



الهوية المتعددة الثقافات في رواية "White Teeth" لزادي سميث

رجاء وفي جاسم<sup>(١)\*</sup>، زهره رامين<sup>(٢)</sup>، سيد محمد مرندی<sup>(٣)</sup>، سارا نازك دست<sup>(٤)</sup>  
(١) جامعة طهران  
(٢) (٣) (٤) جامعة طهران  
(\*) الكاتب المسؤول [rajawafi@ut.ac.ir](mailto:rajawafi@ut.ac.ir)

الملخص

في عصر تميز بحركة الثقافات العلمية، عملية تكوين الهوية تطورت إلى ظاهرة مرنة وديناميكية بدلاً من كونها ظاهرة مستقرة. يكتشف هذا البحث في كيفية تأثير التبادلات الثقافية على الهوية في روايات المهاجرين الحديثة White Teeth لزادي سميث. باستخدام إطار ستوريات هول الذي ينظر إلى الهوية كبنية مرنة تتشكل من خلال التفاعلات الثقافية والاجتماعية، تحلل هذه الدراسة كيف يصوغ أبطال المهاجرين هويات تعكس تراثهم والثقافات المتنوعة، والتي غالباً ما تكون مختلطة التي ينتقلون عبرها. تعزز النتائج فهم أدب المهاجرين، موضحة أن الهويات معقدة، وتتأثر بالديناميكيات المحلية والعالمية، وتتجدد باستمرار من خلال اللقاءات الثقافية الجديدة. من خلال دمج مفهوم هومي بابا عن "الفراغ الثالث" ونظرية أرجون أبادوراي عن التدفقات الثقافية العالمية، يقدم البحث فهماً دقيقاً للهوية كناتج للتفاعل الثقافي بدلاً من كونها سمة ثابتة مرتبطة بالعرق أو الخلفيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تكوين الهوية، التفاعلات الثقافية، أدب المهاجرين، الفراغ الثالث، التهجين الثقافي

تأريخ النشر: ٢٠٢٥-١٢-١

تأريخ القبول: ٢٠٢٥-٩-١٨

تأريخ الاستلام: ٢٠٢٥-٨-٩

Multicultural Identity in "White Teeth" by Zadie Smith

Rajaa Wafi Jasim<sup>(1)\*</sup>, Zohreh Ramin<sup>(2)</sup>, Seyed Mohammad Marandi, Zohreh Ramin<sup>(3)</sup>  
(1) University of Tehran  
(2) University of Tehran (3) (4) University of Tehran  
(\*) Corresponding author: [rajawafi@ut.ac.ir](mailto:rajawafi@ut.ac.ir)

Abstract

In an era characterized by the movement of global cultures, the process of forming identity evolves into a flexible and dynamic phenomenon instead of a stable one. This research investigates how transcultural exchanges affect identity in modern immigrant novels: *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith. Utilizing Stuart Hall's framework that views identity as a fluid construct shaped by cultural and social interactions, this study analyzes how immigrant protagonists forge identities that reflect both their heritage and the varied, often-mixed cultures they navigate. The findings enhance the comprehension of immigrant literature, illustrating that identities are complex, influenced by both local and global dynamics, and continually reshaped by new cultural encounters. By incorporating Homi Bhabha's notion of the "Third Space" and Arjun Appadurai's theory of global cultural flows, the research offers a refined understanding of identity as a product of cultural interactivity rather than a fixed attribute tied to ethnicity or background.

**Keywords** Identity formation, Transcultural interactions, Immigrant literature, Third Space, Cultural hybridity.

Received: 9-8-2025

Accepted: 18-9-2025

Published: 1-12-2025





## 1. Introduction

Postcolonial theory began to take shape in the middle of the twentieth century, around the time when numerous Asian and African countries were fighting for and achieving independence from European colonial rule. Key thinkers such as Stuart, Bhabha, Arjun, and Said explored the dynamics between colonizers and the colonized, focusing on the various impacts of colonial rule on psychology, culture, and politics. The population of Britain has also changed a lot due to more immigrants, particularly since that time. People who come from the old British Empire and other countries mix up the mostly white population. This wave of postcolonial emigration began a period of cultural variety, making the idea of fixed cultural identity look unclear. Because of these changes, Britain needs new ways to represent its multicultural society.

Novels turn into a beneficial way to explore cultural identity and national definitions because questions about these new social issues become more important. Head says in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction (2002)*, "The novel has proved to be a fruitful site for investigating the hybridized cultural forms that might be produced in an evolving [...] multicultural Britain" (156). It is expected that British literature will witness a rise in fiction by writers from migrant surroundings. This leads to new ideas about who can be regarded as a British author. Many important novels have dealt with themes of culture, nationality, globalization, and ethnicity.

