

РАЗДЕЛ III. ЛИТЕРАТУРА НАРОДОВ СТРАН ЗАРУБЕЖЬЯ  
SECTION III. LITERATURE OF PEOPLES AND NATIONS OF THE WORLD

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A decentred reading of Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*:  
Voices of cross-cultural belonging

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**Abstract.** This article explores the dynamics of differentiation through the perspective of a reconceptualised representation of race, identity and cultural belonging that *Swing Time* brings into scrutiny. Relying on a decentred vision of the on-going problematic of racism, it sketches the various possible ways of re-reading our belonging to the world through the solidarities that bridge humanity into a purely shared heritage through art and dance. By targeting the commonalities in history as basic cornerstones that establish a common lineage, it tries to grasp the confluences that could reconcile the world into its shared heritage. It then strives to redefine our understanding our cultural belonging and living together from a completely different angle that takes us away of all the conflicts and violence that are shaping the world.

**Key words:** decentred; racism; time; redefinition; heritage; voices.

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Introduction

*Swing Time* opens on its prologue by exposing a page in the protagonist's life as he reflects on a specific narrative that will have a great effect on the rest of his life: "It was the last day of my humiliation." (1) This transition into a new life condition is very central in *Swing Time*. Indeed, this is corroborated by the epitaph of the novel drawn from Hausa wisdom that states that: "When the music changes, so does the dance<sup>1</sup>." These two opening sentences together give to the novel all stances as a project to review Time as it offers to bring into scrutiny our everyday experiences under different paradigms of representation. In

accordance to this, *Swing Time*'s storyline spans as a new narrative that subverts all the existing representations in order to arrive to a society that gets rid of all its clichés as it invites humanity into looking at the world with new lenses. The premises that *Swing Time*'s storyline develops through life stories built across all continents and beyond the simple cultural belonging make it possible to read the novel as a promise for harmony in the world. If we agree that the political, social and cultural backgrounds that govern the world are risk as we are now the development of racism and all its by-products it ultimately suggests that we come up with new paradigms of perceptions of this world.

<sup>1</sup> ance captures here the ultimate metaphor of change and readjustment of individual representation of the other.

## 1. WRITING TO CONFRONT A TIME OLD ISSUE

### • CONFRONTING WITH THE MULTICULTURAL ISSUE IN BRITAIN

Present world configuration determined a high sense of population mobility and immigration at large can no longer be read through the single lenses of colonial historiography but rather through the human postmodern condition that brings people from different cultural and ethnic background to build and share socio-political spaces that were once monolithic. To follow the conceptual idea about this present situation that can be traced back to Hume's idea about the awareness that should guide the writer's inquiry of any social event it is not superfluous warn that:

*"To say that any event is derived from chance, cuts shorts all further inquiry concerning it, and leaves the writer in the same state of ignorance with the rest of mankind."* (Hume, 56)

One of the most essential spearheads of contemporary literature in Britain, Zadie Smith has throughout her literary career started in 2000 revealed to the world as one of the voices that champion in addressing multicultural Britain. Writing specifically from her multifaceted roots and heritage she explores the problematic of building a consolidated multicultural world through the perspectives of possible internal mediation between the different structures of societies without unfair relationships.

After her debut novel *White Teeth* (2000), where Zadie Smith delves into the necessity to solve the 'Time Old Equation' in a world that is in permanent cultural representation turmoil, because talking about Britain, immigration and identity issues, she overtly observes that:

*"Nothing changes here; things are only retold, remembered. That's why old men love it. It's all about time. Not just its stillness but the pure, brazen amount of it. Quantity rather than Quality. This is hard to explain.*

*If only there was some equation...something like:*

*Something to rationalize, to explain, why one would keep returning, like Freud's grandson with fort-da game, to the same miserable scenario. But time is what it comes down to."* (Smith, 244)

