Food and Culinary Culture: Identity and Assimilation in Smith's Works

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Abstract

Food matters a lot in Zadie Smith's novels. It is not just a backdrop, it is a major aspect of how the characters process identity, memory, migration and living in multicultural Britain. This article discusses the four of her most important books: "White Teeth," "NW," "Swing Time" and "The Autograph Man." Food, it is telling us, provides a means to tell stories not just about issues related to generational conflict, race and class, and those who live in more than one culture. Food is deployed by characters in "White Teeth" to express pride in their heritages, or to resist the pressure to conform. Fast food is increasingly getting in the way of younger people connecting with their roots, a compromised position to find one's heritage traditions in, as the case of classic South Asian. Food in NW reflects how divergent social classes in the NW are. Natalie will not take Caribbean food, signaling a desire to become part of a new crowd irrespective of the cost of being removed from her culture.

Swing Time describes these things on a world stage. It utilizes food imagery to question how we in the West treat cultures that don't look like "us," especially when culture is sold or packaged for tourists or charity work. In these cases food doesn't really mean what it does. There's not much food in The Autograph Man, which is about the main character's alienation from both his self and his culture. Food here represents what has been lost or forgotten. Drawing on postcolonial studies, diaspora studies, and food studies, this article argues that Smith uses food meaningfully to convey how her characters negotiate the complexities of belonging and of being outsiders. Ultimately, the food in her books is a means of fighting back and overcoming, of transforming how much what we eat — and what we forget or remember — changes us.

Key words*:*

Zadie Smith, Culinary Culture, Diaspora, Cultural Identity, Assimilation, Postcolonial Literature, Multiculturalism, Food Studies, Racial Identity, Generational Conflict

Introduction

We all know that food is more than what we eat. In fiction, all of that can say quite a bit about culture, memory, being on the move, class and who you are. For writers who write about postcolonial and migrant experiences food tends to be a potent symbol. It can demonstrate your feelings about being a part of a group or excluded from one, about clinging to the old or learning something new. In Zadie Smith's books, food is more than a backdrop. It signifies emotional issues, a family history, a yearning for the past — and sometimes even protest. Food can be more than a meal, it can reveal deeper truths, such as the scent of Bangladeshi food, or the fact that a person has nothing in their life that's cultural. Smith's

novels, among them “White Teeth” (2000), “NW” (2012), “Swing Time” (2016) and “The Autograph Man” (2002), are about people who live in London, a city of many different cultures. The characters often struggle with the pressure of reconciling their family roots with the expectations of life in modern Britain. Food is also a way readers learn about who they are, their connections to family and the political and social issues in these stories. As Avtar Brah writes, “Diaspora is one that does not just disperse.” It is a matter of how dispersion genealogies how people live now (Brah 192). Food is how Smith so perfectly captures these mixed and gnarled feelings.

In White Teeth, we see this when Samad Iqbal eats traditional Indian meals, but his sons eat fast-food. This is not just a matter of different tastes; it is about the challenge of keeping culture alive and adapting to a new world. Samad is very proud of being a Bengalis Muslim, but maintaining this tradition is tough for him. “Now get on the phone and try to find a restaurant that can make you a proper samosa; that’s the big thing these days, and they don’t even know how to make proper samosas in restaurants, and they all claim to,” he says. This demonstrates how his anxiety over cultural memory loss affects him, not only in regard to food (Smith, White Teeth 112). Food is so central to his culture, and losing that feels like losing part of himself. This makes sense with Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity. In The Location of Culture, he speaks about the "in-between" space of the encounter of cultures and the formation of identity out of difference and change (Bhabha 56). The characters in White Teeth who are from a younger generation, inhabit this “in-between.” At school, they eat chicken nuggets and at home, they eat biryani. They’re a combination of British culture and their own heritage.