Cultural theory began to focus on identity issues, and novels began to be a key place for discussing identity politics. Several identity subjects are discussed in literature more frequently than others, especially those related to the politics of difference. During those times, postcolonial theory also gains significance, offering new ways to understand Britain's colonial past alongside its contemporaneous multicultural and ethnic landscape. This sparked interest in writing by Colored English authors, like a specific authorial voice; the rise of a recent group of writers with different surroundings from conventional white British writers is a key feature of English literature in the 20th century. (Bentley 1)

Stories about migratory experience in England start in the mid-20th century with writers who capture the feelings of loneliness and disappointment when newcomers arrive in a country that seems welcoming but is not. After this first wave of postcolonial narrative, the focus changes to the experiences of subsequent-generation emigrants born in Britain. Their works often change themes, moving from feelings of being out of place to exploring the role of emigrants in English history and criticizing static ideas about national identity and Englishness. (Head, pp. 170 - 171)

Zadie Smith, a writer from London born in 1975, fits into the spectrum of postcolonial literature. With an English father and a Jamaican mother, she is part of the Black British literary scene that explores cultural variety and seeks to broaden the notion of Englishness. Her body of works includes three books: *White Teeth (2000)*, *The Autograph Man (2002)*, and *On Beauty (2005)*, along with a collection of essays titled *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays (2009)* and numerous other essays and short stories featured in different journals. Smith's various inheritances deeply influence her writing and also enable her to examine themes of heritage, race, and belonging with both depth and sensitivity.

Smith's opening novel receives significant praise, winning several awards. The narrative is set against the backdrop of a lively multicultural landscape of London; the story weaves together the lives of the two families, exploring the effects of colonial legacy and the challenges of immigrant identities that emerge within different societies. The narrative mixes the historical setting with modern experiences, focusing on how the past affects individual and shared identities. With a mix of humor and emotional depth, she holds the core of modern life, changing the story into more than only a personal narrative, but it also becomes a reflection on wider societal influences that shape modern Britain. Through her fascinating style of writing and combined characters, Smith confirms herself as a major figure in modern literature, introducing a deep examination of hybrid identities in a different world.

*White teeth* are deeply rooted in real happenings from England's legacy. The way the story uses the themes of translocation and imperialism characterizes it as a powerful collective story. The book *White Teeth*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23851/mjs.v36i3.1670>



revolves around three families in England with various traditional surroundings, exploring the often challenging but always fascinating results when the British, Jamaican, and Bengali heritages come together. The Jones family includes Archie, a British man, his wife Clara from Jamaica, and their only daughter, Irie. Samad and Alsana Iqbal are initial emigrants from Bangladesh, with two siblings, Magid and Millat, born in Britain. The friendship between Archie and Samad, formed during their service in the same unit in World War II, connects the different storylines. Through these characters and their family histories, Smith creates a rich web of friendships and events that stretches from the Indian Mutiny of the second half of the 19th century to London at the end of the 20th century.

The narrative mixes historical setting with modern experiences, focusing on how the past affects individual and shared identities with a mix of humor and emotional depth. She holds the core of modern life, changing the story into more than only a personal narrative, but it also becomes a reflection on wider societal influences that shape modern Britain. Through her fascinating style of writing and combined characters, Smith confirms herself as a major figure in modern literature, introducing a deep examination of hybrid identities in a different world.

## 2. Historical Background

The backdrop of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* is elaborately integrated in the diverse cultural landscape of London, a city that functions not only as a setting but also as an individual in its own right. The narrative reveals different districts, specifically in upper West London, where the lives of the main characters, like the Joneses and Iqbal, interweave. This metropolitan landscape is characterized by its abundant variety, which represents past waves of settlers who have transformed the urban area. Smith summarizes London as a "contact zone" where various cultures intersect and coexist, resulting in a dynamic social fabric. (Head, p. 222) The individuals in the story represent this multiculturalism, showing a range of cultural backgrounds consisting of English, Jamaican, Indian, and Bangladeshi heritages. Covering decades of years, the novel enables Smith to examine the development of these societies and the complex nature of personal identity shaping within them. The background history is very important, as it emphasizes the lasting impacts of colonialism and the continuous discussions of the cultural background among individuals. For example, the Iqbal family's migration journey reveals both the difficulties and successes of adapting to a new community while preserving connections to their cultural roots.

Additionally, the geographic features in London, from the energetic streets of Willesden to the serene areas of Cricklewood, represent the characters' challenges with their mixed identities. The author's description of these city landscapes stresses the flexibility of identity in a diverse setting, explaining how individuals explore their different environments in a constantly evolving city. Through her lively portrayal and complicated character arcs, Smith invites readers to engage with the intricacies of contemporary British life. The narrative of immigration in England is varied and complex, playing an essential role in shaping the cultural identity. Notable waves of migration began in the 19th century, largely because of the growth of the British Empire. During this era, people from different colonies, such as Ireland, India, and Eastern Europe, migrated to England. The Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s resulted in a considerable surge of Irish immigrants, while Jewish people escaping oppression in Eastern Europe looked for refuge in England. Those early immigrants presented a variety of customs and linguistic expressions, paving the way for a multinational community. (Winder 67)

The period following the Second World War represented a pivotal moment for migration policies in England. The British Citizenship legislation of 1948 granted citizens from Commonwealth nations the right to settle in Britain, causing notable immigration from countries like India, Pakistan, and those in the Caribbean. This movement was largely driven by employment gaps as Britain aimed to revive its economic growth. Immigrants formed lively societies, especially in major city centers like London, Birmingham, and Manchester, thereby deepening British cultural identity. The dining, musical, and artistic traditions of these societies have become essential elements of cultural identity, highlighting the benefits of multiculturalism (Kershen 30). Nevertheless, the story of migration has not been without its struggles and conflicts. The final decades of the 20th century experienced a rise in hostility towards newcomers, often exacerbated by economic



concerns and anxieties regarding cultural dilution. Incidents such as the Notting Hill race riots in 1958 and the immigration issues legislation emphasized social inequalities and the difficulties inherent in cultural identity. Such conflicts underscore broader issues related to connection and protection of a singular national identity amid increasing variety.