The pivotal role of memory and the recurrent status of people's storyline present time as a core element of continuity rather than change in *White Teeth*, mainly in addressing the judgement of the other as it reduces the singularity of difference and interethnic relation into a permanent clash. Race and interethnic relationships are exposed during a school council meeting as Mrs Khilnani's analytical notes are closely checked by Mrs Hanson to ascertain if: *"It was not her imagination, that she was not being unfair or undemocratic, or worse still racist, racist in ways that were deeply ingrained and socially determining that they escaped her attention."* (Smith, 126)

The lack of trust and the suspicion of racist attitudes form the structure of relationships that are not uncommon features of contemporary relationships between individuals in the diversity context. What Zadie Smith has subtly underlined in these lines is the orientation of this racism which denotes a permanent fear to be prejudiced. If we consider this prejudice from Foucault's perspective of the construction of meaning and the text in particular, the novel's task appeals the reader's gaze into what he terms:

*"A plethora of signifying elements in reference to this single signified (signifié). But this primary and ultimate meaning springs up through the manifest formulations, it hides beneath what it appears, and secretly duplicates it, because each discourse contains the power to say something other than what it actually says, and thus to embrace a plurality of meanings: a plethora of the 'signified' in relation to a single*

*'signifier'. From this point of view, discourse is both plenitude and endless truth.'* (Foucault, 118)

Following Foucault, it appears that time has not contributed to put into effect a new paradigm in the relationship between people. Racism is permanently there in latent or disguised form. Racism as a signifier has not completely been removed from the world. *Swing Time's* first announces quite into this direction of building truth through a plethora of signifiers, past and present, and across time and space but more through a variety of individuals' close relationships in the service of humanity which ultimately can be considered to be this unique truth which possibly is to be found in the locations that the narrative incorporates through what Foucault calls the "distribution of gaps, voids, absences, limits and divisions." (Foucault, 119) Indeed the existence of such cracks in the narrative of the self and history justifies that: *"No one never knows who you really are. It was the kind of note you got from a spiteful seven-year-old girl with a firm idea of justice. And of course that – if you can ignore the passage of time – is exactly what it was."* (Smith, 5)

If this ignorance of Time corresponds exactly to the concept and function of the archaeology of humanity, both past and present, and our identities as humans in time we come into Dilthey's idea that:

*"Past and present experiences of life are interconnected through the stream of history in which we all stand. He believed that understanding others and ourselves is possible because we are humans who made history and know ourselves only through this history."* (Zimmermann, 32)

*Swing Time* draws from all this the structural mediation between the different foundational cornerstones that are built from the historiography of the empire as for building a new superstructure framework based on the shared cultural heritage that constitutes Smith's own personal history and cultural heritage. In the form of Zadie Smith

calls: *"Surreal demonstration of what was possible when a good person of means decided to get things done. The kind of people able to build a girls' school, in a rural West African village, in a matter of months, simply because they have decided it."* (Smith, 126)

Written beyond the lines of monolithic cultural belonging, *Swing Time* is both a transcultural journey through time and art that recaptures the wealth of the cultural traits of our cultural history while challenging old clichés that still govern the world. To achieve this ideal of goodwill and philanthropy in the world the novel blends the meeting of cultures Aimee actions: *"Governments are useless, they can't be trusted, Aimee explained to me, and charities have their own agendas, churches care more for souls than for bodies. And so if we want to see real change in this world, she continued, (...) then we ourselves have to be ones to do it, yes we have to change what we want to see."* (Smith, 125) The subtle editing of Aimee's project through software makes it possible to expose the ultimate spirit and message that *Swing Time* sends to the world: *"Inter-slicing Aimee in America with Aimee in Europe and Aimee in Africa"* (Smith, 126). This in many instances gives us a perfect image of people can build bridges across continent with a large humane sense.

