for me to – to – explain my narrative in a way that’s comprehensible ... and achieves an ... I don’t know, explanation, I suppose, in terms of motivation...’”²⁵ Kiki replies that they are not in his class now, so that he should talk in a way that means something. Howard on his turn is irritated by this, because he knows this is something which comes back time and again in their marriage, since Kiki’s language is more personal and “more emotionally expressive than his own.”²⁶ However, Howard does not try to meet his wife halfway by trying to talk to her in a more personal manner. This way, he sets himself outside, not only of Kiki, but of his entire family.

Howard also does not have a great relationship with his children. Because he is white, and his children are of mixed race, an essential difference exists between them. Howard does not understand what it is like to be a young black person in America. In her article “‘A Glance from God’: Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty* and Zora Neale Hurston” Susan Alice Fischer discusses several literary influences on *On Beauty* and she says about this issue: “For instance, his son Levi receives hostile stares from white passers-by as he approaches his own house, and Howard fails to understand his experience as a young black man in America.”²⁷ When Levi tries to tell him that, Howard denies it: “He disliked and feared conversations with his children that concerned race, as he suspected this one would.”²⁸ Howard does not only not understand Levi and his feelings, but he can also not empathise with Jerome’s beliefs. His eldest son converted to Christianity, which goes in against everything Howard believes in, since he considers him and his family as liberal and atheist. The fact that Howard does not understand his wife and children, finds its cause in bigger issues, which have to do with identity. Jerome, Zora and Levi are of mixed race, they are young black people in a predominantly white neighbourhood and it is hard for them to determine where they belong. Howard is not able to empathise with them, he simply does not understand what it is like to be of mixed race and living in a white neighbourhood. Vice versa it is exactly the same: the children cannot relate to Howard either. That is why they do not always feel at home in their own house and they find ways to escape. This is one of the reasons why Levi is attracted by the street lifestyle. He wishes he was not born in the fair white neighbourhood of Wellington, but in Boston’s back streets in Roxbury. That is also where Carl comes from, a young black man with a less fortunate background than the Belseys, who is a ‘street poet’ and who becomes Levi’s friend. Levi wishes he had the same background as Carl, and that is why he dresses and behaves himself as if he actually comes from the street. He uses language as: “di’unt,” “impor’ant,” and “Aw, shut *up*, man. Mom, a’hma be back by eleven.”²⁹ If you hear

him talk, it is not obvious he is born in a prosperous, academic family. Against his friends he conceals this fact and he tells them he is from Roxbury. Levi would want to be less white and more black than he is and so he longs for a 'blacker' lifestyle. He does this by rebelling against his family's lifestyle: he likes hip-hop, finds friends who live in the street and eventually finds a job which is to be practiced on the street. Levi had a job in the music department of a megastore, but he quits because he refused to work on Christmas Day. To earn money to "escape Wellington on a Saturday night"³⁰ is very important to him. For Levi the money he earns every week feels like "the only thing that kept him half normal, half sane, half *black*."³¹ So, when he loses his job, he decides to join a group of Haitian street vendors, because he very much looks up to them. His sister Zora is not as outspoken as Levi, but shows in her own way that she is not satisfied with her surroundings: she is only interested in bigger social issues and not in little things her family does: "Zora gawped at her mother crudely and then, just as abruptly, lost interest."³² She acts cool and disinterested, almost without feeling: "They were speaking to each other with tinkling officiousness, like two administrators filling out a form together."³³ "He had *such* a great face," Kiki said to Zora about Carl, "You don't notice that kind of thing.' (...) 'Well, it's interesting. You don't. You're very high-minded. That's an admirable quality.'"³⁴ However, Zora is the only one who more or less follows her father's path regarding her academic striving and hunger for knowledge. As an unconscious act of rebellion though, she develops a crush on Carl, Levi's friend from the street. He is not educated and not of her own social class. He "is literally dismissed from the Belsey household the first time he attempts to gain entrance."³⁵ Jerome does not get as much attention as Levi and Zora in the novel, but it is clear that he also struggles with his identity. He is raised in a liberal and atheist home, but decides to convert to Christianity and to go to England to work as an intern with the Kippes, which is his way to show he rebels against his family. Howard

is certainly not happy with his son's conversion, because Christianity goes in against everything that he believes in.

1.3 Conclusion

The question I tried to answer in this chapter is: "How do the different characters deal with life, when it comes to friendship, work and family?" It can be concluded that the way the characters do this in *White Teeth* does not essentially differ from the way the characters deal with life in *On Beauty*.

Where friendship and work is concerned, Archie and Samad are close friends. They fought together in the war, which is how their friendship originated. After the war they lived long apart, but eventually Samad moved to England and he and Archie were reunited. Their friendship is a unique one. Samad and Archie are different as day and night, but they remain best friends. They do not have the same religion, background or view on life, but fighting in the war has created a strong bond, which surpasses their cultural differences.

Howard and Monty in *On Beauty* are exactly the opposite of friends: they cannot stand each other, although these two men are more alike than they think. They work in the same professional field, they both have affairs, their wives become friends and they both moved from England to the United States, but all of this is not a basis for a connection. Although their cultural background, work field and way of life contain extreme similarities, their divergent ideas about art and Rembrandt in particular make them see each other as archrivals.

On the subject of family it can be concluded that the various households deal with issues in divergent manners. Although the Joneses have different backgrounds, they do not seem to have much trouble when it comes to the raising of Irie. Both Archie as Clara want

what is best for her, and they come across as rather carefree parents. Especially Archie does not worry about a thing, he makes a very light-minded impression.

With the Iqbals this is fairly the opposite. Despite the fact that Samad and Alsana have the same cultural background, they cannot seem to agree on the nurture of Magid and Millat. They fight a lot, do not have the same opinions about raising their sons, and what is worse, they do not communicate about important decisions. Samad and Alsana's marriage is also not an extremely happy one.

In *On Beauty* both the Belseys as the Kippses experience troubles when it comes to marriage and children. Howard Belsey cheats on his wife with another woman and creates a crisis between him and Kiki. Besides that, he also does not have a great bond with his children. Because he does not know what it is like to be a person of colour in a predominantly white neighbourhood, he does not understand the troubles his children experience. All three of his children rebel in one way or another against their father, and Howard sets himself outside by not showing more interest or at least try to understand what motivates his children to do what they do. So, with the Belseys there does exist a problem which is connected to a difference in skin colour.

The Kippses do not differ in skin colour, but they experience problems as well. These problems show a striking resemblance to those of the Belseys. Monty has an affair as well, although his wife does not find out. Their children rebel also, although Victoria is much more prominently present in the novel than her brother.

There are also some striking differences between the two novels. One of them is the great contrast in academic milieu and street culture. More so than in *White Teeth* this is manifested in *On Beauty*. The focus in *On Beauty* lies more on Howard Belsey and Monty Kipps, who are academically involved with each other. Besides that, the friendship between Zora, Levi and Carl is not an unimportant storyline. The contrast between the prosperous and

intellectual family Belsey and Carl, who comes from the street, is clearly shown when they become friends. In *White Teeth* however, the focus lies more on the ethnic and cultural differences between the families. So, the contrast between the different cultures of the main families is larger. The way in which the Belsey's and Kippses handle things are more alike than the way in which the Joneses and the Iqbals handle issues.

Chapter 2: The Old vs. the Young

Chapter two will hinge upon the question whether or not there are differences, when it comes to dealing with life in general, between the several generations the two novels revolve around. I will examine the differences between the older and the younger generation as well as the variety in dealing with life between the young adults.

2.1 *White Teeth*

Both in *White Teeth* as in *On Beauty* the younger generation rebels against their parents' wishes. Without an exception, all children in Zadie Smith's first novel turn out to be persons, or do things, which their parents do not approve of. *White Teeth* is divided into several parts: in one of them are the children about nine years old, in the subsequent parts they are aged fifteen to seventeen years old. This way, it is not hard to see how Irie, Millat and Magid evolve as individuals, but also in relations with each other. In this part I will show how these children deal with life and how this differs from how their parents do this.