The effect of migration on self-identity development in England is complicated and layered. For a large number n of newcomers, navigating acculturation includes balancing their historical legacy with the expectations of assimilation into the English community. This double nature frequently causes multicultural identity, where characters examine their traditional culture with the dominant culture. Scholars such as Stuart Hall point out that identity is not a static entity but rather a dynamic and evolving process, affected by historical and social backgrounds. (Hall 222)

In brief, the UK's immigration background has played an important role in shaping individual and collective identities, leading to a mixed cultural heritage. Though populations have significantly enhanced the cultural landscape of Britain, the complexities of assimilation and recognition persist in influencing the discussions surrounding national identity. At the same time as England faces its heterogeneous society, the discourse on what defines being British maintains a critical component of its social landscape.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The topic of identity is one of the most contested subjects within cultural studies and postcolonial theory, and it occupies a significant place in my study. Stuart Hall, a prominent cultural scholar, observes that traditionally, people have viewed identity as fixed and immutable. It has been perceived as a constant, unaffected by external changes; in this view, identity serves as a refuge in an ever-evolving world. In contrast, contemporary perspectives regarding identity focus on the idea of the divided and peripheral subject. These perspectives acknowledge, as Hall asserts, that

Individualities are not cohesive and, in the context of recent modernity, are progressively disjointed or splintered; they are not singular but are constructed through various, often conflicting discourses, practices, and positions. They undergo significant historical shifts and are perpetually subject to change and evolution (Hall S., 1996).

Cultural identity deals with aspects of who we are that come from belonging to specific ethnic, racial, linguistic, and faith communities. Hall suggests that one way is to see cultural identity as "oneness"; this means it represents "the shared ancestral narrative and civilizational symbols that provide us, like, a 'single community' and a fixed and constant perspective" (Hall 223) (1990). Hall emphasizes the importance of recognizing distinctions within groups as well as likenesses.

"Cultural identity, in this view, is about 'existence.' It relates to what has come before and what lies ahead. It is not merely an abstract concept detached from location, period, chronicle, and civilization. Cultural backgrounds possess origins and narratives. However, as all legends do, they are constantly changing".

Hall discusses that every modern country is a mix of cultures. This blending has grown stronger due to factors like large-scale migration after colonialism and advancements in communication, technology, and globalization. Hall explains that globalization means moving beyond strict national borders, leading to new cultural connections across different times and places (Hall 299) (1992). Corresponding cultures are not a recent issue; throughout history, people have migrated for various causes like environmental changes, commercial opportunities, political issues, work, and environmental crises (Hall 212) (2000). Anywise, multiculturalism has received considerable media coverage and has become a key topic in political discussions, especially after the decline of old European empires. (Hall 212)

While the term "multiculturalism" is widely used, its meaning is not always clear. Hall suggests creating differences between 'multicultural' and 'multiculturalism.' "Multicultural" describes the social aspects and challenges of a community where various cultural groups coexist while trying to maintain their identities. In



contrast, 'multiculturalism' deals with the strategies and policies aimed at managing the diversity within these communities (Hall S., 2000, p. 210).

In cultural theory, multiculturalism is a debated term. Moreover, because cultural variety is fundamental to all communities. It is very hard to separate varied cultures, as the term might suggest. Instead, it may be more useful to discuss the blending of cultures concept central to Zadie Smith's work. In fact, hybridity is a key idea in this study, which we will examine further. The word "hybridity" becomes important in everyday discussions, particularly in cultural studies and postcolonial theory. It is used to describe various outcomes of cultural mixing, like linguistics, new identities, music, and even technological advancements. Hybridity refers to the blending that happens when two or more elements come together, leading to change. We believe this term helps us recognize and discuss new cultural forms that the word 'multicultural' does not fully capture. Hall describes hybridity as "a powerful creative source generating new cultural expressions that are more relevant today compared to outdated national identities from the days of former times." (Head, pp. 310-311)

Bhabha is another key thinker often mentioned in talks about hybridity. He depicts hybridity like a 'third space.' For Bhabha, the focus of hybridity is not about finding two sources that create a third; instead, It is about this 'Third Space' allowing a new perspective to form. This space changes the narratives that shape it and also creates recent ways of understanding power and politics that are not well captured by traditional views (Rutherford211, 1990). For Bhabha, hybridity is not a fixed identity. It is a place where culture is created, showing that cultural meanings are not set in stone. Even the same symbols can be reinterpreted and understood in different ways. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 55). He emphasizes that the 'inter'—the space of translation and negotiation—is where cultural meaning really happens. This allows us to think about national histories and even challenge nationalistic views.

Hybridity, then, is a gap where new meanings are formed, leading to fresh notions about identity, cultural significance, and heritage. This space also allows for changes in how cultural meanings are valued, as it creates opportunities for cultural hybridity that accepts difference without a strict hierarchy. Bhabha sees each nation as constantly evolving. Cultural meanings and identities are not singular or permanent; instead, they emerge from the ongoing exchanges and interactions that occur in a transitional space. (Bhabha, p. 295)

#### 4. The Past Shaped the Present: History, Heritage, Identity in *White Teeth*

In *White Teeth*, history is crucial because past events keep affecting the present. As Childs notes, "history is as inescapable as here and now" (Child, p. 211). This notion is introduced right at the start of the novel, with the phrase "What has happened before sets the stage for what is to come" from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (11). A prologue serves as an introduction, laying the groundwork for future events. It means that the past helps shape the present, but it does not control our future. While the past provides context, the future is still something we can influence ourselves. Throughout the story, it is evident that previous events, including the narrative of imperialism and ethnic issues, still disrupt the characters' lives. The past continues to affect the present in the novel. The opening quote can be considered a hopeful sign for the future, which aligns with the novel's positive ending that hints at the development of more mixed identities.