#### •DISPLACING THE CULTURAL BORDERLINES

In a hint at "modern criticism" technique as discovery Mark Schrorer suggests that, *"through its exacting scrutiny of the literary texts, has demonstrated with finality that art beauty and truth are indivisible and one. The Katesian overstones of these terms are mitigated and an old dilemma solved if for beauty we substitute form, and for truth, content."* (Stevick, 65-66)

By exploring *Swing Time* under the form and content paradigms we can go further with discourse analysis by asserting that *"part of what is implied in approaching texts as elements of social events is that we are not only concerned by texts as such, but also with the interactive processes of meaning-making."*

(Fairclough, 10) Smith's use technique in writing *Swing Time* culminates into interplay of various world experiences that inform the place that she wants to give to the individual indifferently of any belonging biases.

The refusal to subscribe to any compartmentalization of art and beyond all the denial to establish filiations that attach the artist to any cultural/historical belonging is the backbone of the quest for setting up humanity as a narrative voice that should determine our perception of art and human relationship. The universality of art as appealing to every individual across cultural borderlines and differences is then another dimension that gives to *Swing Time* its vocation for constructing a new paradigm of representation.

On the onset, *Swing Time* determines that it's a new cultural narrative with a hybrid reference to both sides of the identity divide. It demonstrates a deep use of image-creation to bridge between the different sections of the narrator's personal history and identity as a mixed-race protagonist. Hence, her narrative approach supports different cultural and historical symbols that combine into a powerful information synthesizer for building a different perspective in the way of our reading of history and the conception of our communal existence and world experiences.

*"I am reading about the Sankofa. You know what that is? It's a bird; it looks back over itself, like this. From Africa. It looks backwards, at the past and it learns from what's gone before. Some people never learn."* (Smith, 30)

Drawing the Sankofa imaginary from African wisdom and mythology, *Swing Time* gives the opportunity to revisit all the historical foundations that map societies and through which we could realistically understand contemporary. It's first of all pedagogy. *"The Sankofa. From Africa"* is an in-depth hint into the journey of all Black Diasporas in their quest for meaning. Like a hypertext reference, the Sankofa is a symbolic representation of all uprooted Black people

that emphasizes on the need to develop a new pedagogy of cultural literacy not solely based on the daily interactions within our communities and between societies but looking backward to establish a conversation with the past and ultimately measure the path our cultural journey to the present. Indeed, the gaze of the Sankofa is the mythical quest into the roots for re-owning one's sense of human dignity and pride as stated in the literal translation of the different components of the Akan wisdom word.

Sandra M. Gayson's work, a further insight of the Sankofa both as a film presented in the form of a cross-analytic assemblage. She says:

*"During the 1990s for example several films grounded in African American history were produced, directed and/or written by people of African descent. Symbolizing the Past focuses on three of these films – Sankofa, Daughters of the Dust, and Eve's Bayou – is an analysis of the ways in which the films image African American history of oral narratives, these films are multi-faceted, revealing much through the spoken word but even more through the symbol."* (Gayson, 2)

*Swing Time* re-owns this tradition of storytelling and the symbolic framework that goes with it but while still looking backward into Africa, also adds to this narrative the journey into the continent with the motive of an outreach development programme. Similar steps are taken by the narrator and Aimee in their enterprise to build an aid project in the Gambia while taking this opportunity to explore the sites where African captives departed for the Americas during the slave trade. And this is very another symbolic representation of the Sankofa, but this time on the field for fighting against poverty.

The symbolic urge to learn and know one's history that narrator's mother embodies in the novel both as a black woman and a feminist immerses the reader into the political context of the Thatcherite Britain and hints of



her conservative policy: “If *all Saturdays of 1982 can be thought as one day.*” (Smith, 9)

Indeed, the condition of encounter between the narrator and Tracey, their physical similarities and contrasts also allow introducing their mothers whose life conception and philosophy seem poles *apart and reveal at some point the crucial time in history in which she was growing up*:

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

If this echoes the end of the welfare state of during Thatcher’s era and the austerity that is then imposed on some families, the narrator then only an adolescent invites us to “*look at the other problem*” (Smith, 10) as she compares herself and mother to Tracey and her mother whose:

*“Family look, not my mother’s taste, I found captivating: logos, tin bangles, and hoops, diamante everything, expensive trainers of the kind my mother refused to recognize as a reality in the world – “Those aren’t shoes.”* (Smith, 10)

In fact the resonance of the Thatcherite years is persistently in the adolescent’s mind: “*We were both from the estate, neither of us received benefits. (A matter of pride for my mother, an outrage for Tracey’s: she had tried many times – and failed – to get on the disability.)*” (Smith, 10)

If we regard the narrator’s mother through her ideological stance that is very much resonant in her life choices and the principles, her belief, the narrator as a grown up assistant to Aimee, the Australian Pop-star, somewhat confirms this vision:

“I think voices are like clothes” (Smith, 97). As the narrator compares her own mother to Aimee as two women moving in two different timespans but all up to serve a cause: “*that there might be any practical divergence between my mother’s situation and her own did not seem to occur to Aimee, and this was one of my earliest lessons in her way of viewing difference between people, which were never structural or economic but always essentially differences of personality.*” (Smith, 111)

As if to merge the lines cultural of difference between her Jamaican mother who symbolizes what Paul Gilroy calls the intellectual trial to “*press original African time into the service of their attempts to come to terms with diaspora space and its dynamics of differentiation*” (Gilroy, 197) and Aimee who stands for the new dynamics of world solidarity across all colour across all differences, and whom she qualifies as:

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

What could be considered as a project to merge the characteristics of differences of all types for surfacing the human worth is seen in Aimee and the mother as the ultimate sense of humanity, a kind of utopian being that Aimee carries as if belonging to “*a tribe of one.*” (Smith, 97) It’s more in the narrator herself than in Aimee that the most striking signs of cultural transcendence see its most complete expression of voluntary un-belonging because we are ultimately world citizens with many influences. The surreal conversation between the two of them reveals in all aspects this problematic that stands as an inferential response of a second generation immigrant to the high stake of British nationality and lineage:

- “- Narrator: You're funny.  
- Aimee: I come from a long line of funny people. God knows why the British they think they're the only people allowed to be funny in this world.  
- Narrator: I am not that British.  
- Aimee: Oh babe, you're as British as they come.” (Smith, 108)

Indeed, the relevance of Aimee's answer to the narrator's own observation on Aimee's authentic Australian identity:

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

She sounds like a global citizen, almost. Her accent is difficult to back into a singular and fixed cultural location. It is to be sought beyond the borderlines. The globalization schema of identities that *Swing Time* conceptualizes draws its sources from the social reality of contemporary issues that Zadie Smith also depicts through Aimee's outreach activities. *Swing Time* provides an effective space for collaboration and international solidarity across the continents and cultural sensibilities as the narrator questions herself as a witness and central protagonist of this new life she suddenly uncovers:

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

The pursuit of a useful life and outreach to other communities is humanely and eventually what enhances the narrator to

disapprove “most things with a cold streak of defensive pride” (Smith, 89) and ultimately to develop a political view and assumption about life that clash with Zoe's, her supervisor in this job:

“The opposite of me. Yet, in the context of the office, Zoe and I were viewed as interchangeable. Her politics like mine, were already assumed, although in her case the office had it wrong: she was an ardent Thatcherite, the kind who feels that having pulled herself up by her own bootstraps everybody else better follow her and do the same.” (Smith, 89)

If *Swing Time* purports to be a Marxist criticism of capitalism and all form of hegemony, it is also a celebration of Aimee as an epitome of social justice, Smith underlines that:

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

This makes of the narrator a privileged collaborator for Aimee's actions in her African outreach. As a curator of history and art, the narrator sets out to bridge her experience to a long time line of the history of dance starting from the 1930s up to the present. However, if we consider the “visits by the Fisk University Jubilee Singers England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland in the early 1870s” (Gilroy, 88) as an important landmark we can also nourish the idea that:

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

*established by Leroi Jones, I believe it is possible to approach music as a changing rather unchanging same. Today, this involves the difficult task of striving to comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilising flux of the post-contemporary world.” (Gilroy, 101)*

Indeed, it echoes the commitment of the artist to social justice which Aimee seems to be the best epitome through her equity name “*Alias Truthteller Legon*” (Smith, 92) This phase of the narrator’s life echoes another important page of the United States history of race issues. Zadie Smith introduces racism through a mystery writer/theorist who: “*sat at a plain white desk, dressed all in white, with his prematurely white head of hair, facing a sizeable audience.*” (Smith, 93) The audience listening to that mystery writer/theorist and eventually a political activist or civil rights leader was in:

*“The greater part of his crowd black men, of about my own age, holding well-worn copies of his books on their knee and listening with absolute focus and determination to an elaborate conspiracy theory. For the world was run by lizards in human form: The Rockefellers were lizards, and the Kennedys, and almost everybody at Goldman Sachs, and William Hearst has been a lizard, and Ronald Reagan and Napoleon – it was global lizard plot.” (Smith, 94)*

This highly critical perspective of world power and financial systems offers a certain left-wing reading of the world and enables to explain hegemony by “linking many historical periods and political facts combining them into a sort of theory of everything.” (Smith 94) If the real issue of the state of the world is the hegemony of the liberal system on all areas back from

Napoleon to present day, Swing Time becomes then a socialist project for fighting against all the perverse systems that have always shaped the world as we know it today.

## **2. SPORTS AND ART AS CHALLENGING PARADIGMS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD**

### **▪ SPORT: THE BLACK/AFRICAN VS. THE REST OF THE WORLD.**

Sport has the lovely vignette of encompassing cultural belonging, patriotism and nationalism at large. It is often the terrain for battles, though of the time ruled by fair-play, that deter latent or hidden wars that people would like to wage. Indeed, in order to offer a critical approach to racism, sport and art function in *Swing Time* as illustration of the different spaces where the development of all the subjective representations is constructed. If the problem is to be found in the reality that supports the foundation of any society it is then through a subtle communicative realism that it can also be efficiently challenged on order to reach at an adequate paradigm of all paradigm that we would like to debunk. In that purpose, Ellis points out that:

*“Communicative realism does not cavalierly suggest that society is subjectively constructed, but it locates social reality in the communicatively real structures of discourse, rather than in the metaphors of external reality where language is simply a map between cognition and the supposed external world.” (Ellis, 71)*

In *Swing time*, Zadie Smith provides another important global insight of cultural representation within the co-existing immigrant identities, using sport a cultural battlefield that Bahram, her Iranian boss uses as the “*purest manifestation of sociological theories.*” (Smith, 24) Bahram understanding of the sportsmen’s performance as fundamentally subject to eugenics gives Zadie Smith the possibility to expose racism beyond the mere lines of the binary oppositions between Black and White. Indeed, Zadie

Smith reads out this racism through Bahram's conception of:

*"The Black man, he informs us, he is moving body, he is strong, and he is music, yes, of course, and he is rhythm, everybody knows this, and he is speed, and this beautiful, maybe, yes, but let me tell you tennis is game of the mind – the mind ! The Black man can be good strength, good muscle, he can hit the ball hard, but Karim he is like me, he think one two steps in front. He have Arab mind. Arab mind is complicated machine, delicate. We invent mathematics. We invent astronomy. Subtle people. Two steps ahead. Your Bryan now he is lost."* (Smith, 326)

This ironic challenging of socio-historically of constructed and construed cultures, races, identities and the relationship between co-existing communities is one of the most poignant of *Swing Time*. Echoing the work of Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plot: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction*, Bahram's monologue is very central in understanding how *Swing Time* shakes and blurs the lines of evolutionary discourse as applied to the hierarchical structuring of races and cultural relations when he asserts that he: *"shall show how differing and cultural needs have produced deeply felt, satisfying but contradictory interpretations of its elements."* (Beer, 8)

