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## Global Flows and Local Voices in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* *Zadie Smith'in White Teeth Eserindeki Küresel Akışlar ve Yerel Sesler*

### Abstract

This article investigates how Doreen Massey's concepts of *A Global Sense of Place and Geographies of Power* can be applied to Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) to analyze the dynamic construction of locality in multicultural London. By depicting intersecting lives across ethnic, cultural, and generational divides, Smith's novel presents London as a fluid and contested space shaped by global migration, history, and power flows. The study examines how the novel translates the city's audiovisual textures—urban landscapes, voices, and cultural signifiers—into narrative form. Massey's framework enables a reading of *White Teeth* where locality is viewed not as fixed or nostalgic, but as a site of mobility, interaction, and conflict. This approach emphasizes how Smith's portrayal of North London captures the complexities of globalization and redefines the literary representation of place.

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### Öz

Bu çalışma, Doreen Massey'nin *Küresel Bir Yer Duygusu ve Güç Coğrafyaları* kavramlarının Zadie Smith'in *White Teeth* (2000) romanına nasıl uygulanabileceğini inceleyerek, çokkültürlü Londra'da yerelliğin dinamik inşasını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Farklı etnik, kültürel ve nesiller arası kesişen yaşamları tasvir eden Smith'in romanı, Londra'yı küresel göç, tarih ve güç akışlarıyla şekillenen akışkan ve tartışmalı bir mekân olarak sunmaktadır. Çalışma, kentin görsel-işitsel dokularını—kentsel manzaralar, sesler ve kültürel simgeler—roman formuna nasıl aktardığını incelemektedir. Massey'nin kavramları, eserdeki yerelliğin sabit veya nostaljik değil, hareketlilik, etkileşim ve çatışma alanı olarak anlaşılmasını sağlar. Bu yaklaşım, Smith'in Kuzey Londra tasvirinin küreselleşmenin karmaşıklıklarını nasıl yakaladığını ve mekânın edebi temsilini nasıl yeniden tanımladığını vurgulamaktadır.

### Keywords

Local voices, audiovisual locality in literature, audiovisual texture, multiculturalism

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Yerel sesler, edebiyatta görsel-işitsel yerellik, görsel-işitsel doku, çokkültürlülük

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## Introduction

Doreen Massey presents the concept of a global sense of place and geographies of power, which enable us to understand how cultural, social, and economic relationships shape places. *White Teeth*'s vivid reflection of these concepts is in the fluid and multidimensional representation of identity and place. Massey contends that areas are not fixed but rather shaped constantly by worldwide links. For example, Smith underlines London's variety, where people negotiate their identities amid migration and cultural interactions (Hossain, 2016). Their diasporic origins shape their views of home, showing that location is a dynamic combination of past and current influences.

Moreover, Leetsch and Leetsch (2021) note that Smith highlights the interdependence of people by using the subject of love, thereby reflecting the global connections that shape their lives. This illustrates how relationships across multiple cultures challenge the notion of a stable identity or a single location, aligning closely with Massey's viewpoint. The book thereby reveals how the many tales and experiences of London's people shape its sense of place.

Building on this, Toth (2016) characterizes London as a dynamic character in itself, always engaging with the life developing inside it. This aligns with Massey's perspective that social and physical environments are interconnected, with neighborhoods having a significant influence on human identities, employing common narratives and practices. The book also examines power interactions, suggesting that these interrelationships involve struggles for authority and identity. Ciyiltepe (2017) criticizes the neoliberal environment even more, highlighting how certain voices are marginalized, a theme evident in characters like Archie and Samad, who face social pressure in their identity battles.

Pérez Fernández (2009) emphasizes the significant role that cultural background plays in shaping relationships and personal growth. The characters' sense of belonging is shaped by their family and cultural pasts, thereby showing that identity is profoundly rooted in legacy. Smith's story also reflects Massey's claim that location is always changing with time; past events and shared narratives shape people's views of space (Rappen, 2023). According to Siccardi (2022), people seek sanctuary in specific locations and relationships that represent their quest for identity and security within the geographical fabric.

All things considered, Massey's ideas offer insightful analysis of how *White Teeth* presents location as an active, changing creation formed by world linkages and power relations. Smith emphasizes that location is not only geographical, but a reflection of connected narratives, relationships, and social forces in a globalized society by means of the characters' tales, hence presenting a rich tapestry of hybrid identities.

## The Reflection of Doreen Massey's Concepts of *A Global Sense of Place and Geographies of Power* in the Novel *The White Teeth* by Zadie Smith

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) is a multi-generational, multicultural novel set primarily in North London. It weaves the intertwined stories of two families—the working-class English Joneses and the Bangladeshi Muslim Iqbals—as they navigate issues of migration, identity, history, and belonging. The novel explores the legacies of colonialism and globalization, illustrating how personal and collective histories shape individual lives within a contemporary urban landscape. Smith depicts North London as a dense cultural mosaic where different ethnicities, religions, and ideologies collide and coexist. The characters' struggles to reconcile personal aspirations with inherited cultural expectations make the novel an exemplary narrative to examine through the lens of Doreen Massey's *A Global Sense of Place and Geographies of Power* (1994).