Teeth are an essential concept in *White Teeth*, and the title of the novel highlights this significance. They refer to history. For instance, when the author wants to explore the past of the character, it is described as 'a root canal.' Teeth are strong and last much longer than the people who own them, representing roots and lasting legacies in history, culture, and nationality. When young Clara loses her front teeth in a bicycle accident, it also marks the moment she misses her faith and determines to quit the Jehovah's Witnesses Church, causing a rift with her mother. This loss symbolizes her disconnection from her religion and her Jamaican roots, making her feel lost. Anyway, when she sees and gets married to Archie Jones, a typical white English man, she chooses to substitute her missing teeth. This marks a new phase in her new life where she decides to leave behind her Jamaican heritage and fit into English society, essentially swapping one cultural identity for another. However, teeth are also referred to in relation to the assassination of Indira Gandhi, which led to disorder in India. Many men were murdered, and there were "teeth, teeth everywhere, scattered throughout the land, mingling with the dust" (Smith, p. 201). The imagery of scattered teeth also suggests that the impact of the violence in India will be felt for a long time and remembered in history.



In *White Teeth*, Head illustrates how the effects of colonialism and 20th-century events significantly shape the characters' quest for identity in contemporary times (Head, p. 116). The story happens in a postcolonial context that points out the cultural impacts of imperialism, which still influence modern societies. Gikandi employs the term 'post' not to suggest that colonialism is completely gone, but to remind us that its impact is still felt, even after decolonization. (1996, 14) Salman Rushdie echoes this idea in his article "The New Empire within Britain" (1982), where he talks about how centuries of colonialism have left a lasting mark on culture and daily life and not much has been done to erase that stain. Understanding this text is very significant to exploring *White Teeth*.

The impact of post-colonialism is clear in the character of Samad, who constantly feels the need to tell different stories about mainstream English history. He is fixated on his ancestor Pandey, whose deeds are said to have sparked the Indian Mutiny of 1857. This event is significant in British history because it marked the shift from the East India Company to overseeing British governance in India, referred to as the Raj. The Indian Mutiny is a crucial part of English nationalism and the understanding of what it means to be English. According to Hall, national identities are shaped by narratives and environments like this one.

In *White Teeth*, the Mutiny represents 'post-colonial memory' as Samad's head. He frequently shares Pande's tale and believes he is a hero, even though most historical scholars see him differently. Many historians describe Pande as a 'drunken fool' who was overly religious and ultimately a failure (Smith 254). For instance, he loses his target when trying to shoot his lieutenant, and, recognizing he cannot win, he attempts to kill himself but loses again. Consequently, he is judged and sentenced to death for betrayal. However, Samad disagrees with his view. He believes his connection to Pande is the only precious part of his identity in a place where he feels like a nobody. He says that when a man has nothing to boast about except his bloodline, every bit of it matters greatly.

When a man has nothing but his blood to  
commend him, each drop of it matters, terribly  
[...], (Smith, pp. 255 - 256).

Being linked to a significant historical personality will help Samad build a constructive identity. As Nicora explains, Samad hopes to involve the Mutiny in his national identity narrative, similar to how the English previously acted for their benefit. (2007, 367). He feels that his forebears are regarded as barbaric, savage natives instead of as Indian patriots striving for freedom. Therefore, Samad knows that if he wants people to hear his ancestor's narrative, he must continue to share it.

Samad makes a comparison between Pande and Gandhi, a well-known national hero in the Indian liberation struggle. Samad suggests that Gandhi's popularity is partly because a distinguished Anglo-Indian artist, in an accomplished English movie, depicted him, while Pande is seen as too Indian to fit that image.

Gandhi had Mr. Kingsley to support him – lucky him!  
However, what about Pande? He does not have the right look,  
does he? Too distinctly Indian, with his large nose and thick  
eyebrow... nobody will (Smith, p. 226).

In a multicultural country such as England, celebrating nationalist and imperialist views can leave many citizens out. The language used about the event also shows bias. Referring to the event as the Mutiny rather than the Indian Rebellion highlights an English perspective, which frustrates Samad. He is angry that a monument to Henry Havelock, the individual who executed Pande, is located in Trafalgar Square while Pande's story is overlooked. To Samad, this statue continuously reminds him of the neglect towards his great-grandfather and the power dynamics of British imperial regulations. Samad observes Havelock's monument as a clear sign of cultural divides, representing the East versus the West, or 'us' versus them.

