# 3. Colonialism, Power and Resistance in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

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## Abstract:

*This essay attempts to analyze the colonial histories depicted in Zadie Smith's White Teeth by considering them alongside Michel Foucault's lectures on biopolitics. It also aims to contextualize some of the historical threads in the text in order to highlight some of the ways that power and resistance are performed in the fictional narrative. This will uncover important themes in White Teeth that help to identify how apparatuses of power and resistance function in the narrative, linking colonial history with contemporary multiculturalism.*

## Keywords:

*Colonialism; Zadie Smith; White Teeth; Biopolitics; Race; Identity; Power; Eugenics*

# Colonialism, Power and Resistance in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

## 1. Introduction

Zadie Smith's celebrated first novel, *White Teeth,* is often categorized as a postcolonial and diasporic text that portrays the peculiar lives of three families from various ethnic backgrounds. Although many scholars also acknowledge that *White Teeth* attempts to arouse a more nuanced understanding of how eugenics and genetics both operate within the same systems of state dominance and control, little scholarly discussion has taken place regarding the particular moments in colonial history that serve to contextualize the scientific themes that are explored in the text. More specifically, the brief but poignant retellings of the Kingston earthquake of 1907 (Smith, 2001, p. 34), and the Indian rebellion of 1857 in South Asia hold significant weight in the discussion of how racial hierarchies within the colonial substructure permeated throughout the industrialized British empire and its scientific and educational institutions (p. 87). Moreover, these complicated colonial stories help to connect the past with the present, acting as a bridge that highlights previous colonial indiscretions with present-day postcolonial issues that complicate race, class and identity. Smith's perspectival approach links the conditions that fostered systemic racism with what grew into the racialized educational and scientific practices of the British empire. The history of state sponsored racism in

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Britain and its colonial enterprises had an immense impact on the educational and scientific language that helped control and oppress certain bodies rather than others. Smith engages with the contemporary ethical issues surrounding genetic testing to recognize the forms of biopower that permeate through the institutions that the novel depicts. Smith highlights how these institutions work within a biopolitical frame and reemphasizes the process in which scientific truth claims are born out of state administered policies. *White Teeth*'s preoccupation with science and genetics is an attempt to remember how imperial ambitions and competitiveness with other, rival state powers, often leads to unethical, racialized scientific practices, leaving us with a historical blueprint that warns contemporary audiences of the impact and influence of state policy over science and education.

This essay seeks to examine the biopolitical concerns in the novel by illustrating how the colonial histories and institutions that serve as backdrops in Smith's work have a lasting influence over the multicultural society depicted in the text, and how the contemporary society depicted attempts to mobilize against and resist state dominance and control through direct and indirect action. To support some of this essay's theoretical work on Smith's text, I will utilize Michel Foucault's lectures on biopolitics, which hold important frameworks that help to uncover some of the concerns with power and resistance that are found in Smith's text. For Foucault, the state determines the relationship between truth and law, suggesting that truth claims are born out of the conduits, or branches of the state, to maintain dominion over its subjects. This key factor will help to recognize and understand the

difficulty in developing alternative historical narratives. According to Foucault, scientific discourse is also shaped by state policy, and state policy, therefore, becomes a significant factor in how the language of scientific research transforms the epistemological and alethiological functions within the corpus of the empire. These state policies operate from a local authoritative entity on the mainland, and spread to more geographically distant colonies where imperial interests dictate and standardize the language of science and industry abroad. Keeping Foucault's framework in consideration with Smith's text, I will analyze how the historical conditions at the turn of the twentieth-century have continued to hold dominion over certain individuals in the transition from colonial rule to present-day British multiculturalism. This will help to unpack and emphasize some of the colonial histories and geneologies that linger within *White Teeth*'s narrative development. Moreover, the deep rooted relationship between the colonizer and colonized resonates through the multicultural and diasporic experiences of the characters in the text, articulating itself as a struggle between power and resistance. I will emphasize how the state functions as the substratum of society, and its influence on the principle institutions and apparatuses that govern and organize its citizens and non-citizens is far reaching. This essay will ultimately argue that *White Teeth* works to address and complicate how resistance is almost always provoked by power, and remains, much like power, something that cannot be exercised by the apparatuses and institutions but that is instead an irruptive force that reveals itself through the apparatuses and institutions of a disciplinary society. *White Teeth* emphasizes the

manner in which multiculturalism functions as a conduit for resistance, and how the decolonization process is an apparatus of resistance, which ultimately manifest in the counter-institutional practices of the characters.