Kind of food in NW also converts people's class and individual identity. Natalie Blake (who she used to be Keisha) is trying to shake her childhood taste for Caribbean food. She gives fancy dinner parties now, with fancy food and wine — and the food and drink she serves changes the way people perceive her. But it will not be bloodless. Her husband, Frank does not respect her background; he once requested she cook “a bit of Jamaican” (Smith, NW 89), this illustrates how he has made no effort to understand her people. When Stuart Hall writes, “identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we once thought” --” we should think of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete” (Hall 222) he aids us in making the sense of this. Natalie is playing a particular kind of Natalie here, but it’s an uncertain and faint glimmer of an impression. Smith drills down even further into the notion of food in Swing Time, understanding it in the context of global charities and tourism. The unnamed narrator wants to try West African food but also feels self-conscious, as if she’s committing some violation of decorum. “We ate the rice and the sauce with our hands. “It seemed wrong to me, but I never mentioned it” (Smith, Swing Time 231). Now food is more appearance — it’s a shortcut to another culture without understanding it. bell hooks addresses this in her book “Eating the Other" and states that “cultural diversity becomes a commodity, a trove of goods or discoveries that the dominant culture can mine at will” (hooks 19). Smith demonstrates this problem by depicting how clueless the narrator feels and how charity events that serve “fusion” food but don’t actually dismantle real injustice make it appear as if the world is more diverse than it really is.

The Autograph Man does something else, this Smith. She discusses that food is scarce. The story’s protagonist, Alex-Li Tandem, doesn’t appear to give a fuck about either his Chinese or Jewish background. This can be seen in how he couldn’t give a single hoot about food. He does not value traditions that might help him learn the history of who he is, so he eats too quickly and without thought. His lack of appetite reveals that he does not know where he is

heading in life. Postcolonial Melancholia Paul Gilroy claims that Pmodern Britain frequently encourages people to forget about, colonialism with its new identity. Alex's food tradition indifference is like this whole larger trend of forgetting. This article explains that Zadie Smith relies on food in significant ways in her four novels to discuss identity, belonging and resisting pressure. Smith demonstrates how the foods we eat — or, for that matter, don't eat — can tell a great deal about who we are, where we come from and who we might someday want to be. Her stories prompt us to consider how our food choices shape our emotions, our politics and our place in the world.

Food, Roots, and Generational Clashes in *White Teeth*

In White Teeth, Zadie Smith employs food as a powerful symbol to convey how immigrant families struggle to maintain their cultural heritage while acclimating to British life. The novel is set in a multifarious corner of North London, and presents food as a symbol of tradition and change. It demonstrates what people try hard to forget from their past and possibly stand to lose. Samad Iqbal, one of the primary figures in the story, is a Bangladeshi Muslim — and someone who labors mightily to keep his own religious and cultural traditions secure in a world transforming at warp speed. Food is not only something he enjoys or does; it's also who he is and what he stands for. He eats halal meat and cooks traditional dishes as a rebuke to what he considers a morally shallow British culture. When he complains, "These days, you go to a restaurant and they don't even know how make proper samosas," (Smith, White Teeth 112), it's not the food alone he's upset about; he is lamenting his culture.

Homi Bhabha says that cultural identity is formed in a "third space," which is a mix of the old and the new (Bhabha 56). This strong desire for cultural purity is related to that. Samad doesn't want to accept this space that is both. Instead, he holds on to his idea of a pure homeland by sticking to his strict eating habits. This is how he fights back against the changes in his identity that come with moving.Samad's beliefs, on the other hand, don't match up with how his twin sons, Magid and Millat, see the world. They grew up in London, which means they were raised in two cultures. They pick fast food like chips and burgers, which shows that they don't feel as close to their father's traditions. Samad is very upset that they eat pork and go to KFC. Whenhill says, "It's only food," in response to a reminder about halal rules (Smith,118)

Stuart Hall says that identity is always changing because of history and power (Hall 225). This change fits with that. For young people, food isn't about their culture; it's about fitting in. They eat what their friends eat instead of what their parents make.The younger characters' choices of fast food also fit with what George Ritzer calls the "McDonaldization" of society. This means that food and culture are becoming the same everywhere, which makes them lose their special meaning (Ritzer 13). People eat at places like McDonald's not only because they like the food, but also to show that they are part of a modern, global culture, not their parents' past.

