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Intersectionality and Narrative Form: Race and Power in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between intersectionality and narrative structure in Zadie Smith's (2005) novel *On Beauty* and how race and power are represented. Although previous literature has touched upon various themes, such as cosmopolitanism, liberalism, and diasporic identity within the novel, there is little focus on how intersectionality is applied in the novel as a cohesive analytical approach. To fill this gap, the current research relies on the theory of intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and the concept of the matrix of domination developed by Patricia Hill Collins (1990) to examine four interconnected dimensions: Racial Oppression, interlocking oppression, double bind, and intersectional invisibility. This study explores the functioning of these concepts at both the thematic and formal levels of the novel through a close textual analysis. It claims that the contradictions of race and power are actively created by the irony, free indirect discourse, and narrative ambivalence used by Smith and not merely represented. This analysis shows that the reproduction of systems of racial and gendered inequality is carried out at the institutional, social, and intimate levels, which involves both privileged and marginalised characters in the same system of domination. This study contributes to the scholarship on literature and culture by pre-emptively indicating the importance of narrative form in the formation of intersectional experience in a more conceptually rigorous and formally sensitive approach to the study of *On Beauty*. It also emphasises the significance of infusing theoretical accuracy with close reading in interpreting race in modern fiction.

Keywords: Intersectionality, narrative form, oppression, race, Zadie Smith

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INTRODUCTION

This study claims that Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* (2005) is not a race novel in

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liberal academic circles, but a literary enquiry that persists over time on how interrelated systems of oppression are both marginalising, invisible, and silencing Black subjects, specifically Black women. Inspired by Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theorisation of intersectionality and Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) concept of the matrix of domination, we argue that the narrative form employed by Smith-its irony, dialogism, and use of free indirect discourse–actively brings about the ambivalences and contradictions which intersectional theory aims to name. Instead of providing direct critiques of how racism is perpetuated, Smith directs all her characters, including the Black conservative Monty Kipps and the liberal white academic Howard Belsey, to reproduce racial and gender hierarchies. The present reading addresses a particular gap in the current scholarship: whereas the ideas of cosmopolitanism, liberalism, and diasporic femininity in the novel have been studied by a variety of critics, such as Batra (2010), Taheri (2017), and Siccardi (2020), no one has presented the four interconnecting notions of intersectionality, matrix of domination, double bind, and intersection invisibility as a unified critical framework for the text.

Race, identity, ethnicity, equal rights, oppression, and stereotypes remain subjects of urgent debate in contemporary society. Race is a historically dominant social construct. The term 'racism' was coined in the 1930s as a reaction to the Nazi project aimed at making Germany *judenrein*, or free of Jews (Rattansi, 2020). The term's meaning is complex, encompassing various cognate ideologies such as ethnocentrism, nationalism, and xenophobia. In the nineteenth century, Robert Knox published *The Races of Men* (1850), asserting that race was the key concept for understanding human variation, while the French count Arthur de Gobineau regarded the history of every social order as the result of conquest by a dominant race, producing a bourgeois class of mixed origins and a lower class formed through miscegenation (Rattansi, 2020).In the United States, it is estimated that Europeans or whites are the ancestors of more than three-quarters of the African American population. During the era of slavery, white plantation owners exploited enslaved Black women, asserting their sexual rights over them. The uncertain status of mixed-race children gave rise to racial classifications such as 'Sambo' and 'meamelou,' associated with the principle of hypodescent, whereby children of mixed unions are automatically assigned to the group with a lower social status—an ideology also known as invisible blackness.

Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton popularised the concept of institutional racism in the 1960s in the United States (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967). Institutional racism highlights the structural denial of opportunities and outcomes to Black people, such as inadequate housing, poorly resourced schools, lower educational achievement, and employment discrimination, which create cycles of unemployment, criminalisation, and neighbourhood deprivation. Police,

courts, and legal institutions became systematically biased, and Black children grew up in environments that stereotyped and destabilised their aspirations, producing what Carmichael and Hamilton identified as the reproduction of white dominance across generations.