This monument represents the traditional English narrative, depicting England as an imperialist country with which Samad cannot relate. It highlights his feelings of being an outsider in English history, as cultural identities are often shaped by contrast and isolation. By addressing Havelock's monument, the author rejects the conventional narrative and examines how national and personal misfortunes are honored. Samad also feels excluded from the idea of being English in his daily job life. He works as a waiter in the restaurant



operated by his relative. He sees his job of serving Asian food to English customers as connected to colonial themes. He describes the long walk to a table as a journey through a 'jungle', serving customers he imagines as colonial figures, like gentlemen with guns and ladies sipping tea while being attended by 'brown boys.'. (Smith 206)

Samad learns from his kin Rajnu that there is one Indian thinker called Misra who reveals his critical view of Pande. They uncover the sole remaining duplicate of Misra's book at the Cambridge University Library. When Samad takes the dusty book, his kin believes it to be "a minor, disregarded research paper" and "a lesser trivial, overlooked work of academic study." He is filled with joy upon discovering this, as noted by Smith (258). To Samad, the dust does not indicate that the book is neglected; rather, it signifies that it is a unique and valuable piece of history with which he can connect. Just seeing the words makes him tear up. Finding a pro-Pandee book strengthens his beliefs, and he feels thrilled to discover someone who shares his thoughts, even if it is just one person. It highlights the importance of sharing history, even with just one person.

Although Samad is a former soldier, he frequently questions why he fought for a country that did not recognize him and why he sought revenge for the deaths of men who would not recognize him on the street (Smith, p. 95). While on a mission, he recounts the tale of Pande to his new companion, Archie Jones, who expresses admiration and wishes he had a meaningful family history like Samad's. He feels that being linked to a historical figure would be motivating, while he sees his family, the Jonesses, as unremarkable. (Smith, p. 99..)

During the narrative, it is revealed that Archie questions Samad's stories and is not completely convinced that Pande was a hero. Still, he appears to be jealous of Samad's connection to a significant past, while he himself feels like an 'everyman' without any notable history. His prospective spouse, Clara Bowden, also captivates Archie because she "was from somewhere." "She had roots" (Smith, p. 27). This highlights that while roots and history are complex issues for characters with immigrant backgrounds, Archie's identity as a typical Englishman feels outdated in today's multicultural England. He is often portrayed as dull and out of touch, which reinforces this idea.

Archie, a pivotal figure in *White Teeth*, illustrates the complicated nature of identity conflicts influenced by his history. His path highlights the difficulties of balancing personal and cultural identities within a diverse society. The trauma Archie experiences during the Second World War profoundly affects his sense of self. As a warrior, he endures the brutal realities of combat, which include enduring emotional pain.

This suffering leads to issues with self-esteem and purpose, pushing him into a deep dilemma. At the novel's outset, Archie tries to take his own life, reflecting his deep sadness and confusion about his identity. He thinks about his life and choices and says, "I was just trying to find a way to live" (Smith, p. 10). This incident lays the groundwork for his continuous search for significance and connection, demonstrating how earlier shock can significantly influence current situations. Archie's identity becomes even more complicated because he is a white Englishman living in a rapidly changing London. His union with Clara, a Jamaican immigrant, exposes him to a reality that challenges his established views on personal identity and inclusion. The contrast of their environment compels Archie to face his own cultural prejudices and the benefits linked to his racial identity. He frequently feels alienated within Clara's family and society, struggling to harmonize his English identity with the rich, multicultural setting surrounding him. This struggle is clear as he tries to meet the expectations of being a husband and father, feeling unfit to meet these demands. His desire to be a positive figure for his wife and their children shows his difficulty in adapting to a new culture.

Archie's character is fascinating when we consider a study. Bridget Byrne, who looked into what it means to be English, had discussions about her work "struggles with identity, British identity, English identity, and notions of whiteness" (Byrne, 2007). Byrne found that many people felt that being English is actually hollow or deficient in cultural richness when compared to other British cultures. This notion certainly fits Archie. Byrne also points out that this perceived hollowness is often regarded unfavorably; some individuals argue that English identity is diminishing since it lacks the evolution seen in other cultures. In certain instances, being English is considered undesirable due to its exclusionary aspects and problematic colonial history. While Archie may not delve deeply into matters like colonialism or racism. National identity presents challenges for him as well. He associates themes of heritage and history with Clara and Sarmad, yet he fails to connect his



cultural background to his own version of English identity, even though English history is typically filled with narratives of pride.

While the younger generation tends to prioritize the present and avoid reflecting on the past like their parents do, they still struggle to break free from their heritage and background. This is evident when the two brothers come together after Magid's return from Bangladesh. Although their meeting occurs in a university class, a space meant to be impartial, they inevitably bring their shared history into that setting. This shows the difficulty individuals with immigrant backgrounds face in leaving their past behind. As Dyer notes in his book *White* (2004), even those born in the country where they reside, like second-generation migrants, are still categorized as migrants. For instance, Millat feels the impact of their father's challenges and his fixation on Pande. He contemplates how their father, Samad, is imperfect and has failed to make an impression in England despite his education and years spent there. Millat links the narratives of Pande and Samad there, perceiving them as marginalized in historical accounts. He understands that they are regarded as insignificant, which connects to broader themes of colonialism and national identity.

"A flawed, ineffective, foolish one-handed man who had lived in a foreign land for eighteen years and left no greater impact than this. This is why Pande was hanged from a tree while Havelock, the executioner, relaxed on a chaise longue in Delhi. Pande was insignificant, while Havelock held power. (Smith, p. 506).

Irie Jones, the daughter of Archie and Clara, also grapples with the weight of her ancestry, particularly as she navigates her Jamaican-English identity. She contrasts her family with those who lack immigrant backgrounds, longing for a life unburdened by the shadows of the past. She imagines how effortless it must be for families who only have neutral spaces like bathrooms and lounges. In contrast, she feels trapped in a maze of memories and histories. She humorously suggests that Samad likely knows more about his great-grandfather than anyone else does, but questions why it matters to others since they view it merely as history.