## 2. Colonial Histories: the Kingston Earthquake and the Indian Rebellion

As Captain Charlie Durham witnesses his beloved Queen Victoria's statue ominously "turning…her back to the people" of Kingston during the earthquake of 1907, he cannot "help but feel a certain wounded pride" (p. 362). His realization that it is the American's and not the British Empire that have the aid available to supply the island calls attention not to the empire's incapableness of acquiring the resources for aid—as the British Empire had remained one of the more profitable empires in the global trade market (Bearce, McDonald, & Rowe, 2002, p. 552-553)—but instead suggests a waning interest in the region by the British that started when the economy surrounding the "plantations began to decline as a result of fluctuating sugar prices and fortunes" in lieu of globalization (Wahab, 2007, p. 285). Simultaneously, Britain's arms race with continental Europe's newest empire, Germany, began much earlier than the earthquake of 1907 in Kingston and highlights Britain's increased militarization in the period (Bearce et al., 2002, p. 552). Britain's dedication to the growing global trade market significantly impeded their ability to compete with the German military in a land war. This subsequently called for a formation of counter strategies necessary to refashion the British

Empire into having the capabilities to quell Kaiser Wilhelm's continental ambitions (p. 552). Evidence of this presents itself in *White Teeth* when Smith emphasizes Britain's expertise in "relinquishing one responsibility and taking up another" (Smith, 2001, p. 358). Foucault would argue that this manner of state behaviour we come to witness in the text ensures the state's "forces are such that it will never be in an inferior position with respect to the set of other countries" (2008, p. 6). The lack of aid marked for Kingston highlights the state's lack of desire to participate in the humanitarian effort and represents a moment where biopolitics functions through a policy of inaction.

Coincidentally, the year of 1907 also marked the centennial anniversary of the British Empire's abolishment of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807 (Ryden, 2001, p, 347). The movement to abolish the slave trade, and the ownership of slaves, which took place later in 1833 (Hall, 2014, p. 26), was originally thought to be a moment in British history where abolitionist pressure overcame great parliamentary odds to liberate the Blacks. However, as David Beck Ryden (2001) argues: "The cessation of the British slave trade had little to do with the evangelical abolitionist movement in Britain and everything to do with the faltering profitability and political influence of West Indian sugar producers" (p. 350). I touch on Ryden's argument because the legacy of slavery in the eyes of slave owners and planters did *not* change the supremacist beliefs deeply embedded in colonial culture that Captain Charlie Durham and his superior Sir James Swettenham portray in *White Teeth*. Catherine Hall (2014) rightly states that "once slavery no longer fixed the African as inferior

other legitimations for his/her subordination had to be found" (p. 26). Swettenham dismisses Durham's request to bring Ambrosia Bowden on a ship back to England on the grounds that "there were no spaces on his boats for black whores or livestock" (Smith, 2001, p. 363). Swettenham still commodifies and dehumanizes the Black body, which represents the systemic condition where "the slave-owners and their descendants were active agents in the re-making of race as a hierarchical category" (Hall, 2014, p. 26). Colonial economic interests ultimately created the conditions for British subjects to "assert the veracity of their characterizations of racial difference" (p. 26). Both men express a hierarchical view of race and emphasize some of the ways in which the attitudes born out of slavery are very much present in the language of British mercantile economics.

Britain's presence in the Caribbean sugar economy remains in the backdrop of *White Teeth,* albeit for a brief reference to a mostly forgotten book on the shelf of Hortense Bowden's dusty library titled "*In Sugar-cane Land"* by the unknown "Eden Phillpotts" (Smith, 2001, p. 400). However, the circumstances of colonialism and industrialization in the region is highlighted through the historical conditions that brought families like the Bowden's to North London. These conditions reemphasized certain issues amongst the upper classes that attempted to control and organize Blacks through wage labour in industrial factories. As Raphael Dalleo (2008) suggests, the relocation of the Bowden's, at the hands of the wealthy industrialist, Sir Edmund, much like "hundreds of Jamaicans…to North London," was in "the hopes that proximity with hardworking Brits will instil in the Jamaicans a