If we follow a psychoanalytical reading of Bahram's discourse, it suggests to point out the Freudian assumption that the *"universal narcissism of men, their self-love has up to the present."* (Beer, 9) If Bahram reminds to this small microcosm of immigrants in his Iranian composed of a mixed-raced worker, a Congolese cleaner, a Somali delivery boy that: *"Wherever you in the world, he told Anwar, you people at the bottom! Sometimes at top White man, Jew, Arab, Chinese, Japan, depends. But your people always they lose."* (Smith, 326)

The narrator explains her misadventure that took place during her first encounter with her boss, Bahram. The impressions of her physical features and the gap between his first sympathetic warm welcome in the restaurant and her sudden rejection are because, *"despite my Persian nose, I was not Persian, not even a little, nor Egyptian, nor Moroccan, nor Arab of any kind, I made the mistake of speaking the name of my mother's island and all friendliness vanished."* (Smith, 323)

*Swing Time* thus goes further into displacing the crisis of cultural belonging beyond the traditional spheres of West/East or West/Third world confrontation into the modern and global where eventually we can attest emerging attempts to build new hegemonies. If we assert with Fairclough in his analysis of the text as action, representation and identification that states that:

*"Texts simultaneously represent aspects of the world (the physical world, the social world, the mental world) enact relations between participants in social events and the attitudes, desires and values of participants, and coherently and cohesively connect parts of texts together, and connect texts with their situational contexts."* (Fairclough, 27)

Then we can grasp how what Halliday (1994) calls the "ideational" function" and "interpersonal function" of the text interplay to build meaning in *Swing Time*. The narrator, who is supposed to be the writer's voice, sides with Anwar and the Congolese cleaner to cheer the black tennis player Bryan Shelton against Karim Alami supported by Bahram, it is above all because of racial solidarity. Bryan Shelton can be considered as the epitome of all the Black Diasporas and those at the periphery of all the Western societies and its system. Western civilization only plays a distant or inferential role in the binary paradigm that reveals itself as the geographical and political space in the opposition between the two groups that can be referred to as the awakening of a new



topology of cultural representation. Bryan Shelton, the African-American, stands then as the hyphen between sub-Saharan and Caribbean immigrants in London, while Karim Alami on the other hand reconciles the Arab and the Persian by bringing them together as one.

The geopolitical insight of this configuration has at the prowess of transcending some contemporary issues by showcasing a new discourse and its possible implementations. The world may not look better by writing a new page in its history through these insights. The unwritten message of *Swing Time* that is hinted in the text is the absolute absence of physical violence that gives to *Swing Time* the prospective power of establishing a peaceful interaction between cultures.

▪ CULTURAL BODIES AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW DISCOURSES

We should move from Stevick's perspective that the great writer's time locus does not limit him to their immediate and contemporary reality that allows him to attain what he terms as the '*sub specie aeternatis*', that is the level of in-depth science, vision and wisdom where he "*writes more truly that he knows, and under the surface of his subjects and through the restrictions of his medium and treatment glows a universal humanity in the light of which contemporary distortions of perspective vanish or become of no significance.*" (Stevick, 257) In between the interstices of all this process, the development of new discourses based cultural bodies as a medium of re-elaboration of a new sense of humanity, *Swing* strive to create a new world reality on the ashes of old and perhaps vanishing realities. If not the project of *Swing Time* is before all, as Lodge and Wood would suggest it below:

*"For the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very*

*identity of the body of writing.*" (Lodge & Wood, 146)

The multiplicity of voices in the exposure of racial prejudices is a very subtle parody of the postmodern of the rejection of truth that points out racist and discourses and rhetoric of cultural narcissistic representation that are changing the world and the nature human relationships. By displacing the sensitive spots of the racist discourse Zadie Smith offers a great opportunity to shake all other similar discourses which traditionally stand as the dividing lines between cultures. She also underlines the different competing cultural bodies in the global identity sphere by shifting old oppositions into new juxtapositions are at least operating a new scenario that mimics contemporary geopolitics in a subverting process.