Racism and nationalism are mutually constitutive. Hobsbawm argues that nationalism was a product of what he calls the 'dual revolution'—the French and Industrial Revolutions. Alongside this formation, racism was formed, and it remains a persistent challenge. Expanding on this, Balibar argues that national identity has no choice but to be identified with race, such that the dimensions of history, culture and politics of a nation are racialised (Miles & Brown, 2004). This can be termed nationalistic pluralism, whereby the line between we and they are never well outlined. This study examines Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory and its relevance to the interplay of various forms of oppression, such as racism and sexism, in Zadie Smith's novel *On Beauty*. Nominated for the 2005 Man Booker Prize, Smith's novel illustrates racist stereotypes, discrimination, and cultural diversity in high-end academic institutions, while also unveiling that discrimination is not only perpetrated by white characters but also by elite black characters. As Crenshaw (1989) defines it, intersectionality is "a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that are not understood among conventional ways of thinking." We use Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality and Collins's (1990) matrix of domination to assert that Smith deals with social stratification and race as multiple social memberships of characters that experience in ways that a single-axis approach cannot explain. Intersectionality cannot be used in the same context as diversity; it is an instrument for comprehending the unseen power dynamics and how they contribute to the creation of structural inequality (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989). To examine *On Beauty* thoroughly, we dwell on four theoretical lenses: interlocking oppression, matrix of domination, double bind, and intersectional invisibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Smith's literary works are based on various themes of race, culture, society, and family relations, exploring the nuances and issues of racial experiences in modern multicultural communities. *On Beauty,* which was published in 2005, a novel, based on the novels of E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, is about the conservative policy of elite universities and the mental traumatisation of deprived Black children and suggests a re-evaluation of citizenship, race and plural nationalism (Amine, 2006). Smith's honest and reflective treatment of identity and race has become central to conversations about contemporary society in the UK. As a woman and writer of colour, she explores culture in literary spheres that are exclusive and restrictive, using playful wit and vibrant narratives to comprehend complex themes

of race, class, and culture. She described her own sense of community in terms that prefigure intersectional analysis: "My trouble is I can't think of community in the singular. Doesn't everyone exist in a Venn diagram of overlapping allegiances and interests?" (Cronan, 2022). As a regular contributor to *The New Yorker* and The *New York Review of Books*, her prose captures the nuances and cadences of Northwest London, demonstrating her mastery of tone, subjectivity, and compartmentalisation of experience (Magee, 2012). Cronan (2022) argues that Smith's ideas are idiosyncratic and authentic, breathing life into characters who form portraits of contemporary life, combining societal and existential concerns through writing that engages identity politics at a genuinely political level, rather than merely personal.

Research Gap Present Contribution

Existing scholarship *On Beauty* has approached the novel through various critical lenses. Batra (2010) examines the novel in terms of cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, and Black Studies, arguing that it negotiates different versions of Black diasporic belonging. Taheri (2017) reads it as a liberal fairy tale that exposes the limits of multicultural idealism. Siccardi (2020) focuses on Smith's treatment of women and domestic space in *White Teeth*, *On Beauty*, and *NW*. Lopez (2010) examines the death of aesthetic relish within academic culture as it is depicted in the novel, while Hale (2012) interrogates the novel's own engagement with aesthetic theory. Lanone (2007) situates it in relation to E. M. Forster's legacy and Tew (2013) provides a broader overview of Smith's first decade of fiction. Studies of diasporic hybridity (Pourgharib & Pourya Asl, 2022) and of gendered ideological representation (Setiadi et al., 2023) have likewise shown the value of identity-centred readings of fiction. However, none of these studies has brought together the four theoretical concepts of interlocking oppression, the matrix of domination, the double bind, and intersectional invisibility as a unified analytical framework for the novel. This study aims to fill this gap. By treating these four concepts as interlocking rather than synonymous, and by attending to the novel's own formal strategies, its irony, free indirect discourse, and dialogic structure, we produce a more rigorous intersectional reading than those currently available in the literature on Smith.