2.1.1 Older generation

Samad wants his children to grow up as well-behaved men and good traditional Muslims. In order to achieve this, he goes to great lengths. By sending Magid to Bangladesh he separates his twin sons and deprives them of their right to grow up with each other. To separate twins is an unnatural thing to do, they should never be separated at such a young age. By doing this, Samad drives a wedge between them, and as a result their relationship will never be the same. The reason why he wants to send his children away is a hypocritical one. Because Samad's behaviour grows more and more immoral, he wants his children to be more

traditional. He uses two sentences to condone his behaviour: 'To the pure all things are pure' and 'Can't say fairer than that.' The origin of these sayings lies in the beginning of his marriage, when he slept alone in the attic, and where he masturbated because Alsana was sexually not interested in him. Samad goes to a mosque where he asks an alim whether it is allowed to deliver himself an orgasm. This is not the case, but Samad justifies it for himself by thinking that he is a pure man and so "to the pure all things are pure." However, after five years Samad gives up masturbation, and instead starts drinking. In his eyes he made a deal with Allah. Since he is basically a good man, he "can't say fairer than that." In other words, Samad is not able to sacrifice things: he only swaps one Islamic sin for the other. When he starts feeling attracted to one of the teachers of his sons, Poppy Burt-Jones, he conceives this as revenge from God. That is when he starts masturbating again, several times a day. Because he feels guilty, he does not eat between sunrise and sunset and he starts working fourteen hours a day, because the restaurant is the only place he could bear to be. When Shiva, a colleague, asks him what is going on, Samad explains and Shiva tells him that he should not feel guilty, and that relations with English women never work, because of "too much history (...) Too much bloody history."³⁶ However, Samad starts an affair with Poppy, which is rather short lived. Just before he ends it, he realises he is being hypocritical, that he cannot teach his boys anything when he himself does not act as a righteous man. That is when he decides to send one of them to Bangladesh.

Archie is already dealt with in Chapter one: he particularly lives by chance. For all the important decisions he has to take in his life, he flips a coin. The Chalfens on the other hand, think significantly more about things than Archie does. The Chalfen family can be called arrogant: they think they know what is best for everyone and they feel themselves better than the Joneses and the Iqbals. They have an eccentric way of treating their children and for most of the time they close their eyes for the problems they or their children have.

2.1.2 Younger generation

Already when they were young, the differences between the two brothers Iqbal were visible: Magid always has been the more conscious one of the two. Already at nine years old his teacher said about Magid that he was so “impressive intellectually”³⁷ and dressed himself like a little adult, while Millat forced Alsana to buy Nike and other popular brands. As young as he was, “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 (...).”³⁸ He denies his family’s culture and legacy and wanted to be called Mark Smith, like a “normal” English boy. After Samad sends Magid to Bangladesh, the differences between the twin boys grow significantly. They turn out to be opposites in the extreme. Magid becomes an educated young man, who does not believe in a God, is interested in law and writing, dresses himself in tweed suits and ties, and learns from an Indian writer that Indians should “be more like the English” because “the English fight fate to the death.”³⁹ Millat on the other hand turns out to be a boy who seeks trouble, smokes weed and already started having sex at a very young age with a lot of different women. However, this lifestyle eventually tires Millat and he becomes interested in KEVIN, Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation, whose members “are aware they have an acronym problem.”⁴⁰ They do not approve of Millat’s lifestyle and try to convince him to change his mind by letting him read leaflets. After reading them, Millat looks at Karina, one of his girlfriends, in quite a different light. He tells her he does not respect her, because she wears clothes that are too revealing, she sings ‘Sexual Healing’ at a pub karaoke and she screams when they have sex. Suddenly, Millat disapproves of the sexual promiscuity of his girlfriend, while he is promiscuous himself as well. Like his father, Millat demonstrates hypocritical traits. Later, he grows himself a beard and turns into a more extreme Muslim fundamentalist, who does not

want to meet his brother on “political, religious and personal grounds”⁴¹ when Magid comes back from Bangladesh. Both brothers do not turn out to be what their father had hoped for, although Samad’s wish came true to a certain extent in the way that at least one of his sons devotes himself to something traditional and Islamic .

Something similar occurs in the Chalfen house with Joshua, the son of Marcus and Joyce. He used to be a nerdy boy who goes to the same school as Millat and Irie, who likes to play board games with his friends at school and is called names like “Chalfen the Chubster” and “Josh-with-the-Jewfro.”⁴² However, when he joins FATE, which stands for Fighting Animal Torture and Exploitation, he changes. Joshua starts smoking pot as well and turns into an extreme animal rights activist. Everything his father believes in, Joshua does not. Marcus is a genetic engineer and works on a project called FutureMouse, in which he uses a mouse that develops tumors at set times. FATE is an organisation which comes up for animal rights, and is against hurting and killing animals, so Joshua helps protesting against everything his father believes in and does with his work. He thinks that only by joining FATE, giving up eating meat and not wearing leather anymore, in other words “really fucking extreme behaviour,” that he “can get through to somebody like Marcus.”⁴³

Irie is the one who secretly rebels against her parents. She does not do it in an obvious manner as for example Millat and Joshua, but Irie does things her parents are not charmed about. She silently rebels by spending much time at the Chalfen house, she visits her grandmother against her mother’s wishes after Irie finds out Clara’s upper teeth are false, and at the end of the book Irie sleeps with both Millat as Magid, gets pregnant, and will not be able to figure out whose child she is carrying, because of the identical genes the brothers share. Irie is very much searching for who she is. She has low self-esteem, because she finds

herself too big (“the European proportions of Clara’s figure had skipped a generation, and she was landed instead with Hortense’s substantial Jamaican frame”⁴⁴) and she also does not like her hair. Irie finds herself in general wrong:

“Irie believed she had been dealt the dodgy cards: mountainous curves, buck teeth and thick metal retainer, impossible Afro hair, and to top it off mole-ish eyesight which in turn required bottle-top spectacles in a light shade of pink. (...) And this belief in her ugliness, in her *wrongness*, had subdued her; she kept her smart-ass comments to herself these days, she kept her right hand on her stomach. She was all *wrong*.”⁴⁵

So, Irie goes to a Afro hairdresser, and wants to get her hair straightened. However, she should not have washed her hair, because there should be dirt to protect the skin, and due to poor communication between the hairdressers, the process goes terribly wrong and Irie ends up not with straight hair, but with no hair. In order to undo the damage, she is sent to a fake hair shop, where she witnesses a Pakistani woman selling her hair, which is the same hair Irie is sold by the owner of the shop. The hairdresser then attaches the fake hair to Irie’s short hair, but she tears it all out when she goes by the Iqbal’s house and Millat appears not to be home. For Irie has a crush on Millat, and she goes to great lengths to make him notice her in an amorous way. Millat never does, and Irie continues searching for her identity. After finding out something about her mother she did not know before, she feels as if her parents on purpose had not told her:

“Irie was sixteen and everything feels deliberate at that age. To her, this was yet another item in a long list of parental hypocrisies and untruths, this was another example of the Jones/Bowden gift for secret histories (...)”⁴⁶

So, she flees to her grandmother’s house. Hortense is a Jehovah’s witness, and has not seen Clara or Irie in six years. The reason why is an odd one. Hortense objected to the fact that Clara married a white man, her opinion being that “black and white never come to no good.

De Lord Jesus never meant us to mix it up.”⁴⁷ She seems to forget that she herself is the product of the lovemaking of a white captain and her Jamaican mother Ambrosia. Hortense tries to interest Irie in her religion. Ryan Topps, Clara’s ex-boyfriend, was converted by her, and is now living together with Hortense in her house. Irie stays with them for a while, she hopes to find answers there, but Hortense’s attempts to interest Irie in becoming a Jehovah’s Witness are fruitless, for “Irie’s atheism was robust.”⁴⁸

All children in *White Teeth* find someone of the older generation to which they turn when they are away from home and need someone to give them advice or to talk to. Magid finds a pen-pal in Marcus Chalfen, Millat turns to KEVIN and in a certain way also to Joyce, Irie goes to Hortense and Joshua finds comfort with the people from FATE. The children need these emotional outlets to define for themselves who they are. They are all of the same age, which is a difficult one: puberty, because their bodies change, and their views, opinions and values, in other words, their characters are being formed.