If the multicultural novel is in the essence a quest to build social and cultural harmony, the subtlety by which reality is treated in the British novel since 1980 in general confers it a political role that does not necessarily set up the environment for an exacerbated conflict but a new way of solving social crisis in an area where the coexistence of different cultural bodies can no longer be eluded.

*Swing time's* hypo-textual reference to the structural cultural crises that are shaping the world is an excellent parody of de-contextualization then reconceptualization of race and ethnic issues from a global perspective. Smith's message is conveyed through the subtle division of the world into new sensibilities, though she does not totally erase old stereotypes and prejudices. Thus, she shakes both the latent and the new developments of cultural conflicts into building a new "time" and a way of living together.

Katherine Hayles draws the lines of the quest of reconceptualization of ties and relationships in our contemporary time by defying the formalized axiomatic racist issues. It is Smith's refusal to replicate old racial symmetries that is suggested through the theoretical common grounds between the

science of chaos and postmodernism by stating that Hayles reminds that it is also informed by a similar suspicion of globalization from Jacques Derrida (Signature) to Frederic Jameson (Postmodernism) Jean François Lyotard (Postmodern Condition) to Lucy Irigaray (The Sex) because it also emphasizes on iterative techniques and recursive looping as ways to destabilize systems and make them unexpected conclusions. Hayles explains that:

*“It is akin to poststructuralism, where the structuralist penchant for replicating symmetries is modified by the postmodern turn toward fragmentation, rupture and discontinuity. The science of chaos is like other postmodern theories also in recognizing the importance of scale. Once scale is seen as an important consideration, the relation between the local sites to the global systems is considered problematic, for movement across different scale levels is no longer axiomatic.”* (Hayles, 11)

Paul Collili offers a different scale to reading *Swing Time* by following Halliday's perception of the text as:

*“An ongoing process of semantic choice; it is meaning and meaning is choice, a continuous flux of selections.”* (Halliday, 195) Collili underlines still with Halliday that *“the text is also the realization of a higher segment signifying processes that possess their own means of interpretation, namely, the literary, the sociological, the psychoanalytic and so on.”* (Collili, 631)

This reference to all the processes and choices involved in the construction of the text mirrors what Halliday calls *“resistance and change in the social system”* and *“the primary channel of the transmission of culture.”* (Halliday, 199) Of course read under these lenses, *Swing Time*, with its high blend of hypertext focuses art, and the *“History of Dance”* (Smith, 242) provides the mechanisms for the prospective

deconstruction our shared or common cultural heritage beyond the lines of conflicts of representation. Most importantly, the palimpsest of the various stages and icons of the history of dance gives to *Swing Time* its strength to blur the lines of difference and to reconcile the world through artistic expression and aesthetics. Indeed, if art stands as common ground for cultural understanding and reconciling cultural differences, *Swing Time's* narrative offers an unbiased insight into the history of world art.

As an empirical representation of the cultural heritage of the multicultural society that she sought to build in her novels, *Swing Time* is a multi-layered narrative that leads the reader through contemporary sympathies and solidarities through outreach projects for a better life across the borders with constant links to textual references to the History of Dance. Zadie Smith the readers gaze through representations of both mainstream and peripheral cultures by merging the lines of difference and revealing the essential truth as it should be, a sympathy and friendship for a better world. The absence of violent scenes throughout the novel is an important feature that gives to *Swing Time* its unique merit of projecting a different world eventually, a world of love between people.