Theoretical Background

The social framework of discrimination and white privilege is shaped by colonial legacies that constitute power relations. Intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) as a critical response to the single-axis approach prevalent in anti-discrimination law and anti-racist politics and the idea that the experiences of Black women could not be explained through the lens of single-axis analysis (race or gender). She also contends that intersectionality is a metaphor that can be used to explain how various kinds of inequality are multiplied and form impediments that are invisible to traditional thought. One should not

confuse the intersectionality as formulated by Crenshaw (1989) with similar but conceptually different models elaborated by other Black feminist intellectuals. Although Crenshaw's (1988) writings are more scholarly oriented on the subject of discrimination and structural analysis, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) conceived the idea of the matrix of domination in Black Feminist Thought to explain how race, class, and gender are all systems of oppression that work together at the individual, cultural, and institutional levels. The matrix of domination created by Collins (1990) builds upon Crenshaw's (1989) intersectional analysis. It asserts that these systems are not additive but constitutive of each other in generating distinctive forms of power and subordination. This paper relies on both theorists, but with this analytical distinction: we will apply Crenshaw's framework to discuss the structural and legal aspects of oppression and Collins's matrix of domination to explain the patterns of institutional and cultural oppression which are deeply rooted in the novel.

The idea of the so-called double bind, used in intersectional studies (Remedios & Snyder, 2018), is a case where an individual who is marginalised in more than one way is presented with conflicting and mutually supporting demands, whereby one response could only be considered a loss. Intersectional invisibility (Remedios & Snyder, 2018) is the term that explains how the subjects who are at the intersection of the various marginalised categories, such as Black women, become invisible exactly because they do not conform to the image of the prototypical member of any of the subordinated categories. These four concepts in combination provide an analytical scaffold for the close reading of the novel that follows. The segments of the diversity wheel overlap in systems and structures that define one's experience, personality, and identity. The main dimensions of age, ethnicity, and gender are constructed at the centre of the circle. The second layer includes the social, cultural, and environmental aspects under which family, community, nationality, and belief are the components of the individual. The outer circle explains the institutional framework and systemic obstacles within which the person functions (Scottish Government, 2022). Intersectionality is directly related to social inequality. Marginalisation, suppression, discrimination, and stereotyping are not just interpersonal failures; they are structural conditions that Black people are subjected to in society. Crenshaw (1989) opines that social categorisations were established initially during the onset of racial modernity and have been solidified by rules and policies that officially embrace equality but continue to uphold the racial hierarchy. Socialisation between various communities occurs within the framework of society, where power is the prevailing aspect. Intersectionality acknowledges all inequalities and their development in a variety of social categories (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Rosette et al., 2018). According to Crenshaw (1988), the main reason why racial discrimination persists is due to the stubborn tenacity of

white dominance, which is enshrined in the American legal and socioeconomic order (Coaston, 2019). Oppressed groups are excluded from society, and intersectionality is the main tool of analysis for how to bring out and question the structural roots of inequality, although civil rights are officially enacted.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Research Objectives

Based on Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theorisation of interlocking oppressions and intersectional invisibility and Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) matrix of domination, this study investigates the various forms of oppression, each interacting with the others to produce multifaceted experiences in *On Beauty*. In particular, the paper addresses the co-occurring experiences of racism and sexism and the re-enactment of white superiority over people of colour in institutions and intimate relationships.

Methods

This study represents a close textual analysis of the novel using intersectionality theory. Crenshaw (1989) and Collins's (1990) critical concepts of interlocking oppression, intersectional invisibility, and the matrix of domination were operationalised as separate analytical tools instead of being interchangeable. Interlocking oppression is the co-commensurability of various subordination systems and their mutual reinforcement. These systems are embedded in the overall social structure, which is referred to as the matrix of domination (Collins, 2000). The term double bind refers to a no-win situation created for the occupants of overlapping marginalised identities. Intersectional invisibility refers to the invisibility of people with complex identities that cannot be subordinated to any one prototype of marginalisation. The four lenses are used by persistently closely reading chosen scenes, paying attention to narrative structure, characterisation, dialogue, irony, and the formal ambivalences of the novel.