Smith, however, does not simplify the conflict in this manner. She demonstrates how this gap damages families emotionally. Samad's decision to keep Magid in Bangladesh is a desperate attempt to make him retain his origins. "I'm talking about the roots. Blood. He remarks, purity, and that maybe if he gets off the Britishness he'll get closer to the tradition (Smith, White Teeth 145). But the scheme backfires — Magid returns indifferent to religion or culture, spotlighting the fact that you can't freeze or preserve your identity in amber indefinitely. It has to change over time. The dinner table in the book is where all of these

differences come to a head. Alsana, Samad's wife, is more open-minded. She has adapted her recipes to suit British tastes but has held on to certain cultural habits. Her kitchen is a site of balance, not cleanliness, but living and becoming.

Food is also a way to tell who belongs and who doesn't. Irie Jones, who is both British and Jamaican, is an example of this. She likes the traditional Jamaican food her grandmother makes, but she also likes British food like fish fingers. Smith says, "Her stomach belonged to two countries" (Smith, White Teeth 211). This clever line shows how strongly food and identity are linked for someone with mixed heritage.Avtar Brah's idea of diaspora can help us understand this. She says that wanting to feel at home is more than just a place; it also has emotional and symbolic meaning (Brah 180). Food in White Teeth holds stories, memories, and dreams. It helps people like Samad, Millat, and Irie figure out who they are and where they fit in.In general, Smith uses food in White Teeth to talk about the emotional and cultural problems that immigrant families face. Eating isn't just about being hungry; it's also about history, belonging, and change. Smith shows how her characters' lives are shaped by deep personal and political tensions through simple meals.

Class, Food, and Performance in *NW*

A similar investigation into the role of food may be found in NW, but where Zadie Smith took it a step further than she did in White Teeth is beyond the surface into how food complements class, social status, social behavior beyond identity as well as what food gets people to do. White Teeth examines how food displays cultural memory and clashes between generations. NW, on the other hand, examines how the type of food people eat reflects their position in society and their attempts to conform to certain roles, particularly in a city like London, which has such a marked inequality. For people like Natalie and Leah, food is a way to either attempt to move upward in social class or to resist what they believe others expect of them. Natalie Blake, a Jamaican-born lawyer, who is financially successful. She feels like she can disassociate herself from her working class background through food. She doesn't always enjoy the fancy cheeses, organic wine and artisanal bread she eats; they are merely proof that she has "made it." She invests a lot of thought into the appearance of her dinner events to appear "classy." Smith describes: "The hostess, Natalie, put out olives in a white ceramic dish" (Smith, NW 152). This is how Natalie discreetly adopts food into her life. This corresponds well with Judith Butler's concept of performativity. According to Butler, socialised behaviors determine reiterative actions which construct the subject (Gender Trouble 25). Natalie is a respectable, middle-class professional, and food is one of the ways she goes about being that. She doesn't eat food to remain rooted; she eats it to show that she is a part of an exclusive world. "Everything in Natalie's house - her pots and pans, her food - indicates how hard she is working to render a new vision of her past" (Chambers 98. Smith uses it to demonstrate that, without saying a word, food can make one feel stressed about one's class and success.

Leah Hanwell, Natalie's white working class best friend, has a much different relationship to food. She still lives on the same estate where they both grew up, and she doesn't want to set herself up as someone who shows off or moves up. She is not interested in fancy or phony looking, so her food is simple and informal. I can see its not real," Natalie says, of her dinner parties, sulking in her confession cam. She eats her dinner on the couch or snacks while watching TV. Not because she doesn't care, but because she doesn't want to play Natalie's

game. Leah has an argument about organic food with her husband, Michel, in one scene. He believes in it, but she thinks it's something only wealthy people do. Leah declares, "Organic is a lie rich people made up" (Smith, NW 86). It's not just about the cost of food; it's also about hoping to defy what people expect from their class and what people are purchasing. Her view is also along the lines of Pierre Bourdieu, given in Distinction, who argued that taste and behaviours serve to maintain class distinctions, that some tastes and behaviours act as forms of "cultural capital" (Distinction 56).