As previously noted, newcomers frequently find it difficult to let go of their histories due to ongoing reminders such as monuments honoring national figures they do not identify with, like the Statue of Henry Havelock. Nevertheless, as Irie highlights through Samad's fixation on Pande, immigrants might also hesitate to abandon their pasts, fearing that doing so could mean completely severing ties with their history while integrating into a new culture; conversely, Irie prefers not to dwell on her heritage due to its complexities. Yet, she acknowledges that her history influences her current life. In an effort to distance herself from her origins. She forms a friendship with the Chalfen family, who prioritize scientific pursuits and a forward-thinking mindset rather than reflecting on the past. This progressive outlook appeals to Irie as she envisions a future where cultural backgrounds become irrelevant due to their intricate and buried nature: "when roots will not matter anymore because they cannot, because they must not, because they are too long and they are too tortuous and they are just buried too damn deep." (Smith 527)

## 5. The Cultural Intermingling: Immigration and Adaptation

In her narrative *White Teeth*, Zadie Smith intricately explores the notions of cultural mixture, movement, and identity through the different experiences of her characters. The author provides an insightful analysis of how cultural identities evolve among both first- and second-generation migrants in the United Kingdom. Central figures, especially Irie Jones and the Iqbal brothers, Magid and Millat, explain the tension between preserving their cultural background and adapting to a diverse community.

Smith's depiction of their identity struggles reveals the complicated nature of cultural hybridity, demonstrating that migration leads to both friction and the fusion of traditional practices with contemporary influences. The idea of hybridity is critical for understanding the identity challenges confronted by her characters. Homi Bhabha's notion of 'third space,' where cultural interpretations are formed, is particularly applicable, as it underscores that identities are dynamic and develop at the intersection of various cultures. For example, Irie's daughter, embodies this hybridity as she navigates her longing for acceptance, caught between conforming to Western standards of beauty and reconnecting with her Jamaican heritage. Her journey



to visit her grandmother, Hortense Bowden, represents a return to her cultural roots, illustrating that hybridity can serve as fertile ground for personal identity formation. As Smith points out, "Irie wanted to be part of the story; she wanted to know where she came from so she could not work out where she was going" (Smith 328). Irie's quest to reconcile her past with her future reflects Bhabha's assertion that hybrid identities arise from the interplay of diverse cultural influences. Irie knows that "there was England and there was Jamaica, and there was a great abyss in between." (Smith 327) Irie's awareness of the divide between England and Jamaica highlights the confusion often linked to hybrid identities. Her internal struggle becomes apparent as she confronts societal pressures to choose between her British and Black identities, emphasizing the challenges inherent in embracing multiple facets of self. She knows that "there was England and there was Jamaica, and there was a great abyss in between" (Smith 327). Additionally, she considers how societal norms shape her self-perception, particularly regarding her hair, revealing her aspiration for individuality over conformity. Irie notes that "it was not that she wanted straight hair; it was simply that she wanted to be different." (Smith 274)

Furthermore, Avtar Brah's idea of diaspora provides a significant lens through which to analyze the experiences of characters in *White Teeth*. Brah characterizes diaspora as a space of multiple affiliations influenced by memory and displacement. For Irie. This idea materializes as she seeks to establish her identity within the cultural narratives of both Britain and Jamaica, navigating her sense of self amid contrasting stories.

Jamaica has always been a puzzling place for her, a blend of what she knows and what remains elusive (Smith 315). This resonates with Brah's idea that identities in the diaspora are shaped both by and in opposition to national narratives, showcasing Irie's quest for belonging that transcends rigid national categories. Similarly, Bhabha's notion of ambivalence is evident in the identity challenges faced by the Iqbal twins. He argues that those from colonized backgrounds often grapple with internal contradictions, at the same time defying and imitating the prevailing culture. In *White Teeth*, Magid and Millat exemplify this complexity. Magid is sent to Bangladesh to learn traditional values, but ironically returns more influenced by Western ideals, embracing a scientific worldview. In contrast, Millat, who grew up in Britain, refuses Western values and embraces religious extremism. Samad expresses his frustration when he says, "I send him away to be more like me, and he comes back more like them" (Smith 336). This situation underscores Bhabha's idea of mimicry, where colonized subjects adopt aspects of the prevailing culture while also challenging its authority, resulting in a state of being "almost the same, but not quite" (Smith 76).

Millat's claim to be "the face of the future" (Smith 351) highlights his challenge to merge his British upbringing with his cultural roots. His statement "We are the pure, the faithful; we are the future" (Smith 400) emphasizes the internal clash in the balance of tradition and innovation. This tension becomes even clearer when he confronts his identity, exclaiming, "They wanted to call him English." His frustration deepens as he asserts, "I am not English, I am not Bengali, I am not anything. Just like Archie Jones, a man without a side." (Smith 411)

The experiences of the Iqbal family also reflect the concept of diaspora as a space filled with cultural complexities. As a first-generation immigrant, Samad embodies the challenges of diaspora life, striving to maintain his Bengali identity while sensing a deeper disconnection and feeling out of place in Britain. His statement "We are split people, of half things" (Smith 133) echoes the view that diaspora identities exist at the crossroads of multiple identities. Samad's ongoing struggle between pride in his heritage and the desire to fit in illustrates the continuous negotiation of diasporic identity.