Materials

The novel *On Beauty* by Zadie Smith (2005) is the main source of information for the current research. The novel was chosen because it directly deals with humanist issues and reveals the difficulties of existing in the world of white privilege. This is highly relevant to this research as it describes the most profound forms of racism that Black characters go through, in particular, Haitian-origin Blacks in the United Kingdom, and describes all types of racism: individual, active, passive, cultural, and institutional.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On Beauty investigates the issue of racism by juxtaposing the lives of two families (the Belseys and the Kippses) whose varying attitudes to race, social status, and identity help us understand how racism functions at the individual and systemic levels. The novel explores the complex racial conflicts present in elite American universities. Through Kiki Belsey, a Black woman married to a white

intellectual, Smith shows how a Black woman is placed in the middle between being an insider and an outsider in the academic world of her husband and has to consider the needs of other people more than her own. The various types of oppression and marginalisation that are revealed by the lives of Kiki and her children on the one hand and the family of Monty Kipps on the other are structured by the ironic narrative framework of the novel that never seeks to resolve the contradictions that it reveals. There are various forms of racism in the novel, and all the characters are interrelated in exclusion and marginalisation one way or another. The significance of race in the novel is ambivalent: Smith does not present heroic black characters and villainous whites only. On the contrary, she holds all her characters, even Black characters who reproduce hierarchies of class, gender and belonging, responsible for what Collins (2000) terms the matrix of domination.

The intersectional invisibility of Kiki is formed at the beginning, and with a bang. By hosting a party in her own house among white educated elites, she imagines how she will be viewed by them as a black woman in a head wrap, walking around with a bottle in one hand and a plate of food in the other as a maid in an old movie (Smith, 2005). This scene of self-objectification has a formal role: free indirect discourse enables Smith to allow the reader to be inside the alienation of self that Kiki experiences, to see the mechanism of internalisation and reproduction of racial stereotypes by the white gaze. The image of the 'maid in an old movie' does not arise from malice but from the accumulated cultural grammar of a white-dominated social world, which Crenshaw et al. (2019) describe as "practices, networks, and other social interactions that predictably reproduced white dominance across the social terrain." Kiki experiences racial stereotyping and microaggression by the academic peers of her husband, who view her as the representative of the whole African American population, not as an individual, and resorts to humour, withdrawal, and assertion as her coping strategies. As Crenshaw (1989) argues, racial identity is not a personal issue of prejudice but a deeply rooted issue in institutional practices and cultural conventions; intersectionality points out the interrelationship of race and sex as mutually constitutive identities.

Crenshaw (1989) thinks that the difficulty of being Black in a white-dominated world is partly that any racist comment may be directed any way, and it is hard to demonstrate and justify the presence of structural inequality. She is a feminist who supports structural transformation and the breaking down of racist institutions (Crenshaw, 1989). Carl Thomas is a brilliant Black music artist and a street poet accused of stealing a painting in the office of Monty Kipps due to his race, class and identity. Refusing to be educated at the university, humiliated by Howard at the anniversary party of Kiki, he explains his marginalisation: The future is a different country, man. And I still haven't been given a passport (Smith, 2005). Carl symbolises the validation, identity and equal

opportunity of the entire black community. The disillusionment of the society that Carl has been attempting to join is shaped by the matrix of domination structures. Simultaneously, interlocking oppression is also brought out clearly when Carl enters Claire's poetry class without being an enrolled student, creating controversies that highlight the contradictions of belonging.