good English work ethic" (p. 98). Sir Edmund's motivations are bolstered by the conditions of a free market economy and the manner in which the British empire altered the way they controlled wage labour. Foucault's lectures focus on two "seizures of power" over the body in the modern period (Foucault, & Ewald, 2003, p. 243). The first was of the disciplinary power that controlled bodies. However, the second, relevant to this discussion, took place at the end of the eighteenth century (p. 243). This alternative mode of population control functioned as a necessity for the state to manufacture goods for global trade during the continued industrialization of the empire. These large scale operations produced specific technological advancements that allowed for individual bodies to be kept under "surveillance, trained, used, and if need be, punished" (p. 242). Smith's depiction of the Jamaican diaspora highlights the British empire's own transition towards a new "regime of truth" that focused on "governing with sufficient intensity, detail, and attention to detail so as to bring the state to the point fixed…to bring it to maximum strength" (Foucault, 2008, p. 19). Smith depicts Sir Edmund as a wealthy individual operating under industrial conditions that demand a growing workforce to maintain a competitive edge in the free market. Nevertheless, Sir Edmund becomes perplexed by "the remarkable difference between a Jamaican's devotion to his God in comparison to his devotion towards his employer" (Smith, 2001, p. 305). For Sir Edmund, the Jamaican's spirituality does not accrue capital and wield a profit.

Sir Edmund attempts to understand the Jamaican group he brought to England with an observational method that mirrors the eugenic practice of racial

categorization—which was part of the leading scientific and sociological discourse at the turn of the twentieth-century. Karl Ittmann (2003) explains that "colonial population studies sought to define and describe the nonwhite other for purposes of administrative and political power" (p. 418). Consequently, Sir Edmund stands in for what Ittmann understands as individuals "who pushed for the integration of demographic factors into colonial and international issues" and "hoped to draw attention to what they viewed as unfavourable racial trends" (p. 418). Although Sir Edmund appears to act in "goodwill," his observations describing the Jamaican workers as "uncooperative and sullen" (Smith, 2001, p. 305), gives support to the possibility that his view point is informed by the intense concentration on details that demographic discourse provides, and how this influences the epistemology and ontology of discourses around race and material differences. Moreover, the matter of eugenic population control was an underlying principle that was maintained by the state for the sole purpose of dividing and fragmenting the labour force. Because the ownership of slaves was outlawed in the colonies, there remained a new found problem of wage labour for Blacks, and how to discipline and control a sizeable workforce. As Sir Edmund dies before he returns to England to further observe the Jamaicans, his factory fails and shuts down. The Jamaicans he brought over to work alongside the British ultimately lose the resources available to them and find themselves on the fringes of British society (p. 307). Sir Edmund's social experiment is imbued with white supremacist attitudes that emphasize how state policies may

have allowed for the flourishing of eugenicist methodologies within the social and economic environment.

Smith helps to unpack the evolution of racist ideology by bridging the Bowden's family history in the Caribbean, and their migration to London, to the contemporary postcolonial society that the text centres around. This calls attention to the lineage and tradition of eugenics as a popular worldview that concurrently influenced and taught generations of individuals about racial categorization and genetic fitness during the interwar period. Smith indirectly portrays the middle-class anxieties of interwar Britain through Mr. J. P. Hamilton's lurid white supremacy in *White Teeth.* In Mr. Hamilton, we see the lineage of Swettenham's unwavering racism towards the Black body, and the supremacist attitude towards the non-white as inferior (Smith, 2001, p. 172). As Mr. Hamilton explains the reasons for his survival in the Congo, his depictions of violence on the Congolese by the British and Germans, who enlisted them for war, exposes his epistemic view of Social Darwinism (p. 172). The eugenic theory of Social Darwinism, which still remained a relevant point of discussion in some scientific circles, had a substantial influence on how populations were viewed and organized. British eugenicists were often curious as to what their German counterparts were discovering in their experimentations on sterilization (Hart, 2012, p 38-39). By 1930, British eugenicists were "lobbying for a bill to legalize voluntary sterilization for eugenic purposes" (p. 38). Although many eugenicists in Britain were quietly reserved about the topic of Nazi experimentation, scholars highlight how a sizeable contingency of scientists in

Britain found the Nazi eugenicist experiments to be of some value (38). However, the view of race and genetic fitness in the population, which lead to many scientists advocating for the sterilization of what they considered unfit individuals, greatly influenced the general concerns of the middle class (Kenny, 2004, p. 403).