Bhabha argues that hybridization disrupts colonial storylines that impose rigid cultural hierarchies and limits. He suggests that efforts to describe and oversee ethnic disparities often collapse because these boundaries are inherently fluid and complicated. For Bhabha, hybridity appears as a powerful perception that challenges traditional narratives and blurs the lines between colonizer and colonized.

In this way, the novel explores the complex realities of postcolonial immigrant identity against the backdrop of multicultural London. The city is a vibrant mix of various nationalities, faiths, and cultural backgrounds. This blend creates both opportunities for connection and moments of conflict among its residents. As Smith notes, "This has been the era of unfamiliar faces—brown, yellow, and white. It has marked a significant period of the immigrant experience (Smith 272)."

Smith vividly portrays this tension through Samad's declaration, "We are split people. Our children were born of split people, of half things" (Smith 133). His statement reflects the ongoing battle between



embracing new identities and holding onto one's roots, a central theme throughout the narrative. Irie conclusively recognizes that "There was no single thread, no single line, no straight road, but a thousand branches" (Smith 543), emphasizing that identity is not fixed but rather fluid and layered. The overarching message of the novel is encapsulated in its final lines: "What was past was past, and if it was not, it should be.

The future remained undiscovered. And with it, the promise of a new story" (Smith 542).

#### 6. The multicultural Narrative:

The book offers an inclusive storytelling style that challenges conventional understandings of identity. Smith utilizes the motif of multiculturalism through her individuals' varied landscapes analyze their intersecting identities within a globalized context. The novel evaluates oversimplified classifications by race or ethnicity, promoting deeper identity comprehension that acknowledges multiple impacts. A key figure in this exploration is Irie Jones, who embodies the challenges associated with multicultural identity as she wrestles with her diverse ancestry. Her lessons mirror those confronted by many second-generation immigrants who often find themselves straddling different cultures. Irie's path toward self-discovery symbolizes the search for a unified identity amidst a globe that frequently enforces strict categories (Smith 320). Ultimately, the narrative posits that identity is not a complex and changeable construct but rather a mixture shaped by diverse encounters and impacts.

*White Teeth* can be interpreted as a reflection of Smith's personal experiences, particularly in light of the media frenzy that accompanied its release. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that Smith's identity as a female author significantly influences the text. Smith is recognized as a 'multicultural' writer. Although she was in her twenties when she penned this work, she plays a pivotal role in its impact. This element contributed to *White Teeth* emerging as a cultural sensation and established Smith as a prominent figure in the media and her discussions. Her mixed heritage and mother's immigrant background have fostered a tendency to correlate the writer with her narrative, while her youth has positioned her as a voice for a new generation addressing race and identity through a multicultural lens. Claire Squires characterizes *White Teeth* as "postcolonial fiction because it speaks of race and multiculturalism" in a manner that restraightforwards straightforward readings as "an uncritical celebration of the bright multicultural color of the Willesden streets." (Squires, p. 43)

Similarly, Nick Bentley, in his analysis within Contemporary British Fiction, highlights that while the novel honors diversity within a community, it also "shows the problems of individuals caught up within a postcolonial world" (Bentley, p. 52). Despite the deep engagement with themes of race and multiculturalism, featuring families from former colonies like India and Jamaica and also depicting moments from India's colonial past during World War II when Samad and Archie first meet, the primary focus of the narrative does not appear to be past colonialism. Instead, this theme serves more as a backdrop or setting for the story Smith aims to tell. A similar perspective applies to her classification, as a writer who is an immigrant is indeed central to the narrative, with many characters grappling with the challenges of leaving behind their familiar pasts while confronting the complexities of their new environments. Smith illustrates how individuals from immigrant backgrounds navigate their understanding of community dynamics and power structures while finding new ways to articulate their experiences in an unfamiliar world. Nevertheless, it seems that Smith did not set out to craft an immigrant solely focused on adjustment and assimilation into a new society. The settlement journey is undeniably significant in the narrative, yet it appears to serve a broader purpose. If we consider Zadie Smith as a writer associated with multicultural themes, and view *White Teeth* as a multicultural work. This may allow us to understand the novel that resists simple classification as merely postcolonial or about immigration. Jonathan Sell interprets *White Teeth* in this manner, describing it as a diverse narrative that "liberates itself from deterministic history and shifts away from focusing on 'historical injustices or unproductive self-reflection'" (33). Indeed, the label 'multicultural' is frequently applied to both the narrative and its author.

Multiculturalism encompasses a political framework that promotes the acceptance of cultural variety rather than adhering to perspectives, while also serving as "a challenge to ethnocentrism, discrimination, national superiority, cultural oppression, and prevailing inflexibility towards variety" (Fernandez, p. 52).

Smith's *White Teeth* certainly reflects a multicultural society. Society or community advocates for the acceptance of cultural diversity while also highlighting the complexities that come with it; however, labeling *White Teeth* solely as a multicultural novel feels insufficient. Clair Squires notes that identifying Zadie Smith



as a multicultural writer implies dual meaning, recognizing her mixed-race heritage as well as her exploration of multicultural themes in her writing (15). This duality applies not just to multiculturalism but also to all the various labels that have been attached to the novel. Terms like "postcolonial," "immigrant," "multicultural," and even "global" each suggest something about the work and its creator. Nevertheless, we contend that these titles ultimately fail to fully encapsulate either the writer or the narrative. They may resonate to some degree, but none adequately represent the novel in its entirety.