2.2 On Beauty

As in *White Teeth* the children in *On Beauty* rebel to a great extent against their parents. They as well are in search of their identity because of their age. Not only the children, but also the adults want to escape their living environment, and the conditions they live in. Like in the previous part I will compare the younger and the older generation of *On Beauty* and will draw a conclusion.

2.2.1 Older generation

“The Belseys are a mess” is what Max Watman states in his article ‘The ever-present human hint of yellow’ about the characters in *On Beauty* and several other books. Furthermore he says: “Howard has hastened, if not precipitated, the disintegration of the family by having an affair with a poetry professor named Claire Malcolm.”⁴⁹ His wife is obviously not pleased that he could not stay faithful to her, but also Howard’s children take it ill that he has cheated on their mother. Howard is the head of a household, and he should feel responsible for his family’s well-being, but it appears that he does not. He has problems understanding his wife and children, because he does not have to face the same difficulties they experience. The result of this is that Howard’s self-esteem drops, because he is not capable to empathise with his family, which generates a feeling of failure, which is why Howard escapes in his work and several affairs. His work also does not provide for a growing of his self respect, because he does not have a lot of success in his field. The problem with Howard is that he does not confront his wife or his children with his feelings, but walks away from it. Kiki on the other hand, is not afraid to confront her husband with the way she feels. She makes it very clear to Howard that she does not feel at home in a predominantly white neighbourhood. She feels alone in “this *sea* of white”⁵⁰ and she longs for friends of her own skin colour, of whom she finds one in Carlene Kipps.

In the other family, the Kippses, Monty makes the same mistake Howard makes: he has an affair. Two of the differences with Howard are that Monty is a strict Christian, and that his wife does not find out that he has an affair. The fact that he is a Christian, means that he does not practice what he preaches. He wants his children to be religious and to follow the rules of Christianity, but he himself is a hypocrite by cheating on his wife. During the

sickness of Carlene Kipps, Monty finds one of his students rather too interesting and this indicates that he is in a state of denial about his wife's sickness. To flee the house in order to avoid his sick wife is the easy way out. However, Carlene herself also does not know how to handle her sickness, because she does not even tell Kiki, who surely becomes a good friend of her, what is going on with her.

2.2.2 Younger generation

The characters of the younger generation all have two things in common: they rebel against their parents and the way they do this is by means of fleeing their environment. The manner in which they do this differs. Jerome literally flees, by going to England to stay with the ultra conservative family Kipps. He follows an internship at Monty's office and becomes a Christian himself as well. According to Kiki, Jerome wants attention:

“He's wanting his daddy's attention – and he's going the right way about it. Even doing this Kipps internship in the first place – there's a *million* internships he could have gone on. Now he's going to marry Kipps junior? Doesn't take a Freudian. I'm saying, the worst thing we can do is to take this seriously.”⁵¹

Unlike his mother, Jerome's father does take his son's mail seriously in which he tells his parents that he is going to marry Victoria after knowing her only one week, so Howard even goes to London to stop Jerome. Since Howard does not own a cell phone, Kiki cannot reach him to tell him Jerome sent another email in which he tells that it was all a mistake, and that Howard should not tell anybody. Jerome does not know that Howard is on his way to England, because he is desperate to stop his son. The last thing that Howard wants, is a Kipps in the family, and be related to Monty Kipps. The happiness of Jerome is not considered. To most parents the most important thing is that their child is happy, but Howard has other

priorities. He also forgets an important lesson which Kiki does not: when a child comes up with a ridiculous idea, a parent is supposed to ignore it, or pretend to support it, but in order to make a child get over it, not take it too seriously. However, what both parents do not understand, is that Jerome “had fallen in love with a family. He felt he couldn’t tell his own family this fact; it was easier for them to believe that last year was Jerome’s ‘romantic fuck-up’ or – more pleasing to the Belsey mentality – his ‘flirtation with Christianity.’”⁵² He had a wonderful time at the Kippses, because they are so different from his own family: they eat breakfast together, have meaningful conversations and spend in general much time with each other. According to Jerome himself “long before Victoria arrived in the house, he was already in love. It was only that his general ardour for the family found its correct, specific vessel in Victoria.”⁵³

Zora is the only one who sort of follows her father’s path. She attends the same college as where her father teaches. Zora is a smart, hardworking and resolute young woman, who knows what she wants for her future. Studying takes up a lot of her time, and also in her spare time, she is often busy organising things which have to do with her study or college. She likes to arrange meetings with important people to inform them of her future plans. At one of those meetings she appears to be rather manipulative. According to her, Claire Malcolm did not accept her in her poetry class, because of the affair she had with Howard. Zora does not want to believe that Claire refused her because she is not good enough in creative writing, since she is “in the top three percentile of this college, [her] academic record is pretty spotless.”⁵⁴ After referring to the advisory board, Zora makes the Dean talk to Claire Malcolm and convinces her to take Zora Belsey into her class, even though Claire finds her lacking poetry talent. However it is not as obvious as with Jerome and Levi, Zora nevertheless also shows flee behaviour. She flees into her future, and into her academic path. She is not so

much occupied with her present, but rather with her future. This does not necessarily have to be a negative thing, but besides this innocent fleeing behaviour, she also rebels against her parents. As can be seen in Chapter one, Zora develops a crush on Carl, the street poet. She meets him at a Mozart music event, where she was with her own family. Levi befriends Carl, and that is how she regularly comes into contact with him. Zora was not immediately charmed by him, but getting to know him better, the inevitable happens. Since her father is not really a fan of Carl, the crush of Zora can be seen as an act of rebellion.

Of the three Belsey children, Levi rebels in the most drastic way. He pretends to be something he is not. By living on the street, and talking and dressing like his Haitian friends of the street, he denies that he comes from a prosperous family. Levi does not identify with his father, he does not understand him, and vice versa. This is shown in the thoughts he has about his father's affair: Levi looks at it from two sides, he "had felt quite reasonable about it. He felt bad for his mom, obviously, but he also understood his father's position."⁵⁵ But when he finds out that it was a little white female his father shared a bed with, he gets confused: "It was yet another example of his father's bizarre tastes. Where was the booty on that? Where was the rack?" He realises this when he talks to Claire Malcolm, and "as a sign of solidarity with his mother's more generous proportions"⁵⁶ he decides to stop the conversation. All three of the Belsey children have an affinity with their mother, more so than with their father, and they also feel more understood by her. All three of them rebel more against their father, than against their mother.

The children of the Kipps family do not receive as much attention as the Belseys, but about Victoria can be said the same as about the Belsey children: she as well rebels against what her parents want for her. Michael is hardly present in *On Beauty*, so not much can be

told about him. He works as a “risk analyst for an equities firm”⁵⁷ and has a stable relationship with the woman he is going to marry soon. Michael and Victoria are supposed to be raised in a orthodox and conservative manner, but it becomes clear as the novel progresses that especially Victoria is everything but a holy virgin Mary: she does not only share the bed with Jerome Belsey, but with his father Howard as well, and later also with Levi’s friend Carl. Of course she rebels secretly, because her parents know nothing of her sexual escapades. It seems a plausible explanation that Victoria has a negative self-image and thus seeks approval and appreciation from men by sleeping with them. However, she goes with Howard to a formal dinner at the university where her father is as well. There, Howard realises that this gorgeous young woman “giving her attention to a 57-year-old married man (albeit with a full head of hair) might have other motives besides pure animal passion. Was he – as Levi would put it – being played?”⁵⁸ Since Howard and Monty are everything but friends, Victoria tries to provoke her father.

2.3 Conclusion

The question I tried to answer in this chapter is: “When it comes to dealing with life, are there differences between the older and the younger generation?” I found out there are certainly clear differences, which I will recite here in the conclusion.

In *White Teeth* the older generation handles the problems they have in a more silent manner than the younger generation does this. Samad struggles with his urges and thoughts without anyone knowing. Alsana is not extremely happy in her marriage, which she expresses by aiming her anger at her husband. Clara does not talk with her mother because she is as good as disowned by her. Archie is a special case, his opinion is that he does not have any

problems and he walks through life with a nonchalant attitude. So, the parents deal with the issues they have in a rather introvert fashion.