In addition, Smith's fictional account of the Congo may allude to Joseph Conrad's oft-referenced novel, *Heart of Darkness*, which depicts the horrors of colonialism in the Belgian Congo at the tail end of the nineteenth century. This important moment in Smith's work indirectly addresses the way that, educational institutions, much like the scientific community, remain and have remained influenced by a predominantly racialized worldview that developed alongside eugenics and Social Darwinism. Chinua Achebe (2016) describes *Heart of Darkness* as a form of "permanent literature" that is "read and taught and constantly evaluated by serious academics" (p. 15). Conrad's text remains ambivalent towards Africans because it resists "an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters" (p. 21). This sentiment towards an educational system that is dominated by a single worldview is also echoed in *White Teeth* when the unnamed narrator proclaims that "a little English education can be a dangerous thing" (Smith, 2001, p. 356). Smith's portrayal of Mr. Hamilton engages with Achebe's critical view of Conrad's work. Through Mr. Hamilton, Smith communicates how racialized ideologies remain embedded in the language of everyday speech. Mr. Hamilton's overt racism reveals a connection to Conrad's canonized text because of his use of light and dark imagery to describe Black bodies

in the Congolese jungles. As he describes Blacks in the Congo to be "dark as buggery" (p. 172), he eerily echoes Conrad's Charles Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow's othering of Blackness in Conrad's text has helped to crystallize what critic Paul Gilroy (2005) calls a "Manichaean fantasy in which bodies are ordered and predictable units that obey the rules of a deep cultural biology" (p. 6).

*White Teeth's* distrust of British education is also reinforced by the general agreement that middle-class society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries professionalized themselves as educators, and "rapidly rose to dominant positions in the universities, public schools, science and literature" (MacKenzie, 1976, p. 506). This class of British society motioned towards the secularization and modernization of the education system in Britain and were proponents of "eugenic ideas" that were "put forward as a legitimation of the social position of the professional middle class, and as an argument for its enhancement" (p. 501). The language of eugenic scientific practice was steeped in racial categorization and hierarchies. This new language of the empire helped mobilize people en masse, and allowed for the organization and assembly of its citizens by genetic fitness. Moreover, the eugenic language administered by the empire was an undertaking to promote a language of classification and standardization within the scientific community to unify and control the market and the goods that were industrially and chemically manufactured for global circulation. David Roth Singerman (2015) argues that "the successful operation of scientific instruments is a local and contingent process, and the ability to propagate standards anywhere always

depends on the ability to recreate particular techniques and material cultures" (p. 783). The language that was administered by the empire in order to control the development and manufacturing of products like sugarcane, for example, also serves as a way to indirectly control distant locations of colonies through a standardization of language and practice (p. 783). The eugenic language that was embraced and taught by the middle class in Britain, and the language of scientific production all developed out of state interest to seize power under a new regime of truth that, unlike sovereign power, avoids violence through the use of prescriptive language as a form of disciplinary action. Under these historical conditions, the prescriptive language embedded itself into the very fabric of education and scientific practice that Smith recognizes in the genetic language presented by the fictional geneticist, Marcus Chalfen, and mirrors what can be seen in today's scientific research and practice. Undoubtedly, these maneuvers influenced a legacy, through the language of colonial racism and bridges characters like Swettenham and Mr. Hamilton together.

Prescriptive language ultimately reinforced racialized hierarchies within the colonial empire and helped to nurture narratives that supported the unequal relationship between the colonizer and colonized. Samad Iqbal's obsession with the forgotten details of the 1857 rebellion in South Asia can be interpreted as an attempt to resist these oppressive hierarchies that were established during British colonial rule in that region (Smith, 2001, p. 251). Smith's text emphasizes its own concerns regarding the manner in which historical narratives are implemented by

the state as a form of biopolitical suppression, and has had a lasting impact on contemporary multicultural experiences. *White Teeth* asks us to consider how the primary historical narratives that are recognized as truth help to shape and influence more contemporary views on race and class. Samad's attempt to envision a history where the colonized can resist the colonizer does not fit within the historical narrative that is necessary for biopolitical action to take place. Mangal Pande's absence in colonial history emphasizes how a subaltern revolt cannot sustain its place within the colonial imaginary. These forms of historical discourses that dismiss the presence of any revolt or dissent, according to Foucault, often take place because "history is an intensifier of power" (Foucault, & Ewald, 2003, p. 66). The colonial hierarchies we see in *White Teeth* create lasting racial discourses that influence the diasporic experiences of immigrants, often molding a society into one that exists through acts of inclusion and exclusion.