In her essay, Unmasking Colour-blindness in the Law, Crenshaw suggests that the logics of segregation and racial power are not only based on formal rules but also on practices, networks, and social interactions that predictably reproduce white dominance (Crenshaw et al., 2019). The intersectional invisibility of Kiki is revealed not only through microaggressions but also through structural isolation: being in a mostly white neighbourhood, Kiki is socially deprived of peers. The importance of the interior monologue used by Smith here is important: the loneliness of Kiki is not the expression of self-pity, but rather an expression of a political situation, the work of a spatial and social hierarchy that allocates belonging by racial categories. Her friendship with Mrs. Kipps, despite their husbands' rivalry, symbolises the unity through the experience of the white world. Mrs. Kipps's remark, "There is such a shelter in each other" (Smith, 2005), is not merely an expression of friendship but a recognition of mutual intersectional invisibility. When Mrs. Kipps says, "You have a marvellous face…and the moment I saw you I knew I would like you" (Smith, 2005), she affirms an identity that the white academic world has consistently failed to see. Crenshaw focuses on the intersections of race and gender, highlighting the fact that the social world is constructed on multiple grounds of identity (Crenshaw, 1991). Levi's experience of racial belonging, articulated through his sense of homecoming in a Black neighbourhood

> How strange it was to see streets where everybody was black-nobody looked at him twice
>
> (Smith, 2005)

The irony that Smith has used here as a liberation is that one is not being looked at: the invisibility of Levi in the Black neighbourhood is the exact opposite of the invisibility of Kiki in the white world. The Haitian worker's cause in Wellington and his assistance to the Haitian group are indicative of his adherence to Black identity, which has been in constant conflict due to his mixed-race family life. His interrogative, which is addressed to some conceived Wellington audience, is in the novel translated with very suppressed scorn of liberal universalism.

> That is the question I pose to all fair-minded Wellingtonians today. Are we truly steadfast in our commitment to equality of opportunity, or not? Do we presume to speak of progress when, within these very walls, our policy remains so shamefully hesitant? Are we satisfied that the African American youth of this fair city?
>
> (Smith, 2005)

Levi hails from a mixed-race family and has the privilege of studying at

Wellington University because of his white father; he often wonders whether racism and differences of opinion are related to blackness. His friend Felix from Haiti was, in Levi's description, "blacker than any black man," possessing skin "like slate," yet withholding the "true essence of blackness" in ways that confound simple racial taxonomy. Haiti's history of slavery and oppression is detailed through Levi's engagement with it.

> A country close to America that you never hear about, where thousands of black people have been enslaved, have struggled and died in the streets for their freedom
>
> (Smith, 2005)

Crenshaw's (1991) analysis of the racialised subject draws attention to the fact that people of colour are differently situated across economic, social and political worlds. The model of domination suggested by Collins (2000) comes in quite handy in this case: it designates the structural architecture in which these various positionings of difference are created, not as a consequence of personal prejudice, but as the product of interlocked systems within the institutions of education, employment and criminal justice. The matrix also points to how the dominant groups maintain power and privilege over the marginalised groups through institutional set-ups that seem to be neutral. In the novel, Smith reflects the anguish of this oppression of the Haitian people:

> do not ever sell your soul, my brother… Everybody tries to buy a blackman. But he can't be bought. His day is coming
>
> (Smith, 2005)

This text describes what Collins (2000) describes as the outsider-within stance: the awareness of the persons who are part of the institutional context of conditions that do not recognise their entire humanity. The biggest scene in this respect is the funeral of Mrs Carlene Kipps, which Smith makes a surreal event that suspends the racial hierarchy in the moment. Jerome observes:

> You can tell she knew every type of person. Can you imagine a funeral—or any other event—like this, back home?"
>
> (Smith, 2005)