The younger generation on the other hand, has a more extrovert manner to deal with their problems. Both Magid and Millat as Joshua and Irie resist against their parents. They all are about sixteen years old, which is a difficult age. It is logical that they are in search of their limits and boundaries and that they want to find out who they are. However, some of them rebel in a more extreme way than other. All in all, we can say that the younger generation is much more straightforward in uttering their dissatisfaction than the parents.

Another striking difference between generations, noted by Laura Moss in her article “The Politics of Everyday Hybridity” is “the shift from a forced hybridity in Jamaica to a chosen hybridity in England.”⁵⁹ Whereas the great-grandparents of Irie were brought together in a forced manner (they expected Irie’s grandmother), Clara and Archie first fell in love. These are similar stories, but generations apart.

On Beauty is rather different when it comes to the difference between the older and younger generation. In this novel the older generation is more explicit in uttering their unhappiness in life, compared to the older generation in *White Teeth*. Howard finds himself in a sort of midlife crisis, and everyone knows of Howard cheating on Kiki and the following marital problems. However, the other family, the Kippes struggle with their problems in a more subdued way. No one knows about Carlene’s illness, not even her own family, and Monty cheating on his ill wife was a surprise for everyone.

The younger generation though, acts the same as the children in *White Teeth*. They as well do not hide the fact that they are not pleased with the way they live, or the environment they live in. Each one of the Belsey children, and Victoria Kipps as well, rebel against their parents in an obvious way. It can even be said that they all go into the extreme: Levi pretends

to be something he is not, Jerome flees to the other end of the world, Zora escapes into her imagined future and Victoria sets aside the principles she learned from her parents.

All in all, the children of both novels show their discontent easily. They are more pronounced in their rebellion against their parents. The older generation does not rebel, and if one does, they do it in a way that is not as obvious as the younger generation does it.

Chapter 3: The Environment

In this chapter I will investigate what the effect is of the environment of a character on their ideals and values. Why do Millat and Magid grow up to be so different, even though they are twins? Why does Levi not interest himself in education and Carl does? I will try to answer these questions in this part of my thesis.

3.1 White Teeth

In *White Teeth* the origins and beliefs of the characters are extremely diverse. I wonder whether or not the environment in which they grow up, the way they are brought up, or the place where they live, has a certain effect on how they find their way in life. The several children in *White Teeth* grow up in diverse environments with parents who do not believe the same things. Especially in the case of Millat and Magid this is a very interesting subject, since they are twins, and for a great part of their youth live the same life, but somehow end up to be two completely different individuals. In this part I will examine how this is possible. Besides that, I will also discuss Joshua, since he chooses such a different path than his parents taught him.

3.1.1 Millat and Magid Iqbal

Although Millat and Magid are born on the same day, and shared the same living environment until they were nine years old, they grow up to be two totally different children. This is caused by two factors, namely the way their parents handle them and the people from their direct environment they come in contact with. For instance, Samad feels very involved when it comes to the school his children attend. He does not want his sons to be educated in a solely

Western way. On a school governor's meeting, Samad constantly proposes motions to change school initiatives. He suggests to remove the "pagan"⁶⁰ Harvest Festival and instead, celebrate more Muslim events. However, the school does its best to be religiously as diverse as possible. Samad just extremely sticks to his opinion and is not open-minded at all. The same goes for the happiness of his boys. He does not accept the fact that Magid does not identify with Islam and other Muslims. In Samad's eyes his sons are Bangladeshi Muslims, but because they now live in England he has to change his view on that. He does not let them be themselves, he pushes them and tries to make them do what he wants. By trying to force Magid to identify with the Islam, Samad instead achieves the opposite. Besides that, Samad 'uses' his children to achieve other goals. He never brings the boys to school, but on one morning he wants to bring them, pretending that he sees them too little: "I want to see my boys! I want to see Irie! Every morning they are growing up – I never see it! Two inches Millat has grown."⁶¹ But secretly, he just uses that excuse in order to see Poppy, the teacher he admires.

At home, Millat and Magid are presented with the wrong example when it comes to the marriage of their parents. Samad and Alsana fight their battles in a physical manner, and they do not talk about issues in a proper way. When they end up in a physical battle, the kids wake up in the middle of the night making bets who will win the fight: "'Abba,' said Magid, after surveying the state of play for a moment. 'Definitely Abba.' 'Cha, man. No way,' said Millat, blinking in the light. 'I bet you two orange lollies Amma's going to kick the shit out of him.'"⁶² Of course, this has an effect on the twins, since they never have seen the right example and have learned to talk when things bother them.

The fact that Samad does not treat his sons the same, plays also an important role when it comes to the raising of Millat and Magid. Since the birth of his sons, Magid was Samad's favourite son. While deciding which son to send to Bangladesh, Samad therefore had

a hard time. His first choice was Magid, for “Magid had the brains, Magid would settle down quicker, learn the language quicker (...),”⁶³ but after a week “there was a change of heart and it was Millat, because Magid was really Samad’s favourite, and he wanted to watch him grow older, and Millat was the one more in need of moral direction anyway.”⁶⁴ After that, Samad changed his mind ten other times, until “it was finally and for ever Magid”⁶⁵ whom he was going to send to his home country. While Magid is in Bangladesh, and Samad is not continually around him, Samad starts to put him on a pedestal, and idealises him. In his eyes Magid is “destined for greatness” and “capable of anything, a natural leader, a natural Muslim, a natural chief.”⁶⁶ In other words: Samad “places all of his paternal pride in Magid,” because he is convinced that “his forefather Mangal Pande was refused his rightful heroic status in Bengalese history,” as Pamela St. Clair describes it in her article ‘Digging for roots.’⁶⁷ Samad wants Magid to become the hero that his great-grandfather never was.

Millat, Samad’s second son, is the one of whom Samad always thought as a “good-for-nothing”⁶⁸ and he has clear thoughts about him:

“he is the second son, late like a bus, late like cheap postage, the slowcoach, the catch-up-kid, losing that first race down the birth canal, and now simply a follower by genetic predisposition, by the intricate design of Allah, the loser of two vital minutes that he would never make up, not in those all-seeing parabolic mirrors, not in those glassy globes of the godhead, not *in his father’s eyes*.”⁶⁹

All in all, however hard a parent tries to treat his children the same, when someone like Samad thinks this way about his children, he can try whatever he wants, but will never be able to treat his twins in the same manner. According to the narrator “what his father said about him did not concern Millat all that much: he knew himself to be no follower, no chief, no wanker, no sell-out, no scrub, no fuckwit – no matter what his father said.”⁷⁰ However, Millat does develop a bitter attitude towards his father. He does not take him seriously and does not

have the just amount of respect for him: “Here was what Millat really learnt about fathers. Godfathers, blood-brothers, pacinodeniros, men in black who looked good, who talked fast, who never waited a (mutherfuckin’) table, who had two, fully functioning, gun-toting hands.”⁷¹ When Millat is around the age of twelve, something starts which Samad calls *The Trouble with Millat*.⁷² Millat goes looking on the street for things that he misses. He starts getting bolder, starts drinking, smoking and having sex when he is only thirteen years old and searches for trouble everywhere. After coming in contact with the guys from KEVIN, by whom he gets influenced, Millat starts getting even more rebellious and stays away from home for several weeks, coming back with money that is not his. He is more or less influenced by his friends from KEVIN because as the narrator already puts it: “Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali; he lived for the in between, he lived up to his middle name, *Zulfikar*, the clashing of two swords.”⁷³ Millat just wants to belong somewhere, and it does not matter to him that he turns into an Islamic fundamentalist, like the rest of the ‘brothers’ at KEVIN.