Samad's continuous fight for the acknowledgment of Mangal Pande's role in history is often derided or ignored within the social environments he comes in contact with throughout the novel. This includes the patrons he routinely debates with at O'Connell's Pool Hall, and the squad of British officers he was deployed with during World War II, who would merely stare at him with "blank pancake English faces," as Samad recalled his great-grandfather (Smith, 2001, p. 87). In fact, the lack of recognition for Mangel Pande that Samad recurrently encounters throughout *White Teeth* mirrors what Millat and Magid observe in Mr. Hamilton, as Mr. Hamilton rejects the idea that Pakistani soldiers were on equal ground with their


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British counterparts (p. 172). These indirect forms of ignorance and suppression in the text attempt to highlight how the subaltern position is, as Frantz Fanon (1997) describes, a subaltern history that is non-existent within the eyes of the colonizer, and confirms the notion that "the settler makes history" (144). Moreover, Fanon emphasizes how colonialism attempts to shape history by shaping the colonized mind:

> *"Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By that kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (p. 94).*

Fanon's position, when considered alongside Samad's rejection of the accepted version of events in 1857 (detailed by a historian named Fitchett), highlights how the retelling of history becomes a politicized act and a construct that aims to dominate and control the way we remember the past. While Fitchett's version of the event details Pande's act as a drunken revolt full of "religious fanaticism" (Smith, 2001, p. 254), Samad argues against this reading of history by offering an alternative narrative by an unknown historian named A. S. Misra that presents a version of history that confirms Pande's heroism (p. 256-257). Rajnu, Samad's Cambridge educated nephew, considers that this little known academic text by Misra is an "inferior, insignificant, forgotten piece of scholarship" (p. 258). However, Smith complicates our reading of Rajnu's academic opinion, as it dismisses alternative frames of reference, indirectly echoing Achebe's issue with Conrad's "permanent

literature". Ultimately, Samad's lone Pande supporter, A. S. Misra, appears to be no match against Archie's "pile of sceptics" that he puts forth at O'Connell's, which dispute Pande's heroism (p. 257). Although Rajnu hints that there is always some manner of "tragedy" behind any truth, we, as readers, are asked to consider historical truth to be a tragically unattainable outcome of any historical debate.

## 3. Conclusion: From the Colonial to the Contemporary

Samad's loyalty to his great-grandfather offers an important look into how resistance to dominant discourses can take place in *White Teeth*. History and language function as apparatuses of power *and* resistance. Yet, the most salient feature at work in Smith's text, and what helps bring together the disparate themes in the text, is the language of contemporary science, primarily revolving around Marcus Chalfen's genetic research, identified by Smith as having evolved from eugenicist language and practice. Smith crystallizes this argument in her text by associating Chalfen's research with Nazi eugenicist Dr. Marc-Pierre Perret, who's life was fortuitously spared with the help of a coin flip by Archie in the Second World War.[1] Mindi McMann (2012) rightly states that while "scientific discourses increasingly efface the term eugenics, particularly after World War II, there remain eugenicist ideological, scientific, and material underpinnings that has influenced a

[1] Perret's Nazi background is also complicated by the fact that Chalfen is of Jewish heritage. This particular inconsistency in *White Teeth* functions in the same vein as Mr. Hamilton's own inconsistencies as a gay man. Mr. Hamilton, who would have been persecuted under British law for being homosexual, is ironically conditioned by the the state to view the world through a strictly supremacist position.

generation of scholars and scientists" (p. 620). These underpinnings ultimately remain linked to the evolution of racial sciences that formed the basis for eugenic research. As Marcus' son, Joshua Chalfen, and his anarchist group, FATE, drive to sabotage the FutureMouse exhibit on New Year's Eve, the group reads a newspaper article that claims Marcus' exhibit stands to be "'crucially unlike the Festival of Britain in 1951 or the 1924 British Empire Exhibition because it has no political agenda'" (Smith, 2001, p. 492). Marcus attempts to distance his contemporary scientific research from other controversial and overtly political moments in the history of science. Marcus understands the need to depoliticize the event and legitimize the importance of the scientific research undertaken. Daniel Mark Stephen (2009), in his assessment of the British Empire Exhibition, suggests that the exhibition of 1924 was an attempt to reaffirm the empire's investment in the mainland and its colonies abroad (p. 106). It also was a management of public relations amongst the social classes to show the productiveness of the postwar era (p. 106). The language of both the FutureMouse exhibit and the British Empire Exhibition are paralleled in *White Teeth* to uncover the importance of swaying public opinion of scientific research. Just as the exhibition in 1924 attempted to distance itself from Social Darwinism and promote theories of "racial diffusion" (Stephen, 2009, pp. 109), the FutureMouse exhibition plans to educate the populace to recognize the mouse as a "biological site for experimentation" (Smith, 2001, p. 419). Moreover, McMann infers that "the copyright symbol" found in the