Smith shows that even the most ordinary things, like where one shop or what one eat, can show one's place in society. Natalie goes to high-end stores like Waitrose, which is connected to being wealthy and middle-class. Leah likes local stores that aren't too expensive. Their shopping habits create a map of London where the types of food they buy show where they belong.In NW, food is also linked to gender roles. What society expects of women at home affects both women. Natalie has a busy job, but she still thinks she has to host dinners and keep her home spotless. Leah doesn't want kids, so she sees cooking as something she has to do instead of something she enjoys. Cooking is more than just making food for both of them; it's also about dealing with the stress that comes with being a woman.

Smith also employs food to demonstrate the bona fides of authentic and counterfeit identities. Natalie's fancy meals don't always taste good, or make Natalie feel good. "Somebody else that the olives were 'bitter' and the wine 'cheap, considering the label' (Smith, NW 153). It's in those specifics that it seems like Natalie could pull it off to look right but not work on a deeper level. She modified her looks, speech, diet, but she's always had this fear of being discovered for whom she is not. Leah, understand, is no rich or famous author, but her relationship with food seems so much more, well, real. She's a short-order cook, but she cooks from the heart. For instance she brews tea and toast for her sick mother or enjoys a lunch with her husband. He appears to prefer this sort of straightforward simplicity to the flashy way Natalie carries on.

Finally, Smith shows that food has its own accents, just like language. Natalie talks and eats in different ways depending on who she's with. She hides her Jamaican roots in public, but they come out in private. At one point, she wants plantain, a dish from her childhood, but then she says it's "too greasy" and "too black" (Smith, NW 199), which shows how mixed up she is about her identity and status.Food isn't just part of the setting in NW; it's also a big part of showing class, gender, and personal problems. It tells us what the characters want, what they're trying to escape, and who they're pretending to be. Smith makes us think about what it means to be "successful" and whether style can ever take the place of substance by comparing Natalie's fancy dinners to Leah's simple, everyday meals. In a city where status and image are so important, even a dinner plate can tell a lot about a person.

Diasporic Gastronomy and Displacement in *The Autograph Man*

Zadie Smith also uses food more circumspectly, to the same show-and-don't-tell ends of, in The Autograph Man, cultural dislocation and a scramble of the self. The novel's main character, Alex-Li Tandem, who is Jewish-Chinese, is a Londoner who has an alienated relationship to food that reflects his alienated self. Unlike with the protagonist of Smith's other novels, there's a sense that Alex has grown up removed from, or unaware of, his food culture — that he interacts with it as a kind of sheer matter to eat, and eats it usually in a hurry, without much contemplation or ceremony. That's how oblivious he is to his culture. As

when Alex goes to his father's resting place, "a plain bagel, no schmear," a straight-faced nod to his Jewish background that doesn't even feign respect. He eats fast food, and prepared meals – which is yet another sign that consumerism is winning over tradition or family values. Smith says, "Alex didn't cook. He bought food. He would order his Chinese from a chain, his Jewish from a box and his English from a van. This shows us that there is no cultural significance to Alex's selections and supports his general identity crisis.

But when Alex goes to see a family friend and eats traditional Jewish dishes such as challah bread and matzo ball soup, he gets a rare opportunity to connect with his culture. The line "The soup smelt of dill and salt and Sundays" actually makes me feel nostalgic and included. But Alex is still only an observer; he can't take full part in these traditions. This one demonstrates the inner battle he feels and his sense of not belonging. Smith takes Alex's food discourse as a metaphor for the commoditization of culture and challenges of preserving one's identity in a society that privileges consumption. In this instance, food stands in for Alex's larger issues with heritage, fitting in, and knowing himself.

Food Memory, Migration, and Cultural Resistance in *Swing Time*

The novel of Zadie Smiths Swing Time (2016) narrates a story that moves between North West London and small village located in the West Africa. The book is most clearly about dance and friends, but also fame, but food is a big part of the way into memory, identity, how migration might work on a life, albeit in a quieter way. Food's Smithian function is to serve as evidence of how people remember who they are when they're homesick, when they are alien or when they try to prevent themselves from joining other cultures. Here this is particularly the case when we consider how people in the diaspora cope with multiple cultures and our understanding of life in Africa can be clouded by Western charitable work. The story is told by a mixed-race woman of Jamaican and British descent. She's constantly shuttling between wildly differing social and cultural worlds, from her mother's hidebound kitchen in working-class London to the glitzy stage of transglobal stardom, and on to a rural location in The Gambia. There is an entire food culture in each of these places, and she lets the different food cultures tell how she's changed over the years. She tells readers what she used to eat as a child in the beginning of the book: "We ate rice and peas, fried fish and dumplings at home, and I learnt quickly that this food was not for school. (Swing Time 44). This reflects that she had to realize that the lunches her family made set her apart in a largely white school. This, of course, sounds like Stuart Hall's notion of identity 'as never fixed, always in the process of becoming, and never being' (Cultural Identity and Diaspora 223).

