

Multiculturalism in Zadie Smith

Dr. Ronald Hadrian

Assistant Professor,

Karpagam Academy of Higher Education,

Coimbatore

Email: ronaldhadrian@gmail.com

Abstract

The world is a changed place. There is always a multitude of people everywhere. Due to globalisation, and immigration people have shifted from one place to another. Multiculturalism can be acknowledged, championed, challenged or rejected, but it cannot be ignored because it describes a central feature of the world in which we live. Oddly, however, for many years it was ignored, despite decades of struggle by black Americans for full political inclusion, the confederalism adopted by several European states to accommodate linguistic and religious diversity and the multicultural policies adopted by Australia and Canada in the 1970s, to name just three examples. In the 1980s communitarian writers embraced the culture-friendly virtues of solidarity, togetherness and belonging, but ironically, while community was prized as homely and familiar, it was never spelt out which communities – cultural or otherwise – were being invoked. Only in the early 1990s did the liberal-communitarian controversy begin to transform itself into a more particular debate about how to accommodate cultural and ethnic claims within a broadly liberal political theory. Here Will Kymlicka's Liberalism, Community and Culture led the way.² By now, it is increasingly recognised that liberal constitutions are shot through with partisan ethnocultural norms.

Reference to this paper should
be made as follows:

Dr. Ronald Hadrian

*Multiculturalism in
Zadie Smith*

Notions June 2020,
Vol. XI, No. 1,
pp.7-10

Article No.02

Online available at :
<http://notions.anubooks.com/>

Introduction

Multiculturalism cannot be avoided. Whether endorsed as a policy (cultural diversity is good), it cannot be circumvented as a social fact, not so long as we are thinking about theories for the world in which we live and not a cultureless planet far away. Theories of justice, democracy and human rights are necessarily abstract since they have a more or less extensive reach and describe a reality not yet arrived. Abstraction is no bad thing. But when you argue that democracy fosters community, that social justice includes equal opportunity, or that there is a right to free speech but not against hate speech you move from the abstract to the ideal since, as a matter of fact, a community will need to take some stand on immigration, on ethnic patterning in work and education, and on offence to marginalised groups. Saying nothing has no less import than saying something when, like encountering a difficult aunt at Christmas, social circumstances demand a response. It is not necessarily wrong to suppose that cultural membership is irrelevant (at least in certain cases).

But the point is that position will need to be argued for no less than it's opposite; there is no culturally neutral baseline. In sum, then, we must recognise that our multicultural reality is pertinent for politics as soon as we start theorising about it. It is not something which, as some writers imply, we can accommodate in larger theories of democracy, freedom and social justice that are first formulated in a culture-blind way. Multiculturalism is a problem for these theories only because of assumptions and premises that made it so. Approaching multiculturalism with honesty and integrity means accepting that it is not a decorative but a permanent feature of our public social world.

One of the character is the protagonist, called Archie. He is mediocre and indecisive, with the flip of a coin he prefers to make his most important decisions. The ex-wife of Archie is Ophelia Diagilo, whom with his mediocrity he was supposed to have driven insane. He later marries Clara, a Jamaican woman with whom he has a daughter, Irie, less than half of his age. Samad Miah Iqbal is the best friend of Archie. In World War II, the two men served together and frequently visited the pub of O'Connell.

The next friend is Samad Miah Iqbal. The best friend of Archie, a middle-aged veteran of the Second World War with a crippled right hand. Born in Bangladesh, Samad met Archie when in Eastern Europe they were tankmates. He works at an Indian restaurant as a waiter, where he gets a few tips. His wife is Alsana Begum, and Magid and Millat are his twin sons. Above all, Samad wants his sons to become good, traditional Muslim Bengali men. He goes to great lengths to ensure this, even

kidnapping Magid and sending him to Bangladesh to be raised. Samad is religious and open-minded, enjoys control even though he is a steadfast believer in destiny, and fancies himself to be more mundane and intellectual than anyone else credit him.