The story of Smith here is typically ironic: when there is democratic mixing at the funeral, the contrast is the segregation of common social life. Death is the only place in the novel where race is not used as a principle of exclusion, a darkly comical critique of the liberal university world. It is the visit of Howard to his parents after the funeral that leads to an episode of interlocking oppression: the father of Howard, not able to accept Kiki, expresses the logic of racial hierarchy in open-mindedness: "You couldn't expect black people to develop mentally like white people do" (Smith, 2005), and, on hearing that Kiki has found comfort elsewhere, attributes this to a racial essence: "It's their nature" (Smith, 2005). The fact that Smith puts this

racism in the mouth of an Englishman of the working class is formally important: it sends the liberal homogenisation of racism, that it is a condition of the uneducated, home on its head, when Howard himself behaves so with Kiki, that he is indifferent to her, that he thinks her intellectually inferior to him. Crenshaw states that racism and sexism are interconnected forms of interlocking oppression, especially as experienced by Black women in every aspect of their lives, both personally and professionally; Black women live through discrimination and marginalisation shaped by both race and gender (Crenshaw, 2006). Howard met his wife Kiki as a young nursing student, when her beauty was, in the novel's phrase, "natural, honest, powerful, unmediated, and full of genuine desire." Although she was not one of Howard's intellectual peers, she was politically engaged and feminine. Later, Howard became intolerant of her weight gain and ageing, his dislike expressing itself through an affair with Claire Malcolm, a white colleague:

> In the spring it was someone, a nameless someone, it was a one-night stand—now it's Claire Malcolm. It went on for weeks!
>
> (Smith, 2005)

After Howard's affair extended to Mr. Kipps's daughter, Victoria, Kiki left him to reflect on his mistakes. She tolerated the matrix of white domination, the oppression of her educated white colleagues, and marginalisation in the white community, yet Howard failed to perceive her needs as a Black woman. His white superiority is evident in his journey to England to prevent Jerome's relationship with Victoria because of her Black heritage. Victoria's praise of Kiki to Howard— "She's like a Queen. Imperious-looking…Like an African Queen" (Smith, 2005)—is an instance of the novel's formal irony: Victoria affirms Kiki's dignity in terms that Howard cannot hear, because his white liberal consciousness is structured precisely by the invisibility of that dignity. The double bind here is sharp: Kiki is praised for her queenly bearing at the very moment when her husband is conducting an affair with the woman praising her.

Jerome's and Victoria's relationship is established at the opening of the novel, with Jerome finding in the Kipps household an adaptability and belonging that his own family has not provided: "I love living here. It's a different universe" (Smith, 2005); "The Kippses continue to grow on me" (Smith, 2005). When Monty suggested that minority groups often claim equal rights they have not received, Jerome found himself identifying with the minority position; when Michael argued that being Black was merely "an accidental matter of pigment," Jerome began to reckon with his own mixed-race identity. The novel insists, through Jerome's experience, that 'accidental pigment' has material consequences in a world that distributes opportunities along racial lines.

Crenshaw (1991) mentions that individuals experience marginalisation within their own marginalised groups, leading to isolation and exclusion. The social isolation of Kiki spreads even to her

family: her children deprive her of the right to communicate with Mrs. Kipps, making the Kipps family the adversary in the academic battle between Howard and Mrs. Kipps. It is a moment of quiet bitterness on the part of Smith, of how the children recreate the logics of male academic rivalry by policing their mother's social world. Kiki's response—"You all have your life, and I have no life?" (Smith, 2005). This reaction is not a melodrama. It is an accurate expression of intersectional invisibility: the Black woman, whose desires and needs are made invisible by the needs of those who surround her. Kiki's social isolation intensifies as she declares, "My whole life is White" (Smith, 2005). She notes that the only Black people she sees in her day-to-day life are those cleaning floors in the Wellington College café or pushing hospital beds- a spatial arrangement of bodies that renders the matrix of domination material. It is not merely a lament of solitude which she witnesses but a sort of structural study. The physical space of the institution reproduces the racial hierarchy by determining which bodies are visible, where, and in what forms.