An outstanding geographer, Doreen Massey has significantly enhanced our understanding of space, place, and their interplay with identity and community in a globalized society. Her ideas of a global sense of place and geographies of power provide valuable tools for examining how these topics influence modern society. Emphasizing that our knowledge of locales must encompass more global interactions, Massey claims that “places are not fixed containers but actively and constantly shaped by social, political, and economic forces” (Massey, 2008: 269). Massey emphasizes that individual identities and community relationships are formed not just by local conditions but also by global influences, as she proposes that “a global feeling of place allows us to reflect on ways in which local events are linked to global processes” (Massey, 2008: 271). For instance, in *White Teeth*, the neighborhoods of London mirror global trends—migrant pasts, cultural interactions, and economic changes—that shape people's views of their city. Smith shows this interconnection by saying, “London was a place where identities intersected as freely as the trains crossing the city,” therefore highlighting how global trends get ingrained in local areas and particular identities (Smith, 2000:173).

Moreover, Smith underlines that a fluid and constantly changing view of communities should be recognized; Massey calls this “space as a process rather than a fixed container” (Massey, 2005: 3). Set against this transition, people like Samad and Archie negotiate their multifaceted identities throughout the book, showing that “social and cultural exchanges constantly negotiate the borders of community and self.” Reinforcing this, Massey states that “the global feeling is not a commodity to be owned but an experience that makes places alive and interconnected” (Massey, 2008: 272). Smith's portrayal of London as a patchwork of varied narratives supports this, indicating that “the streets knew the secrets of its inhabitants better than they did themselves,” a tribute to the dynamic interaction between location and identity (Smith, 2000: 233).

Massey's concept of geographies of power emphasizes how spatial disparities are shaped by social forces and institutions. She says that "Power is never simple or direct; it is always located and relational," (Massey, 2008: 273). In *White Teeth*, this is clear in the differences between rich and poor areas—both physically and symbolically—where access to resources shapes individual and societal identities. The difficulties of people like Samad, for instance, mirror how "inequality in space is also inequality in opportunity and voice" (Massey, 1998: 50). Such physical divides support the intricate web of influence that shapes personal experiences and perceptions inside the city.

Massey also explains how globalization changes our view of distance via the idea of spatial compression. She clarifies that "global processes such as migration, communication, and transport create a sense of immediacy and proximity" (Massey, 2005: 4). Characters in *White Teeth* remain connected across countries through technology and travel, hence allowing identities to be formed by both local origins and worldwide impact. "Love in London grew in the space between distance and proximity," Smith writes, stressing how globalization creates hybrid identities anchored in a web of linked locales (Smith, 2000: 481).

Massey connects to multicultural societies and explains how "cultural identities are plural and fluid, emerging from several geographic and historical contexts" (Massey, 1994: 81). *White Teeth* shows this through its varied character origins, which produce hybrid identities "a collage of global stories and local histories" (Smith, 2000: 436). Smith shows this combination when Millat says, "Home is where the heart is, even if it's not where you were born," capturing the layered complexity of community and identity, which Massey calls "a constantly reconfigured space of several histories" (Smith, 2000: 439). Massey also underlines the need for political agency—spaces are arenas where power relations play out and shape identities. She argues that communities can redesign their spaces and combat injustices by employing collective action. Massey claims that "recognizing interconnectedness can turn places into sites of resistance and renewal" (Massey, 2008: 274). Characters like Samad and Archie rally around their identities, defying societal conventions and claiming their place within the city's fabric, thereby highlighting how power, resistance, and community intersect in shaping spatial existence.

Massey provides optimism that communities can flourish despite the difficulties caused by globalization by means of understanding their interdependence. People may build inclusive, strong communities when they understand their position inside the larger worldwide system. Massey concludes that "our knowledge of place has to include the acknowledgment of its fluidity, its capacity for renewal through group effort" (Massey, 2008: 275).

Essentially, Massey's ideas of a worldwide sense of place and geographies of power profoundly enrich our knowledge of *White Teeth* by showing how local-global interactions constantly change individuals and collective identities. Her work emphasizes the intricacy of spatial relationships in a society where social, political, and economic forces actively create and recreate place, an awareness essential for negotiating our linked existence.

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* begins not only with a story bang but also with a profoundly symbolic act, which is Archie Jones' thwarted suicide, a moment that becomes the basis for rebirth in a globalized metropolitan environment. Massey's ideas—especially the worldwide sense of place and geographies of power—resonate particularly well here since Archie's crises are spatialized in Cricklewood Broadway, a symbol of fleeting urban living. "Cricklewood was no kind of place. It was not a place a man came to die. It was a place a man came to go other places [...]" Smith (2000: 3) highlights Massey's concept that locations are not static but crossroads of movement, migration, and flux.