When it comes to Magid, instead of what Samad hopes, his first son does not identify himself with other Muslims, and the process that already begun when he was a little boy continues in Bangladesh. He comes in contact with intellectuals, and identifies with them, developing himself as an intellectual young man who does not possess any religious feelings, but approaches matters in a rational way. It is hard to say what would have happened when Magid would have been the one that stayed in England, and Millat was sent to Bangladesh. However, from the beginning on they have been two totally different personalities. In puberty they also developed very divergent ideas, and being physically so far from each other, it is a logical thing that they drastically grow apart and do not feel connected to each other anymore. It is certainly true that because both brothers come in contact with like-minded people, they are strengthened in their principles. These differences in personalities between siblings and

twins are explained in an article that Robert Plomin and Denise Daniels wrote, and which was published in the journal *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. They reason that environment is the most important reason why children from the same family have such different personalities, rather than heredity. This also goes for twins: because identical twins, like Millat and Magid, share the same genes, the differences between them can only be explained by nongenetic factors which are not shared.⁷⁴

3.1.2 Joshua Chalfen

Joshua Chalfen is influenced by the people at his school, but especially by his parents, however not in the way they would have wanted. The way he is raised, and the fact that he is being bullied at school, play an important role in how Joshua ends up as an animal rights activist, which is contrary to what his father believes in. Joshua's parents are very competitive, and aim to appear as a perfect little family. Everything seems to go right at the Chalfen house:

“Every Chalfen proclaimed themselves mentally healthy and emotionally stable. The children had their oedipal complexes early and in the right order, they were all fiercely heterosexual, they adored their mother and admired their father, and, unusually, this feeling only increased as they reached adolescence.”⁷⁵

In their own opinion they do not need other people, so they have no friends. The Chalfens even made their last name nouns, verbs and adjectives: “He’s Chalfening again” or “We need to be a bit more Chalfenist about this.”⁷⁶ Especially Joyce wants to feel indispensable. The narrator ironically goes on about perfection, telling that Joyce almost resents her family to be perfect, because it is so boring. When Irie and Millat walked into her life, the fun starts for

Joyce. Of course, this continuous strive for perfection, to stay perfect, also means pressure on the Chalfen children.

When Joshua comes in contact with Millat and Irie when he takes the blame for the marijuana consumption, he slowly changes, he looks up to them:

“in the past two days, Joshua had gained more respect, been patted on the back by more people, and generally lorded it around more than he ever had in his life. (...) He had a full-blown crush on both of them. There was something compelling about them. (...) He liked being connected with them, however tenuously. He had been plucked by the two of them out of nerddom, accidentally whisked from obscurity into the school spotlight.”⁷⁷

Joshua does not feel understood by his parents. They do not really listen to him. Joyce is more busy being proud of her children and bragging about them, than really interest herself for them. This she proves by constantly uttering statements about her youngest son Oscar, then asks him for confirmation, whereupon he denies everything. Joyce often talks and thinks for her sons, but does not let them express themselves. After Joshua's father becomes penpals with Magid, Joshua starts estranging from his father. Marcus' hope goes out to Magid, who is more 'Chalfenist' than his own son. Of course, Joshua feels his father is more or less disappointed in him, and since his mother is more busy 'saving' other children and forgets about her own, he goes his own way. Joshua joins FATE and travels with them for months. Whereas Joyce Chalfen blames the parents of Irie, Millat and Magid and their way of upbringing for the rebellious behaviour of their children, with her own son she puts in on “he's just acting up against his father and it will pass.”⁷⁸ The reasons for Joshua to join FATE were initially the fact that he did not like his parents, that he was in love with Joely, who runs the organisation, and the fact that he realises the “largest community of earth, the animal kingdom, were oppressed, imprisoned and murdered on a daily basis with the full knowledge

and support of every government in the world.”⁷⁹ But in the end it all becomes more serious when Joshua and his friends of FATE plot an attack on the project of Marcus, and he realises he is actually betraying his father. However, he also realises that he believes in exact opposite things than his father, and this is just something that he needs to do.

3.2 On Beauty

Whereas in *White Teeth* the characters mostly differ in ethnicity and origin, the differences in *On Beauty* are found in the sort of milieu the personages grew up in. In this part I will primarily focus on the characters of Levi and Carl, because they are perfect counterparts: Levi grows up in a prosperous environment but longs for a life on the street, while Carl comes from a poorer milieu and does his best to fit in the university lifestyle.

3.2.1 Carl Thomas

Carl is a smart young man, but he lives alone with his mother in a less fortunate neighbourhood of Boston and does not have the same opportunities as the Belsey children. He is desperate to learn new things when he takes up poetry classes at the university, but Carl struggles against prejudices. Already in the beginning of *On Beauty* he is sent away by Howard when he comes at the door for their party. Howard is plain rude to Carl, saying that Levi was not meant to invite his friends to the “private party.”⁸⁰ Being rude to Carl, probably because of the street image Carl has, Howard comes across as arrogant and patronising. Zora also does not trust Carl totally. After they run into each other at the pool, Carl accidentally took Zora’s goggles, so Zora jokingly asks him later if he just goes to the pool to steal other people’s things, since something similar happened at the concert where Carl met the Belseys

for the first time. Carl does not answer that question in a satisfying way for Zora: “‘Oh, shit –‘ He laughed loudly, falsely, Zora thought. She pushed her wallet deep into her tote bag and discreetly zipped it up.”⁸¹ This also shows that Zora and Carl come from two different worlds. Zora does not trust him because of his poorer background, and Carl does not totally understand how Zora’s world looks like. University and studying are two things which are far off for him: Zora and he “were approaching the main campus building. He seemed to want to slow her down, to put off the moment when she passed through the gate and out of his world.”⁸² He is not an intellectual person as Zora or her father, he is not good at talking and discussing, but he does write his sorrows away and then raps it. Carl is a genius in his own field. A classmate of Zora draws an unusual comparison when they see him perform at the Bus Stop, a café where artists can show their talent: “He’s like Keats with a knapsack.”⁸³ Not everyone who performs there gets the audience’s full attention, but Carl does. Everyone finds Carl so good, including Claire Malcolm, the poetry professor, that she invites him to her poetry class, while he is not even a student at Wellington. Carl feels comfortable in Claire’s classes, since it has been long ago that he felt like that: “Claire had that special teacher thing he hadn’t felt since he was a really small boy, back in the days before his teachers started worrying that he was going to mug them or rape them: *she wanted him to do well.*”⁸⁴ One session he delivers a sonnet, which strikes his classmates, since they find it really hard to write a good one. Carl does not understand the fuss, but on the other hand “felt a sensation he’d never experienced in a classroom before: pride.”⁸⁵ However, also in the classroom Carl fights against prejudices, he’s not taken seriously: Claire Malcolm sends Zora to a faculty meeting to lobby for Carl, to let him take the poetry classes. Claire speaks really demeaning about Carl: “‘what I’d *really* like to do is send Carl himself, but you know ...’ said Claire, sighing. ‘Depressing as it is, the truth is these people won’t respond to an appeal to their consciences in any language other than Wellington language.’”⁸⁶ When Claire thinks of Carl,

she is “thinking of someone who doesn’t have a voice and who needs someone like [Zora], who has a very powerful voice, to speak for him.” To keep him in the university, a job is created for him: “Chief Librarian of the African-American Music Library.”⁸⁷ Carl gets paid to buy new records for the archive and organise the covers of older ones. Carl is a very diligent employee, he comes in five days instead of the three days he is supposed to work and he constantly has new ideas on how to improve the archive. However, his boss does not even remember him when he runs into him, and is not very interested in his ideas. Carl’s colleague Elisha tells him that his job is a job “that you have to make something of for *yourself*.”⁸⁸ She brings him back to earth:

“‘It’s all very well walking through those gates and sitting in the lunchroom and pretending that you’re a Wellingtonian or whatever – ‘ (...) ‘But people like you and me,’ continued Elisha severely, ‘we’re not really a part of his community, are we? I mean, no one’s gonna help us feel that way. So if you want this job to be something special, you got to *make* it something special. No one’s gonna do it for you, that’s the truth.’”⁸⁹

Carl is determined to do the extra work anyway, for it was the first time in his life that he found something he was truly interested in, and he really wanted to do the work, no matter if he was getting extra paid for it or not. Zora lobbies for Carl to let him stay in Claire Malcolm’s poetry class, but she comes by him so often, that Carl gets tired of her and he does not even bother if he stays in or not. It is obvious that Zora has a crush on Carl, but Carl himself does not know, so when Zora finds out Carl has been making out with Victoria, it comes to an agreement, in which it becomes clear that Zora expected some sort of payback for all the trouble she made for Carl. This turns into a huge fight between on one side Zora and Jerome, and on the other Carl and Victoria, in which the Belsey kids find out about their father’s affair with Victoria, and Carl blames them not to be black, because they find

themselves too good for their own people. The next morning Monty Kipps discovers a painting of him was stolen that hung on the university, and Carl is the main suspect. The reasons why are because he is from the street and he has no qualifications and references. What the team at the university does not know yet, is that Levi was actually the one who did it.