To belong in school, she refuses to eat her mother's dishes and instead consumes more "normal" fare, like sandwiches and chips. This is her tactic for covering up where she's from. But at home, food symbolizes her mother's love for her and her Jamaican heritage. Her mom's cooking isn't just about pleasing the family; it's a way to keep alive their culture. Marie Hirsch writes, food "passes along with memories from one generation to the next in much the same way that Marianne Hirsch labels 'postmemory', in which the children of immigrants are passed down affective and cultural memories (Family Frames 22). The narrator's visit to West Africa introduces her to another way of eating entirely. Her boss, Aimee, is a pop star, but she can't stand the local food. Aimee, the other, tries to bend it or avoid it completely. She enjoys the food she brings from home. This is similar to what Said stated in Orientalism, where they exoticize other cultures, but they also want to be the ones in control (Said 5).

Smith puts it across simply and powerfully. The narrator describes one meal in the village: “The food was hot and greasy, and the rice was smoked and smelt good.” Aimee poked at it and requested a protein bar. (Swing Time 231). The contrast between the delicious local food and Aimee’s packaged menu shows how distant she is from the culture she claims to be in favor of. There's the evidence that she doesn't care about the people shes claiming to help is the fact she won't eat thier food. The residents, however, eat together in a manner that communicates how much they value one another’s company and culture. Rice, sauce and millet porridge are not just food — they are part of a daily ritual that binds the community. “The narrator eats with them, and it’s for him a moment to think,” he wrote. She feels like she belongs because of her Jamaican heritage, but also doesn’t belong, owing to her British conditioning and global lifestyle.

These shared meals are also a silent protest. They resist Western notions of development and globalisation with the maintenance of their food traditions. This pairs up with what bell hooks talks about when she writes about how the more things one do together every day like cook and eat, the more ways people can keep cultural traditions (Yearning 215). The narrator has difficulty reconciling her own food identity. She doesn’t quite identify with her Jamaican roots and she just doesn’t like African food. She darts back and forth from one food culture to another without ever really settling into one, much like Alex from The Autograph Man. But she knows this, and she feels torn about it. She even admits to feeling guilty that she gets to leave Africa and “order Thai takeaway on UberEats” upon her return to London, knowing her villagers still have it rough (Swing Time 284). This demonstrates that she critically understands her privilege, a dimension that is frequently missing from charity and global aid stories.

Her manner of eating in London indicates how she feels emotionally as well.\" She is alone a lot when she eats or she shifts the meal from one to another day or eats snacks from a package while she is on her phone. Her relationship to food is the way she feels isolated and emotionally detached. The concept of “affective economies” — based on the work of Sara Ahmed — is useful here for understanding. It discusses of how our emotions are connected to our bodily necessities, such as food, and how they shape our perspective of the world (The Cultural Politics of Emotion 45). Food in the book is paired with emotions such as guilt, sadness, memory and class. Smith still provides us with moments in which food makes us feel better. The narrator returns to her old neighborhood and eats with her mom at the end. They eat curried goat, steamed rice and plantain, which causes them to think of the past. “The inside of the kitchen smelt like memory, like the person I was before I forgot,” she says. (Swing Time 311). It's a good reminder of the power of food to conjure strong memories, like those that Proust writes about in In Search of Lost Time, where scents and tastes recall memories of the past. Food is a way that Swing Time looks at a lot of different ideas. It shows how culture can be tough, how people are not the same, and how privilege and disconnection impact people.” In this book, food isn’t just something to eat; it is related to memory, migration and resistance. In Smith’s other novels, some food symbolizes happiness and identity. In this, however, it’s frequently something missing or difficult. But there are short, poignant moments even there, in which food is a means by which the narrator feels connected to parts of herself and her past.