According to Massey, Archie's collapse takes place at a "node" inside more general world events. His suicide attempt, carried out on a harsh urban street rather than in nature, reflects Massey's disdain for static, romanticized landscapes. His rescue by Mo Hussein-Ishmael, a South Asian origin butcher brandishing a cleaver and yelling cricket scores, transforms death into fresh involvement in multicultural existence. In this moment, Smith's use of humor simultaneously deconstructs and emphasizes the seriousness of the urban postcolonial situation. Massey claims, "places are constructed out of particular sets of social relations which interact at a variety of spatial scales" (Massey, 2008: 271).

Archie's North London is a field of contested identities and changing alliances, a place where Massey's geographies of power are realized, not just a background. Mo's halal butcher shop's dynamics show that no environment is ideologically neutral; there, pigeons, religion, delivery areas, and suicidal white men interact. "The shit is not the shit... the pigeon is the shit," Mo says, allegorizing the underlying spatial politics of immigration and cultural surveillance (Smith, 2000: 6). Massey would see this as a limited manifestation of the uneven power geometries forming urban life.

Archie's time at O'Connell's—"you could walk through that door with nothing and be the same as everybody else" (Smith, 2000: 528)—moreover, points to the transient suspension of identification categories. Massey, however, cautions against such idealistic interpretations: no area is free from historical and worldwide influences. O'Connell's social neutrality is always just ephemeral, always overshadowed by inherited class, race, and gender hierarchies.

Archie's reinsertion into a dynamic, complex metropolis starts when his suicide attempt is interrupted. Massey's theory holds that locations acquire meaning employing the convergence of several paths; Archie, with his failed marriage, Olympic disappointment, and colonial war memories, personifies the friction of those clashing pasts.

Even the pictures of combat in the book, especially Archie's feeble wartime accomplishments, call Massey's criticism of fixed national narratives to mind. The book poses rhetorically, "What have you done in life, then?" (Smith, 2000: 15). As Massey would say, Archie's identity is always partial, hidden in the "simultaneity of stories-so-far." Similarly, his connection with Samad Iqbal, a fellow WWII veteran now re-rooted in England, shows diasporic nostalgia transformed by local urban context. Dramatizing Massey's idea of spatial plurality, their

poker sessions woven with tales of regret and rebirth show that “she [Ophelia] is born, she lives, simply in the wrong time!” Samad finds craziness not in the mind but in temporal-spatial mismatch, he says (Smith, 2000: 25).

Archie’s last image, reincarnated after his botched suicide, circling the Swiss Cottage roundabout “laughing like a loon,” reflects the affirmation of chance, improvisation, and spatial regeneration of the book. This corresponds exactly with Massey’s appeal for openness and plurality in place-making. “Place is a process, not static,” she says; Archie, now “a new Archie,” enters a new relational geography—unfixed, improvisational, but profoundly rooted in the interconnecting histories of Britain and her former colonies (Smith, 2000: 20).

## Conclusion

Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* provides a powerful literary exploration of how global flows and local voices shape the geography of multicultural London, a dynamic that Doreen Massey’s spatial theories help illuminate. Massey’s (1994) concept of a “global sense of place” asserts that places are not fixed, insular entities but rather interconnected arenas where global forces and local practices intersect and evolve. In this context, Smith’s depiction of North London challenges any essentialist view of place as stable or pure, foregrounding the novel’s characters as agents navigating shifting social terrains marked by histories of migration, colonial legacies, and cultural hybridity. Through characters like Millat, Irie, and Magid, Smith demonstrates the uneven experiences of diasporic communities within North London’s layered socio-political landscape, reflecting Massey’s notion of “power geometries” (Massey, 1994). The schoolyard at Glenard Oak, with its “land within land” divisions (Smith, 2000, p. 535), exemplifies how even ostensibly everyday spaces are shaped by intersecting networks of power, race, class, and cultural affiliation. These fragmented micro-geographies within the school resonate with Cresswell’s (2015) view of place as inherently political, where territoriality and boundary-making serve as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Similarly, Smith’s portrayal of O’Connell’s pub as a space where patrons shed visible markers of identity—yet cannot entirely escape the broader urban structures influencing their lives—echoes Massey’s insistence that no space is ever truly neutral (Massey, 2005). This mirrors Appadurai’s (1996) argument that modern urban spaces are sites of tension between global deterritorialization and localized belonging, producing moments of both solidarity and dissonance among diverse actors. *White Teeth* embodies what McLeod (2019) calls the postcolonial city, where characters’ sense of “home” is continuously reconfigured through encounters with both London’s multicultural realities and their diasporic longings. Irie’s idealization of Jamaica as an Edenic homeland (Smith, 2000: 514) aligns with Massey’s critique of spatial essentialism, where places are mythologized as pure or original, masking the complex entanglements of history and power that shape them (Soja, 2010). The novel reflects Massey’s call for an understanding of place as a “constellation of processes”—a nexus where stories, power structures, and global movements

collide and coexist (Massey, 1994). In this reading, *White Teeth* transcends its role as a story of individual lives to become a commentary on the socio-spatial configurations of postcolonial London itself. It foregrounds the importance of relationality and multiplicity in how we read both urban spaces and cultural identities, underscoring the inseparability of place, history, and global forces.

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