3.2.2 Levi Belsey

Levi grows up in an academically successful and prosperous family, but he does not want to be identified with his parents, so he chooses to pretend to come from the street. His life is contrary to that of Carl, who comes from the street, but does his best to achieve something. Levi is already in the beginning of the novel interested in the street culture. He dresses a certain way, with his pants almost on his ankles, and speaks a certain language, which differs from the language his father for example speaks.

His boss thinks Levi is acting “like a nigger”⁹⁰ which Levi gets told when he is in an argument with him. After being fired, Levi almost immediately comes in contact with a group of Haitian immigrants. After that, he starts acting even more extreme. He skips school in order to hang with his friends and sell things, because the Haitians are street vendors. Levi looks up to these people, especially against Felix, the ‘leader’ of the group: “Felix was blacker than any black man Levi ever met in his life. His skin was like slate. Levi had this idea that he would never say out loud and that he knew didn’t make sense, but anyway he had this idea that Felix was like the *essence* of blackness in some way.”⁹¹ Levi does not identify with his parents because he does not find them black enough. He finds even his mother acts too white, because Kiki has a Haitian housekeeper whom she pays less than minimum wage, while many black people in Haiti do not have money and people elsewhere are “living off these people.”

Levi tells his mother: “We sucking their blood – we’re like vampires. *You* OK, married to your white man in the land of plenty – *you* OK. *You* doing fine. You’re living off these people, man!”⁹² With Felix and the other guys he feels comfortable, he almost wished he was born in Haiti as well, and Levi is ashamed to come from the well-doing neighbourhood of Wellington. Levi is all about being ‘street’. He makes up a new name for his fellow vendor, because Choo is more ‘street’ than Chouchou, also he pretends to have “lived on these streets all [his] life,”⁹³ so watching out for the cops is “like second nature” to him and Choo will learn that “*street* sense” as well so he “can *smell* a cop eight blocks away”, because “that’s *street*.”

Levi almost lives an artificial life, pretending to be something he is not. He desperately tries to be someone he will never be. For him it is almost fantasy, but for his friends this life is reality:

“Even if the other guys didn’t fully understand Levi’s enthusiasm for what they did, they always smiled and played along, and they had learned a few of the artificial words that Levi liked to apply to their real-life situation. *Hustler, Playa, Gangsta, Pimp*. The reflection of themselves in Levi’s eyes was, after all, a more than welcome replacement for their own realities. Who wouldn’t rather be a gangsta than a street-hawker? Who wouldn’t rather hustle than sell? Who would choose their own lonely, dank rooms over this Technicolor video, this outdoor community that Levi insisted they were all a part of?”⁹⁴

Levi pretends to know it all, but several times he is put in place by Choo, for example when he calls two ladies who buy a fake Prada bag dumb, because the production costs are only five dollars, while Levi himself wears shoes that cost hundred and twenty dollars, which are made for fifteen dollars. Also, Levi almost gives away his background when he asks Choo which department of Wellington college the two people work that Choo knows. “Choo stopped

organizing the money in his fanny pack and looked at Levi curiously. ‘They’re cleaners,’ he said.”⁹⁵ For Choo it is obvious that the people he knows do not have a high function, unlike for Levi.

Besides working with the street vendors, Levi also gets along in their political campaigns against the exploitation of Haitians. He helps his friends by handing out leaflets and by doing several other chores. The ‘highlight’ of this all is when Levi steals the painting that belongs to the Kippses and that Carlene Kipps wanted Kiki to have after she died. The reason why Levi did this, is because Monty Kipps is not a well-liked person in the Haitian community. He is seen as a liar and a thief because he “got all these paintings by lying to poor people and buying them for a few dollars and now they be worth all his money and it ain’t *his* money”⁹⁶ and as a sort of revenge, the Haitians want to take away the painting for in their eyes they only take what is theirs.

It is interesting to see that Levi grew up in a prosperous environment and longs for a street lifestyle, and Carl comes from a less fortunate background, and tries to fit in a academic environment. Levi has the opportunities to come further in life, to study for example, but he does not, while Carl does not have these opportunities, but grabs the chances when they are reached to him. The fact that Levi does not take the chances which are available to him, finds its origin in the atmosphere at home. In the first place, Levi does not identify with his parents, he does not feel the need to develop himself further like his father and Zora did. Secondly, he flees the house because he finds himself at home between two fighting parents who have marital problems. Levi sees this as a negative environment where he experiences negative emotions, so he escapes the house and finds new and exciting places to hang around and meet new people. A study that was published in 1999 in the psychology journal ‘Environment and Behavior’ supports this behaviour. This study explores the relations between emotions and

environment and proves that boys who have ‘high levels of negative emotion’, are not satisfied with the environment they are in. These boys were also likely to visit new places, which was contrary to what the researchers thought. To the researchers it became clear that emotions and place preferences had a direct relation to each other. The boys with higher levels of negative emotions liked their environment less than their happier peers. The study also shows that the boys with more negative symptoms actually visited more new places than their happier fellows, which suggests that these distressed boys actively searched for a stimulating place or activity.⁹⁷

3.3 Conclusion

In chapter three I tried to answer the question: “What is the effect of a child’s environment on their ideas, ideals and values?” I discovered that the environment in which a child grows up can have great influence on someone’s general attitude towards life.

In *White Teeth* Millat and Magid are an interesting example to look at, since they are twins and lived practically the same life until they were nine years old. However, in Bangladesh Magid comes in contact with like-minded people and lives a completely different life. When he comes back, it becomes clear that he and Millat have grown up to be two extremely different adolescents. In the first part of their life the twins were mainly influenced by their parents, since Samad and Alsana set the wrong example when it comes to communication. Also, Samad was a seemingly involved father, but had ulterior motives, being in love with his sons teacher. Besides that, he makes a distinction between his sons: Magid is his favourite. In Samad’s eyes, he raises his boys in the right way, but the effect is not so positive. In the end, both of his sons have not become what Samad had envisioned. Magid develops himself in Bangladesh as a non-believing, rational intellectual, while Millat

stays in England and turns out to be a Islamic fundamentalist. They both disappoint Samad, but that is not a surprise, because he had unreal expectations. Samad's pushing had a rather counterproductive effect: both of his sons become persons he did not want them to be. Whereas in the first part of their youth their parents are most important in how they grow up, in the second part Magid and Millat are mainly influenced by the people they come in contact with. Millat is strengthened in his principles by dealing with fundamentalists, and Magid because he meets other intellectuals. The fact that Millat and Magid are in between two cultures does not help them to determine where they belong. It is reasonable to assume that for themselves they want to make a clear choice. That Millat and Magid differ so much in their ideas about the world, originates in their living circumstances, which is also supported by research. The differences between the personalities of identical twins are only due to their environment and not heredity, since they share the same genes.⁹⁸

The differences between the characters in *On Beauty* lie primarily in the milieu they grow up in, contrary to the differences in origin in *White Teeth*. Levi grows up in a well-doing, intellectual family that lives in a fair neighbourhood, while his friend Carl always lived in the backstreets of Boston with his mother. Carl did not have the opportunities Levi did have. Contrary to Levi, Carl does his best to make something of his life. He grabs the chances that are reached to him, such as the poetry classes and the job at the university which were offered to him. Levi pretends to be a street guy, which is something he is not. He regularly plays truant and he does not identify with his parents: his father is white, and he also thinks his mother acts too white. This is why Levi looks up to the leader of his new group of friends: Felix, who is more blacker than any man Levi ever met.