A common thread among these labels is the concept of hybridity, which transcends mere cultural diversity to reveal a "third element arising from the interaction of culture, communications, or individuals" (Moss, p. 12). This idea of a third space challenges the notion of fixed cultural or ethnic identities. The blending of cultural identity due to hybridization is a crucial theme in *White Teeth*, arguably its central theme, as it "encompasses the legacy of empire, the gathering of immigrants in former imperial centers, and the multicultural societies that emerge from this" (Squires, p. 23). While hybridity is a fundamental aspect of the work, it itself embodies a blend of various categories, resisting any effort to confine it to a singular identity. In a growing, interconnected world, the concepts of hybridity and relevant aspects of identity and belongingness are becoming ever more significant.

## 7. Conclusion

In *White Teeth*, the theme of hybridity is powerfully illustrated on both personal and cultural dimensions. The concept of Englishness emerges as a dynamic and evolving entity, regardless of its traditional ties to rigid national narratives that seek to confine its meaning. Thinkers like Stuart Hall highlight that cultural identities remain significant—they are central to how individuals perceive themselves. However, it is essential to understand cultural and national identities are more accurately described by the concept of 'growth' instead of 'existence.' They will be seen as adaptable constructs that lack fixed definitions.

This concept is vividly portrayed in *White Teeth*. For example, Samad Iqbal's story underscores how culture and nationality shape identity. Nevertheless, even his sense of self cannot be reduced to just his Bengali heritage; Samad incorporates various English influences into his cultural self. In contrast, Archie Jones, another character, epitomizes the working-class Englishman who navigates his national identity with ease, unlike Samad and his Jamaican wife, Clara.

However, Archie's unexamined identification is not portrayed as ideal. He comes across as bland and symbolizes a stagnant version of Englishness that resists evolution. Similar observations apply to the Chalfens, a middle-class family that represents a certain ideological richness, only to reveal their own immigrant background. Thus, even those who seem quintessentially English may not fully embody that identity.

The individuals who embody cultural identities that exist in the middle often face significant challenges—this is especially true for Irie Jones, Magid Iqbal, and Millat Iqbal. However, the story suggests these hybrid situations are not predetermined. If more individuals recognized hybrid development and accepted that no culture is entirely unmixed but rather a blend, then the concept of hybridity could become a common aspect of daily life. I believe this idea extends beyond the world of *White Teeth* and applies to communities in all places.

In the novel, the Anglo-nation is portrayed as a (fantasized) community best understood through Historical perspectives on Englishness often marginalize many individuals. s often excludes many individuals. Characke Irie, Magid, and MiNevertheless, clearly identify as English. Nevertheless, there are various reasons why the prevailing notion of Englishness conflicts with the experiences of migrants. Factors such as colonial history, the association of Englishness with whiteness, and the divide between the British self and the foreign 'other' contribute to this tension, where the 'other' is often viewed as a danger to national values of integrity.

The idea of a cohesive English identity is ultimately a construct and will remain so in an increasingly globalized world. Smith suggests that Englishness should be seen as a culture that exists in a state of flux rather than solely linking this concept to the nation's 'foreign' residents. This perspective of hybridity should be applied to all cultures.





#### Works Cited

- Bentley, N. (2005). "Introduction: Mapping the Millennium: Themes and Trends in Contemporary British Fiction." *British Fiction of the 1990s*, edited by Nick Bentley, Routledge,.
- Byrne, B. (2007). "Crisis of Identity? Englishness, Britishness, and Whiteness." *Empire and After: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective*, edited by Graham MacPhee and Prem Poddar, Berghahn Books,.
- Childs, P. (2005). *Contemporary Novelists: British Fiction since 1970*. Palgrave Macmillan,.
- Dyes, R. (2004). "Generations of Black Londoners: Echoes of 1950s Caribbean Migrants' Voices in Victor Headley's *Yardie* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*." *Obsidian*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 81-.
- Fernández, C. (n.d.). "The Challenge of Multiculturalism: Political Philosophy and the Question of Diversity." *Challenging Multiculturalism: European Models of Diversity*.
- Hall, S. (1990). "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart,.
- Hall, S. (1992). "The Question of Cultural Identity." *Modernity and Its Futures: Understanding Modern Societies: An Introduction*, edited by Stuart Hall, David Held, and Tony McGrew, Polity Press,.
- Hall, S. (1996). "Who Needs Identity?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, Sage,.
- Hall, S. (2000). "Conclusion: The Multi-Cultural Question." *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions*, edited by Barnor Hesse, Zed Books,.
- Head, D. (2002). *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000*. Cambridge University Press, .
- Kershen, A. (2002). *The Impact of Immigration on British Society*. Routledge, .
- Moss, S. (2000). "White Teeth by Zadie Smith." *The Guardian*, 26 Jan. Accessed 14 Nov. .
- Nicora, F. (2007). "An Icon of 'British Character': The Indian Mutiny and the Literary Imagination." *Textus*, vol. 20, no. 2,.
- Rushdie, S. (1991). *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. Granta, .
- Smith, Z. (2001). *White Teeth*. London, Penguin Books, (First published in 2000.).
- Squires, C. (2002). *Zadie Smith's White Teeth: A Reader's Guide*. Continuum, .
- Winder, R. (2004). *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain*. Abacus, .





### **Funding**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper

### **Acknowledgments**

The authors would like to extend their heartfelt thanks to institution, for the moral support provided during the course of this research. The encouragement and guidance provided by the institution have helped tremendously in completing this research.

### **References**