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FutureMouse name "gives the mouse a certain purchase in the public eye, affirming it as a product that has an end purpose" (p. 622). The language used by Marcus to assuage activists and protestors alike ultimately resembles eugenic discourses in the nineteenth-century and the period of slavery that began in the seventeenth century that saw the body as a commodity or site. Michele Braun (2013) rightly argues that *White Teeth* articulates our own anxieties about the mouse by portraying Marcus as someone "who can ignore the 'mouseness of the mouse,' divorcing their experiments from the social and cultural implications of those experiments" (p. 233). Marcus cannot depoliticize his exhibition because it represents one of the arms of state control. Smith satirizes Marcus' experiment and his exhibition to possibly reveal how forces of resistance can manifest, such as the anarchical group, FACT, the fanatical Islamic organization, KEVIN, and the group of Jehovah's witnesses, lead by Hortense Bowden, that plan to sabotage the conference. Foucaltian scholar Brent Pickett (1996) suggests that many scholars have incorrectly interpreted Foucault's views on power. Pickett's argument regarding power and resistance helps to illuminate the climactic ending of Smith's text. Pickett argues that power is often understood as something undeniably "ubiquitous and overwhelming that resistance becomes pointless" (p. 461). However, Pickett states that because "everything is dangerous…there are multiple opportunities for resistance" (p. 461). We see Pickett's theory manifest in Smith's novel, as the

FutureMouse exhibit is confronted by various apparatuses of resistance, reaffirming what Foucault describes as the relationship between power and resistance.

*White Teeth*'s presentation of scientific language as an apparatus of power illustrates some of the contemporary issues and discourses that influence science and policy. Jenny Reardon's (2004) Foucauldian framework argues that "statements are linguistic utterances that travel and gain authority because institutions give them material form…and find voice only if they function within the moral, political, economic, and epistemological practices of dominant social institutions" (p. 40). Reardon suggests that the relationship between race and science is paradoxical because "the biological meaninglessness of race are accompanied by claims about the *meaningfulness* of race, as it is the former that have often enabled the latter" (p. 40). *White Teeth* expresses how some of the historical conditions allowed scientific discourse and statements to become apparatuses for social institutions. Marcus declares that once he educates the masses, he plans to throw "the ethical ball into the people's court" (Smith, 2001, p. 493), however, he cannot recognize that what seems meaningless to him could be interpreted differently by others. The biological determinism of FutureMouse could be reimagined to solidify social and cultural hierarchies to ultimately reinforce systems of power.

This essay has shown a number of issues within the novel that represent institutions of power and the conduits of resistance that form what Foucault would call a constitution that is made up of power and resistance. Nevertheless, *White*

*Teeth* ends by contemplating the symbols of colonialism and their ramifications on contemporary England. A member of KEVIN, Abdul-Colin, argues: "They have no faith, the English. They believe in what men make but what men make crumbles" (Smith, 2001, p. 504). Abdul-Colin claims that the English "look to their future to forget their past," possibly hinting at the waning attitude towards nostalgia (p. 504). However, Abdul-Colin's claim also foreshadows what we have come to see as a desire for many native's in England to return to a past where British identity was coherent. This movement is defined by Paul Gilroy (2005) as Britain's growing identity crisis, where the nostalgic look back at the wonders of the empire has developed into a melancholic postcolonial sentiment (p. 90). Ultimately, these statues and relics of colonialism remain symbols of power, which still maintain their influence on many native and immigrant lives in England, suggesting that *White Teeth* attempts to leave us questioning the relevancy of symbols such as "Charles II Street, South Africa House, and a lot of stupid-looking stone men on stone horses" (Smith, 2001, p. 504). The text asks us to consider our relationship to historical narratives of colonial oppression and dominance, and to continue the questioning of the so-called truths these narratives and symbols help to reinforce.

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