The way the children are raised, and the environment they live in, has great influence on them. Levi finds himself in a negative environment, so he escapes the house, which is a behaviour pattern that is supported by a study among boys with a high level of negative

emotions. These boys do not think highly of their environment and are more likely to visit new places.⁹⁹ Levi has got all the chances to make something of his life, but precisely because he has them, he is not motivated to do something with them. Besides that, Levi is arrogant: he thinks he knows it all, while he never experienced anything bad in his life. Carl on the other hand has got nothing, and is prepared to work for his future, because he knows what it is to grow up with no money. Carl is determined to make something of his life, and his mother is proud of him because he works at a university. The fact that he works at the university without any references or education makes the academics prejudiced. Carl is from the street, therefore different, so he is the prime suspect when a painting is stolen.

The idea of multiculturalism also plays a role in the way the children grow up. Carl is black and the Belseys are of mixed race, so they have the same skin colour, but nonetheless Carl has to fight against prejudices that not only the Belseys, but also academics at the university, have. The consequence of this is that Carl is more eager to prove that he is trustworthy and smart. Vice versa Carl finds the Belseys are not black enough, because they find themselves to be too good for their own people. Carl makes a distinction between people of mixed race and black people. For him, but also for the Belseys for that matter, this small detail in origin makes a great difference.

Chapter 4: Paul Gilroy's Theory

This chapter revolves around Paul Gilroy and his theory about the multicultural society. I will explain what his theory comprehends, in order to compare the way he thinks about the multicultural society and the way Zadie Smith describes this society in two of her novels in the final conclusion.

Paul Gilroy is a leading figure in international cultural studies. Racism, nationalism and ethnicity are the topics he is best known for, as well as for his unusual approach to the history of the African diaspora into the Western world. He is a multi-disciplinary scholar and besides cultural history and social science, his interests also go out to literature, art and music, and he is known as a path-breaking academic.¹⁰⁰ In 2004 a new book of him was published, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (published elsewhere as *Postcolonial Melancholia*). In a way, this book is a sequel to one of Gilroy's previous books in which he studies the politics of race and nation: *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. The main idea in *After Empire* is that Britain suffers from a melancholic mood which finds its roots in the imperial past of the country. To overcome this mood, Britain has to look closely at itself and maybe then the past can function as a guide for the multicultural future. Andy Beckett describes Paul Gilroy's opinion in a concise manner in his review of the book: "multiculturalism is a description of reality, not a liberal dream or conspiracy."¹⁰¹

Paul Gilroy wanted to write *After Empire* because he wanted to shed some light on several controversies and to make the leaders of Britain understand something of the rich history of the country and the world of which they did not know enough. To Gilroy, the book represents the growing of his ambivalent love of England and it celebrates "the ordinary multiculturalism that distinguishes us and orients our hopes for a better country."¹⁰² *After*

Empire looks at the situation in which multiculturalism is under attack and defends it against the complaint that it has failed. Paul Gilroy is not negative about the multicultural society, but he has problems with the idea of a ready-mixed multiculturalism. However, he defends the utopia of thinking beyond race in an unorthodox but passionate manner. In the preface, Gilroy introduces some concepts which are important to his arguments. Only one of them is important here in explaining his theory, which is “conviviality.” With this term he refers to the processes of cohabitation and interaction which made multiculturalism an ordinary characteristic of social life in Britain’s and postcolonial cities elsewhere. Paul Gilroy hopes that the loss of interest for multiculturalism is compensated with an interest in the workings of conviviality.

After Empire is very important in understanding the contemporary political climate in Britain. In the preface of his book, Paul Gilroy goes into the situation that Britain finds itself in at the beginning of the 21st century. *After Empire* was written in the period after the attacks on 11 September 2001, when Iraq was invaded by the English and Americans, and people in Europe and the United States became anxious about Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. Several repetitive topics, such as invasions, wars and the loss of identity, have caused a melancholic mood among British people. Not only does this mood find its roots in the near past, but also in the country’s imperial past. The relationship with the past has to be restored and there is hope that the forgotten colonial history in the end would become useful as a guide to the multicultural future.

In an article Dennis Dworkin has written, called “Paul Gilroy and the Cultural Politics of Decline,” he discusses *After Empire* in the light of earlier work of Paul Gilroy. According to him, Paul Gilroy uses in this book the same sort of arguments he has been making since he

was only a graduate student in the late 1970s. Gilroy argued at that time that British racism in the late twentieth century was founded on discussions about cultural difference, which rejected black people as outsiders. In *After Empire* Paul Gilroy argues that Britain suffers from “an anxious, melancholic mood.”¹⁰³ postcolonial melancholia. To overcome this state, he suggests “political soul-searching”¹⁰⁴ by which he means a historical analysis of the British empire, and all the horror acts committed in the name of the British empire and the racial hierarchies that remained. Gilroy finds it very important not to forget Britain’s imperial past. The confrontation with the past is very important in overcoming the effects of the melancholic mood of the country. According to Dennis Dworkin, Paul Gilroy’s analysis of present-day Britain should be seen as part of the more general topic of British decline, caused by the loss of empire, migrations after the Second World War, an unstable world role and economic decline amongst other things. As a result, questions about Englishness and Britishness are asked and tried to be answered by journalists, political writers and all sorts of commentators. However, such discussions also suggest renovation and new identities, and Paul Gilroy is a very important writer in this process of renewal.

According to Dennis Dworkin, *After Empire* focuses on Britain in a global context: at some points things that are said about Britain, could also refer to North America or Western Europe. An important part of Gilroy’s book is the unique handling of global challenges by Britain. Britain finds it difficult to deal with discussions about decline and the preoccupation with the defining of Englishness/Britishness after the increase of European integration, asylum seekers, immigration and British Muslims. Dennis Dworkin finds one of the most important statements that Paul Gilroy makes in his analysis of contemporary Britain, that the British discomfort finds its roots in postcolonial melancholia. Inspired by the work of two psychoanalysts from Germany, who stated something similar about their home country, Gilroy argues that the response of Britain after the Second World War “to imperial decline

was a collective loss of memory that manifested itself as an identity crisis and a neurotic preoccupation with heritage.”¹⁰⁵ The fact that the Second World War is romanticised, because the country was racially pure at that time, and immigration was kept at distance, goes hand in hand with the nostalgic desire for a society which was ethnically and racially homogeneous. This attitude preceded the multicultural idea which brought fragmentation and disorientation.

The contemporary British identity has become confused, and the word ‘Britain’ meaning very little, while the country’s image used to be extremely strong in the nineteenth century. Besides diagnosing this, Paul Gilroy also recommends the cure: “a precondition for renewal is confronting Britain’s imperial past, which, most importantly, includes grappling with the racial hierarchies that were produced, sustained, and spread by the British empire.”¹⁰⁶ Gilroy suggests that only by a historical report of the imperial experience it is possible to overcome the melancholy that haunts contemporary Britain. He advocates thinking differently about the racial hierarchies that have shaped the imperial experience. Paul Gilroy calls this ‘conviviality’: the peaceably living together with strangers, but without the emphasis on race and identity. At the end of his book he mentions Ali G, a character played by Sacha Baron Cohen. This comedian helps to playfully explore racial ambiguities and points to tensions in Britain’s multicultural society.

Paul Gilroy knows that imagining a world beyond race comes close to a utopia, but he defends it after all. He indicates the points of critique and resistance in contemporary Britain, which can be seen as steps towards freeing the country from its melancholic mood.

Conclusion

The first three chapters of this thesis have been dedicated to answering the first part of the main question: “How does Zadie Smith represent multiculturalism and its accompanying problems in *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*?” First, the way the characters deal with several aspects of life was looked at. Second, the older and the younger generation were compared in the way they deal with problems. Furthermore, the extent in which the environment has influenced the children was examined.