Also, the balance in exploring the history of dance since the 1930s illustrates the strength of the novels narrative sources and the quest for exposing culture as force for the reconciliation:

*“If Fred Astaire represented the aristocracy, I represented the proletariat, said Gene Kelly, and by this logic Bill “Bojangles” Robinson should really have been my dancer, because Bojangles dance for the Harlem dandy, for the ghetto kids and the sharecropper – for the descendants of all slaves. But to me a dancer was a man from nowhere, without parents or siblings, without a nation or people, without obligation of any kind, this was really the quality I loved.”* (Smith, 24)

These ghetto kids include Michal Jackson, Prince, and even James Brown who are considered as heirs of a long cultural heritage. This transmission of cultural goes even further into passed to the youth, and Tracey whose father is one of Michael Jackson's dancers helps us trace back this history into its genesis:

*“How you jump into a split you said your dad can do it, too, and you got it from your dad, and he got it from Michael Jackson, and Jackson got it from Prince, and maybe James Brown, well, they all got it from the Nicholas Brothers, the Nicholas Brothers are the originals, they're the very first, so if even if you don't know it or say don't care, you're still dancing like them, you're still getting it from them.”* (Smith, 101)

Most importantly, intertextuality gives to *Swing Time* all its strength. It allows building a hybrid sense of art. The history of dance hence establishes a lineage that transcends both race and generational gap. It's this genesis that allows the creation of a certain unity whose nexus of influence can inspire the young generation to see the world with lenses.

On the same range of ideas Smith highlights the importance of revisiting these hegemonic structures that have played a role in the making of the modern world to art, or what she calls: *“The stuff, like Billie Holiday? Or Sarah Vaughan, Bessie Smith, Nina. Real singers. I mean, not that – I mean I feel like it.”* (Smith, 97)

Between Holiday's poem, *Strange Fruit* (1937) and the heights of the civil rights movement in the 1960s we recapture all the important role that (coloured) artists played. *Swing Time* celebrates the rich heritage of the Harlem Renaissance and its contribution to black emancipation struggle in the USA.

If we refer to Thornton Dial's canvas entitled *“Don't Matter How Raggly The Flag It Still Got to tie us together”* (2003) that Elara Bertho explores in her article, *“The colour line, les artistes Africain-Americain et*

*la segregation<sup>2</sup>”* as the most symbolic call for a reconciled nation despite all the pains caused by history in the USA and above in the world. The same process is also taken by *Swing Time* by surfacing the atrocities of racial conflicts that still go on in contemporary days. Both Billie Holiday's poetry and Thornton Dial's painting are insightful historical depictions of the politico-cultural crisis that *Swing Time* aims to overcome through a non-violent discourse. *Swing Time* is mainly a high prism of aesthetic value that challenges the necessity for bringing to together all the voices that defy racism as a political system. Icon like Nina Simone, Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith are those voices whose vibrant messages in Jazz as in Blues and all other artistic expression have contributed to delivering a universal truth: our common essence as human beings and our universal need for freedom. Nina Simone's *“Mississippi Goddam”* (1953) underlines the profound and desperate complaints of the artist pointing out alternatively Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi as locations of the suffering of Black people.

#### CONCLUSION

By exploring the repositories of art and history that prevent the world to sustain harmony between individuals in their natural diversity as humans, *Swing Time* is ultimately an invitation into reading our societies. Throughout the novel, Zadie Smith offers a different perspective in reading our societies and how we can build humanity into a peaceful space. *Swing Time* establishes the necessity of shaking old being together.

*“If my dad hadn't died young? No way I'd not here. That's the pain. I thought of my mother - who had no patience for sentimental reading of history- and cringed.”* (Smith, 113)

Through Aimee's above recollections of her father's worldview and the difference and hers, and the narrator own radical difference

<sup>2</sup> “The Color line: African Americans and Segregation. (My translation)

with her mother's reading of history, we capture the essential message of *Swing Time*: the birth of a human society that is open to the creation of a decent world and whose main defining character is tolerance and solidarity beyond all difference. In *Swing Time*, the multi-accentual correlation between different spaces and historical timelines gives to the book its unique depth: between Fred Astaire, and Mr Bojangles, but also John Legend's "All of me", Billie Holiday's "Autumn in New York" and the echo to Ruby Keeler's "42<sup>nd</sup> Street", Zadie Smith uses various cross-referencing strategies that appeal our need to build new meaning in our mutual representation.

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