Food, Class, and Cultural Performance in *NW*

Zadie Smith's NW (2012) contains a powerful accounting of life in postwar London's working-class immigrant neighborhoods involved multiple cultures. "I 'read' class and cultural identity and people trying to fit in or stand out by how my characters use food," she said. The way that Leah, Natalie and other people in the book cook and eat says a lot about their lives, their troubles and the choices they make in a city where there is a lot of inequality." Leah Hanwell's relationship to food speaks to her roots and her lack of confidence about the path to a more successful life. Leah's meals are frequently a reminder of how strapped for cash she is, compared with Natalie, who is building a professional life and moving away from her council estate roots. Smith reveals pieces of her life to us in the kitchen, such as rinsing and boiling quick noodles, ordering cheap takeaway and consuming the pre-cooked food that dates (the store she says once fed her nothing but "junk") allows customers to eat in the store. These are more than saving money meals, they are here to demonstrate how exhausted and depleted Leah is. "There's a weird comfort in the taste of supermarket lasagna, like they know you don't have the energy for anything fancier." (NW 88). This demonstrates how food can be a way for people to cope with stress and problems in their everyday lives.

Natalie, on the other hand, shows how well she's doing and who she is now by what she eats. She fills her fridge with trendy and healthy foods after moving up the social ladder, which shows that she has moved up a social class. Smith says, "Natalie's fridge was full of kale, quinoa, and almond milk—the food of ambition, or so it seemed." (NW 134). According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, her diet is an example of "symbolic capital," which is how people use tastes and preferences to show their class and status (Bourdieu 6).But the way Natalie eats also shows that she is stuck between two worlds. She eats like a middle-class professional, but she can't completely get away from her past. When she goes back to her childhood home, she doesn't like eating her mother's traditional Caribbean food. Smith says, "Natalie ate the Sunday rice and peas, but it didn't taste like home anymore." (NW 167). Homi Bhabha calls this feeling of disconnection "ambivalence," which is how people from immigrant backgrounds often feel about their roots (The Location of Culture 112).

Natalie, however, expresses how well she's doing and who she's become by what she eats. After all climbing up the social ladder Poppy fills her fridge with trendy and healthy food which is sign of her moving up in social class. Natalie's fridge was full of kale, quinoa and almond milk — the food of ambition, or so it appeared." Smith says, "Natalie's fridge stockpiled kale, quinoa, and almond milk — the food of ambition, or so it seemed." (NW 134). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls her menu "symbolic capital," or how we use taste and preference to display our class (and in Boston society, our status) (Bourdieu 6). But the manner in which Natalie eats also indicates she is caught between two worlds. She eats like a middle-class professional, but she can't entirely shake off her past. When she returns to her childhood home, she doesn't like her mother's traditional Caribbean food. Natalie ate the Sunday rice and peas, Smith says, but when it wasn't home cooking. (NW 167). This sense of alienation is what Homi Bhabha refers to as "ambivalence," the sentiment immigrants comes to experience about their own origins (The Location of Culture 112).

Food in NW is also about how people present and interrogate who and what they are day-to-day. Lots of different cultures in the neighborhood, which comes out in the food. There, among other things, are Caribbean jerk chicken and Polish pastries. These are the places that make the characters feel better, but they also demonstrate how cruel life can be. Leah and her

friends gather to eat at nearby restaurants, and they don't just talk about the food. They talk about their problems. Smith's depictions of the markets and food stalls show London's vibrant tapestry of cultures. At the same time, they reveal how different people in advanced urban centers accommodate differences through food (Back and Solomos 45). In cities too, access to food is usually a matter of class, Smith says. And the few places near Leah that she can get food aren't good for her, like her being at risk of becoming obese or getting diabetes. This supports commentators who write about "food deserts," poor parts of a city where it's difficult to get access to fresh, nutritious food (Crawford 139). For Smith, food is not only personal, it also reveals how social systems fail people.