Crenshaw argues, "If you are a woman, then you are more victimised than a man, and if you are black, then you are more victimised than if you were white" (Coaston, 2019). Kiki describes herself as the only Black woman in the Wellington Choir, which she considers to be an army of the devil, where the white members are in the position of critical judgment. Jerome's entire involvement in the white choir music gives Kiki mixed feelings of pride and shame:

> After all, how many other young black men would even show up to something like this, I wouldn't be surprised to find that there is not one in this whole crowd
>
> (Smith, 2005)

It is the intersection of the matrix of white domination, interlocking oppression, and the double bind, and the intersectional invisibility that all come together in the voice of Kiki here. The fact that Jerome was included and at the same time Black was not in the white elite community underlines the duality of the intersectionally marginalised subject: it is a cause of joy to be included and at the same time a cause of grief to be excluded. Kiki's message to the Black community carries a weight of accumulated experience:

> And there's no big secret, not at all, you need to have faith, I guess, and you need to counter the dismal self-image that black men receive as their birth right from America—that's essential—and, I don't know…get involved in after school activities, have books around the house, and, sure, have a little money, and a house with outdoor…
>
> (Smith, 2005)

Crenshaw further argues that claims of equality for Black America "may fall upon deaf ears—ears deafened by repeated declarations that equality exists" (Crenshaw, 1988). Howard, a white professor at Wellington College, created a mixed-race family with his Black wife, Kiki. His exaggerated praise of the white academic

community and his neglect of his family's experience of racial inadaptability led to Kiki's oppression and marginalisation within the family. Kiki was not invited into the white, educated elite community and always felt isolated and distinct. Racial equality is not appreciated; rather, the matrix of white domination and intersectional invisibility is reproduced through Howard's indifference. Carl Thomas was denied a place at Wellington College because of his race, while Levi, though not interested in college, was compelled to attend because he had a white father. Haitian immigrants were denied basic rights and, without proper education, obliged to take undervalued jobs:

> This was a Haitian fellow driver called Pierree, one of the many from that difficult island who now found occupation
>
> (Smith, 2005)

On visiting the market, Kiki encounters a Haitian trader whose depression and suppression in the white-dominated community are evident. His refusal to accept the designation 'African American' and insistence on his Haitian identity speak to what intersectional theory recognises as the diversity within marginalised communities—the way in which intersectional frameworks must account for the specificity of national, cultural, and migratory experience. Institutional racism hinders the growth of the next generation, and Crenshaw (1988) emphasises that racism is not just about individual actions but also about institutional practices and policies that perpetuate racial inequality. In the novel, the university has a visible Black student population that forms a separate enclave—a mini-university within the university. Levi wonders why Wellington has this Black enclave, as Black students experience intersectional invisibility and often shelter within their community. The matrix of domination by white people suppresses and marginalises students of colour. Institutional racism extends to the faculty: the ideological conflict between Howard and Monty Kipps over Rembrandt is structurally revealing. What appears as an aesthetic dispute—Howard's scepticism about Rembrandt's genius versus Kipps's conviction that beauty comes from God—is in fact a contest over cultural authority, in which the white liberal Howard seeks to delegitimise the intellectual tradition that a Black conservative like Kipps has invested with personal and communal significance. Howard sees Kipps's Rembrandt book as "retrogressive, perverse, infuriatingly essentialist" (Smith, 2005). Yet, the novel's irony turns the judgment back on Howard: it is Howard who has not finished his own book, and it is Kipps's work—whatever its politics—that circulates in the world. The matrix of domination does not map neatly onto a Black/white binary; Smith insists on its more complex and ambivalent operation.