In the introduction, some of Zadie Smith’s views towards multiculturalism have already been revealed. Her attitude towards the multicultural society is more or less a neutral one. She is neither positive nor negative. Zadie Smith does not have problems with the practice of this kind of society, but she does have problems with the forced manner in which the concept is thought of. In her eyes, multiculturalism is just a fact of life, instead of an invented genre or idea. Her books are not a statement, but just funny novels which describe what modern life in London or Boston is like. The several characters in Zadie Smith’s novels differ greatly, not only in origin, skin colour, religion, and age, but above all in character. Smith does not like to put people in boxes and that becomes clear from her novels. Her characters are not just black and white, but also Christian, Jew, Jehovah’s Witness, Muslim, academic, street, intellectual, fundamentalist or simply average. Not one character can be pushed in a box, just because everyone is so unique, there is not one trait which is emphasised. The terms black and white become less relevant, because there are so many more things in which people differ. From her novels it becomes clear that the differences between the characters surpass multiculturalism.

The first part of the thesis showed that the friendship between Samad and Archie in *White Teeth* surpasses their cultural and ethnic differences, because the bond they have built up in the Second World War is strong enough, while Monty and Howard in *On Beauty* are

archrivals despite their similarities. Their views on their academic field are simply too different, and they do not respect each other's difference in opinion. Also, the way in which the several families raise their children differs greatly. Where the Iqbals lack in communication, the Joneses are very light-minded. Visible in both novels is also that the older generation does not always understand the younger generation. This sometimes has to do with skin colour, as is shown with Howard and his children in *On Beauty*, but that this is not always the case is seen at the Kippes, who are all of the same colour. Besides that, the older generation is also more introvert than the younger. The children all rebel in a more obvious way: they are in search for limits, boundaries, and especially themselves. Both in *White Teeth* as in *On Beauty* the children flee into the extreme. The influence of the environment is also very strong in the way the children are raised. Zadie Smith shows that no matter where a child grows up, they can go extreme in their opinions, as Magid and Millat demonstrate. They are in between cultures, and by having these extreme views, they make a clear choice for themselves where they belong. Carl and Levi in *On Beauty* show that the grass is always greener at the other side: they both want to be something which is opposite of where they come from.

If *White Teeth* and *On Beauty* show one thing, it is that families have many ways to deal with things. Families come together and fall apart, and deal with all sorts of problems in divergent ways, which is not always related to skin colour. Differences between characters are usually due to difference in character and opinions, not to ethnicity. It is true though that the troubles with children from mixed race or children born from foreign parents may be greater, because they are in between cultures. On the one hand there is the culture of the parents, and on the other hand the culture of the land they live in. This way, it is difficult for them to define where they belong.

Paul Gilroy is an expert in the field of ethnicity, race and nationalism, and the multicultural society is also a part of that. Gilroy's vision concerning multiculturalism can be called neutral as well. He is not positive towards the ready-mixed multiculturalism, planned by the leaders of Britain, but instead of simply acknowledging that the concept has failed, he defends it against this fact. Instead of a failed multicultural society, Paul Gilroy rather wants to see a convivial culture, as he himself calls it. According to him, Britain suffers from a melancholic mood, caused by the imperial past, which has provoked anxieties and problems between people with different origins. Racism is an important aspect of this melancholic condition. Contemporary politics are shaped by older colonial systems, when it was very normal to separate races. To overcome this state of melancholy, Britain has to look closely at its past, in order to learn from it and maybe then the colonial past can function as a guide to the multicultural future. Racism and nationalism should belong to the past, and the idea of conviviality picks up where multiculturalism broke down. Conviviality assumes the peaceably living next to each other of strangers, but it does not stress the subject of identity or the differences between people.

One main difference between Paul Gilroy and Zadie Smith is the line of approach. Where Paul Gilroy approaches the subject of multiculturalism naturally from a scientific point of view, Zadie Smith deals with it from a merely personal viewpoint. Paul Gilroy studies the subject of multiculturalism and race, regardless of the fact that he is of mixed race himself as well, and describes it in a scientific way, while Zadie Smith draws from the experiences she has herself in modern London: seeing all sorts of cultures living next to each other. Paul Gilroy explains everything with the colonial history of Britain in mind, while that history in the novels of Zadie Smith does not play a role of importance. Especially the here and the now

are significant in *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*, and the only part in one of the novels which can be explained by history is Samad's preoccupation with his great-grandfather.

The visions of Zadie Smith and Paul Gilroy agree on the fact that multiculturalism is a part of reality. Both are not positive towards the designed underlying thought of it, but they look at it as a fact of life. Something which also comes back in both Paul Gilroy's as Zadie Smith's work are the difficulties with identity. Paul Gilroy describes how the British people have problems with their identity: they struggle with the term 'Britishness' and are unable to answer the question what a true Brit is. In the novels of Zadie Smith this also comes up for discussion. Several characters, especially the young ones, are in search of their identity. They wonder where their limits and boundaries lie, and are in general searching for who they are.

Paul Gilroy and Zadie Smith essentially agree on the multicultural society as a reality, but the way they approach the subject differs greatly. The core of their arguments is the same though, just as people all over the world are in their core the same.

NOTES

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⁶ Eithne Farry, "Cultural forces," *Amazon.co.uk*, 2000, <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/feature/-/25895> (accessed 23 February 2011).

⁷ Nick Bentley, "Re-writing Englishness: imagining the nation in Julian Barnes's *England, England* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*," *Textual Practice* 21.3 (2007): 495.

⁸ PBS, "An interview with Zadie Smith," *Masterpiece Theatre*, 2002, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/teeth/ei_smith_int.html (accessed 23 February 2011).

⁹ "Professor Paul Gilroy," *LSE – London School of Economics*, 16 June 2010, <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/sociology/whoswho/academic/gilroy.aspx> (accessed 18 February 2011).

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¹¹ *Ibid*, 96.

¹² *Ibid*, 102.

¹³ Jonathan P.A. Sell, "Chance and Gesture in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and *The Autograph Man*: A Model for Multicultural Identity?" *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 41:3 (September 2006): 29.

¹⁴ Smith, *White Teeth*, 188-89.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 213-14.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 342.

¹⁷ Zadie Smith, *On Beauty*. (London: Penguin Group, 2006), 21.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 91.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 206.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ *Ibid*.

²⁴ Kathleen Wall, "Ethics, Knowledge, and the Need for Beauty: Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 77.2 (March 2008): 771.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 204.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 205.

²⁷ Susan Alice Fisher, "'A Glance from God': Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* and Zora Neale Hurston," *Changing English* 14.3 (December 2007): 286-87.

²⁸ Smith, *On Beauty*, 85.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 201-02.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 193.

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² *Ibid*, 195.

³³ *Ibid*, 199.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 200.

³⁵ Page, "American 'Beauty,'" 47.

³⁶ Smith, *White Teeth*, 146.

³⁷ Ibid, 134.

³⁸ Ibid, 151.

³⁹ Ibid, 288.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 301.

⁴¹ Ibid, 425.

⁴² Ibid, 297.

⁴³ Ibid, 405.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 265.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 268.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 379.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 385.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 395.

⁴⁹ Max Watman, "The Ever-Present Human Hint of Yellow," *New Criterion* 24.9 (May 2006):

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⁵⁰ Smith, *On Beauty*, 206.

⁵¹ Ibid, 10.

⁵² Ibid, 44.

⁵³ Ibid, 45.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 147.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 219.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 220.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 33.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 343.

⁵⁹ Moss, "The Politics of Everyday Hybridity," 13.

⁶⁰ Smith, *White Teeth*, 129.

⁶¹ Ibid, 147.

⁶² Ibid, 200.

⁶³ Ibid, 194.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 195.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 196.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 215-16.

⁶⁷ Pamela St. Clair, "Digging for Roots: Zadie Smith's White Teeth," *Suite101.com* 1 November 2001, http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/british_literature/83481 (accessed 10 May 2011).

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⁶⁹ Ibid, 217.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

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⁷⁶ Ibid, 314.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 302.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 435.

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⁸⁰ Smith, *On Beauty*, 105.

⁸¹ Ibid, 135.

⁸² Ibid.

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⁸⁴ Ibid, 260.

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⁸⁶ Ibid, 263.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 372.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 374.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 192.

⁹¹ Ibid, 242.

⁹² Ibid, 428.

⁹³ Ibid, 244.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 245.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 248.

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