Leah and Natalie's divergent diets illustrate how class influences eating patterns. What Natalie does is use food as a way to transcend her amateur standing, to show that she belongs in the professional world. Leah's dinners, by contrast, indicate that she has learned how to get by. This is neatly conveyed in a scene in which Natalie goes to see Leah: "Leah's cupboards were filled with tins and packets that Natalie barely recognised, and she felt a painful sense of pride in how frugal they were. (NW 189). Food here is imbued with pride in survival beneath the sadness of what had to be left behind. Smith also employs food to illustrate how women cope with their obligations both in the family and in society. Many of the women in the story are cooking for their families, either because they want to and it's an act of love, or because it's how you show everyone who's boss. Leah's mum shows she loves her by cooking for her, even though Leah doesn't always enjoy it. The Big Test Natalie has a hard time keeping track of her food because she's a mom and a worker. Feminist theorist Sara Ruddick discusses "maternal thinking" in which cooking is a form of critical care and responsibility (37). Smith demonstrates the imprint food leaves on women's lives over time.

Finally, NW represents food as a symbol of the modern city and what it contains: mess, mix, contradiction. Fast food and trendy health food are followed by Caribbean. Smith doesn't make this multiculturalism sound cool. Instead, she demonstrates that food can make visible differences in power, and battles over who we are. In its short history, food in NW is about more than feeding people; it is about class, race, gender and memory. With the meals and the food choices of her characters, Smith demonstrates how difficult it is to get inside, and how painful it is to get outside. The food you eat also helps articulate who you are, where you're from and where you are going. It can be clarifying, but it also can be mystifying. People come together, but we also see the walls between people.

Conclusion: How Food Reflects Identity in Zadie Smith's Novels

In Zadie Smith's books, food is more than just something people eat; it stands for bigger issues like who people are, where they come from, and how they fit into their culture, class, and race. Food is shown as a powerful way for people to fit in or stand out in White Teeth, Swing Time, and NW. In White Teeth, it's the family meals; in Swing Time, it's the tension between cultures; and in NW, it's the food scenes in cities.Smith's stories fit in well with ideas from important people. According to Stuart Hall, identity is "a production that is never complete" (Hall, Cultural Identity and Diaspora 223). This goes along with Smith's characters, who are always changing and redefining themselves based on what they eat or

don't eat. Homi Bhabha's idea of "ambivalence" in hybrid identities (The Location of Culture 112) also fits, especially when characters are torn between sticking to their food traditions and wanting to try new, modern options. You can see this back-and-forth in a lot of little things, like when a kid doesn't want to eat Jamaican food at school or when Natalie has mixed feelings about "health food" in NW.
Food also helps us remember things and pass on our culture. Marianne Hirsch's "postmemory" theory (Family Frames 22) explains how kids and grandkids keep up food habits from the past, even if they didn't directly experience those histories themselves. But it can be hard to keep these old traditions alive because of poverty, moving to new places, or the effects of global capitalism. Smith also uses ideas from Edward Said's Orientalism (2003), especially in Swing Time, where she shows how Western views can make food and people from other cultures seem strange or marketable, especially when it comes to charity work in Africa.In Smith's stories, class and gender also change how food works. Pierre Bourdieu's Distinction (1984) helps us understand how food choices can show social status or ambition, which is something we can clearly see in NW. Sara Ruddick's idea of "maternal thinking" (Maternal Thinking 1989) is an example of a feminist view that shows how cooking can be an act of love, identity, or even control, especially in families and between women and their children.Smith doesn't make multicultural cities look perfect. Instead, she shows food as part of a messy and often hard mix of cultures. Her characters find comfort and trouble in their meals. Food can bring people together, but it can also make them think about how different they are.

Smith wields food as a potent symbol to address how today’s world — awash in differences and flux — has shaped the way that people construct their identities. Meals aren’t simply an act of consumption but a way of telling stories, of displaying struggles, of connecting us to a past, our own and other people’s. That food is also the story of how people try to belong to the society around them or distinguish themselves from it, and how they recall where they come from when they’re thinking about where they’re going. By concentrating on food, Smith adds layers to her characters and vibrancy to their worlds. She illustrates how something as elemental as what we eat can be a way of illuminating who we are and where we are in the world, how some of us crave attention and others cherish privacy, how against-the-grain choices can bring harmony rather than strife.

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