For 15 years, Howard and Kipps had moved in similar professional circles. Howard always disliked Monty because of his right-wing politics. He converted

this antagonism into rage when he heard of Kipps's Rembrandt book: "Take your pick. State of Britain, State of the Caribbean, states of blackness, state of art, state of women, state of the states—you hum it, he will play it" (Smith, 2005). Kiki's support of Kipps's anti-affirmative action bill—noting that he believes it is belittling for African American children to be told they need special assistance—places Smith's novel in dialogue with the complex politics of Black conservatism and the internal diversity of Black political thought. Monty Kipps informs Howard that he curated the first American exhibition of Caribbean 'Primitives' in New York in 1965: "I have the largest collection of Haitian art in private hands outside of that unfortunate island" (Smith, 2005). Haitian art—encompassing paintings, sculptures, drum art, and Voodoo flags, using vibrant colours and motifs with intricate meanings—is not only a cultural product of a single community but has also received international acclaim (Hatta, 2018). The representation of Black culture in white-dominated spaces becomes difficult when interlocking oppression and marginalisation operate on a large scale. The irony of a Black conservative claiming ownership of Haiti's cultural heritage while opposing affirmative action illustrates one of the novel's central insights: that the matrix of domination is not simply reproduced by white subjects but is internalised and mobilised in complex ways by those within marginalised communities. Smith's refusal to exempt Black characters from critique is one of the novel's most significant formal choices.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the multiple forms of oppression that intersect to create complex experiences in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*, bringing together Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality, Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) matrix of domination, and the related concepts of double bind and intersectional invisibility as a unified but internally differentiated analytical framework. By maintaining the distinction between Crenshaw's structural-legal analysis and Collins's cultural-institutional framework, we produced a more conceptually rigorous reading than those currently available in the literature. We argue that racism exists collectively in all aspects of society, from educational institutions and workplaces to communities and intimate relationships, persisting from birth to death. The constant rivalry between Kipps and Howard over Rembrandt portrays racism within educated elite society. Kiki's emotional turbulence, search for identity, final solace from Mrs. Kipps, and the significance of Mrs. Kipps's death and final gift together signify interlocking oppression and intersectional invisibility in every aspect of Kiki's life. A close reading of the novel suggests that every character encounters the matrix of domination and that the double bind is never far from the Black experience in the text.

Crucially, the analysis reveals that Smith's narrative form, its irony, free indirect discourse, and strategic ambivalence do not simply illustrate intersectional theory but perform it. The novel does

not attempt to resolve the contradictions that it uncovers, but rather involves all its characters, including the Blacks like Monty Kipps and Levi, in the reproduction of hierarchies. The mere fact that Smith will not give an easy answer is in itself a formal argument: racial inequality is not the result of personal villainy but of systems of interdependence that reproduce themselves even on their victims. According to Crenshaw (1991), racial identity is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. She is against the normalisation of a one-axis system. She demands that power relations be central to the formation of racial identity as it enters the stage of marginalisation and oppression. Race, oppression, and subjugation are the novel's underlying themes. As the current reading illustrates, On Beauty depicts different types of oppression not only against immigrants but also against mixed-race people and second-generation people with one parent of white origin. This is most evident in the characters of Jerome, Levi, and Kiki. The last present that Mrs. Kipps gives Kiki wraps the most important political lesson of the novel: the cultural and historical heritage of Black communities cannot be entrusted to the care of white liberal institutions and must be maintained by the solidarity of Black communities.

This study makes three contributions to the disciplines of literary studies, race studies, and intersectional criticism. First, it shows the analytical usefulness of the distinction between intersectionality as developed by Crenshaw (1989) and the matrix of domination developed by Collins (1990) as it is applied to literary analysis, illustrating how each of the two concepts sheds light on various dimensions of the racial politics of the novel. Second, it identifies Smith's narrative form as intersectional—using irony, ambivalence, and free indirect discourse to refuse the single-axis analysis that intersectional theory critiques. Third, it opens directions for further research on Black conservatism and its internal contradictions as a literary subject, diasporic Haitian identity as it operates within African American political frameworks, gendered racialisation in mixed-race families in contemporary British fiction, and the limits and possibilities of institutional belonging for Black students and faculty in elite academic settings.Social justice for Black people is always a constant struggle, one that must be endured and accepted, even as power dynamics continue to favour the dominant. Smith's *On Beauty* depicts the intersection of race and identity in all its forms throughout the narrative, tracing a process of change, growth, and evolution that is never complete or easy.

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