The next character that was discussed is Clara Jones. Formerly Clara Bowden, an awkward, unpopular witness of Jehovah who spent door-to-door proselytizing her days. When she meets Ryan Topps, an equally unattractive Mod, she leaves her religion and takes up his trendy ways. Clara's top teeth are knocked out when Ryan and Clara crash into a tree on Ryan's scooter. She meets and marries Archie Jones, although she finds him unimpressive and he's more than twice her age. The daughter of Archie and Clara is Irie Ambrosia Jones. Clara wants Irie's best.

The next character is Alsana Begum. Samad Miah Iqbal's young wife, to whom she had been promised before she was born. They have Magid and Millat, twin sons. She sews clothes for an S&M shop called Domination in Soho to help pay bills. Although by nature charismatic and judgmental, she believes that marriage is best treated with silence. However, she has a volcanic temper and by injuring him, she usually wins fights with Samad.

Then there is this character called, Irie Ambrosia Jones. Daughter of Clara and Archie Jones. In Patois, her name means "Ok, cool, peaceful." Irie has been friends with Magid and Millat Iqbal since birth. After struggling with her racial and sexual identity, Irie finds answers in her grandmother, Hortense Bowden. She resolves to become a dentist and despite her best efforts to prevent it, ends up with Joshua Chalfen. Irie gives birth to a "fatherless" daughter, sired by either Magid or Millat.

Then there is Millat Zulfikar Iqbal. Son of Samad and Alsana, and Magid's twin brother. Millat is less bright and interested in pop culture than Magid is born second. Millat comes into his own as a troublemaker, pot-smoking rebel, and the object of affection of every female classmate after Magid is sent to Bangladesh. However, in favor of fundamentalist Islam, Millat eventually rejects this lifestyle. He joins and becomes KEVIN's main driving force. He tries to shoot Dr. Perret at the FutureMouse conference, but shoots Archie in the thigh instead. Millat might or might not be Irie's baby's father.

Then there is Magid Mahfooz Murshed Mubtasim Iqbal. Son of Samad and Alsana, and Millat's twin brother. Born first, Magid is precocious intellectually and insists on dressing and acting as an adult, even at a very young age. Magid resents his heritage and wants to be more "normal" and English with him and his family. In

Multiculturalism in Zadie Smith

D. Ronald Hadrian

essence, Samad kidnaps Magid and sends him to be raised in Bangladesh traditionally. To the horror of his father, Magid becomes an intellectual suit-wearing, secular, English. He joins the FutureMouse program of Marcus Chalfen when he finally returns to London. Magid is fascinated by the certainty offered by fate genetic engineering and the ability to choose the path of another creature as he was chosen for him. Magid might or may not be Irie's baby's father.

Then there is the character of Mo Hussein-Ishmael. Owner of the Cricklewood Broadway butcher shop. Mo is also the brother-in-law of Ardashir Mukhul and is proud of his pigeon-killing prowess. Mo stops the suicide of Archie by asking him to move out of his illegal parking spot. Mo joins KEVIN later, motivated by a desire to look important and vindicate the racist attacks that he has endured over the years in his shop.

All these characters are from different cultures. Then the dissertation talks about post colonial theory and it implies it for every character. The elements of Race is examined in this section. Racism in *White Teeth* appears through characters like Archie's boss, who insists he's not racist while simultaneously acknowledging that Enoch Powell may be right in his xenophobia, and who ultimately gives Archie food vouchers rather than invite him and his black wife to a company function.

Such moments reveal the tension between the liberal rhetoric of acceptance and tolerance and the reality of actually accepting difference. However, the fear of the immigrant becoming too British is not just the fear of the British; it is often the fear of the immigrant, too. So these are some of the points regarding multiculturalism in *Zadie Smith*.

Reference

1. Smith, Zadie, *White Teeth*. London: Penguin Books, 2001. Print.