



University of Tehran press

Research in Contemporary World Literature

http://jor.ut.ac.ir, Email: pajuhesh@ut.ac.ir

p-ISSN : 2588-4131 e-ISSN: 2588 -7092

Cosmopolitanism in Process: Seeking Self-Authenticity in Zadie Smith's White Teeth

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 15 October 2020 Received in revised form: 28 January 2021 Accepted: 30 January 2021 Published online: 01 August 2023</p> <p>Keywords: critical cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitan imagination, immanent-transcendence, self-authenticity, self-understanding, Zadie Smith, White Teeth</p>	<p>Introduction: In <i>White Teeth</i>, Zadie Smith imparts a realistic and profound commentary on contemporary multicultural London environment, highlighting not only the challenging realities about British multiethnic society, but also about the human condition in such a situation. A key aspect of her novel is an authorial interrogation of the individual subject's position and identity formation, most especially of the first- and second-generation immigrants, when facing the intensified interconnections and interdependencies of live worlds with social diversity in current globalization. In <i>White Teeth</i>, Smith concentrates on diversity of cultural contexts and the implication of divergent historical routes to illustrate how identity and self-authenticity cannot be perceived and maintained simply in terms of the importation of a single national model, global uniformity or in terms of a retreat into individualistic orientations. Different factors such as ethnicity, personal histories, interfamilial relationships, and cultural belonging are discussed in assessing Smith's treatment of the concept of self-authenticity. Studying these dimensions of the novel, this essay brings to the fore different dynamics within Gerard Delanty's concept of critical cosmopolitanism as a particularly appropriate medium to explore the ways in which history and interpersonal relationships with diversity act and influence the construction of self-authenticity.</p> <p>Background of the Study: Along with a brief review of multicultural study of Zadie Smith's <i>White Teeth</i> by Dominic Head in his critical reading "Zadie Smith's <i>White Teeth</i>: Multiculturalism for the Millennium" and Bart Moore-Gilbert views on the same basis presented in "Post-colonialism and 'The Figure of the Jew': Carly Phillips and Zadie Smith", this study has considered the following source as well: Jeremy Scott's "Shared and Told Tales: Multiculturalism and Participatory Narrative Identities in Zadie Smith's <i>White Teeth</i>", since the essay recognizes that in <i>White Teeth</i>, Smith participates in the creation of cultural construction of national identity through narrative. Molly Thompson's views regarding <i>White Teeth</i> as a depiction of a utopian multiculturalism reflected in her study "Happy Multicultural Land"? The Implications of an 'Excess of Belonging' in Zadie Smith's <i>White Teeth</i>" are as well taken into consideration in this study. In her study "We're All English Now Mate Like It or Lump It': The Black/Britishness of Zadie Smith's <i>White Teeth</i>", Tracey Walters suggests that "Smith reveals that, in today's postmodern millennial world, notions of ethnic and racial identities cannot be defined in terms of ancestry, language, or culture because the hybridization of English society has made concepts of ethnicity and race indeterminate" (315). Instead, the novel proposes a means for constructing new identities which acknowledges that "interracial unions have crossed racial and ethnic lines" (316) and which "questions the very notion of stable identities" (316).</p> <p>Methodology and Argument: Considering Gerard Delanty's concept of critical cosmopolitanism and its principle dynamics of self-identification, self-reflexivity and self-</p>



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understanding reflected in his seminal work *The Cosmopolitan Imagination: The Renewal of Critical Social Theory* (2009), this study aims to account for the relation between constitution of self-authenticity and individual participation with specific personal and ancestral histories in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000). The formation and maintenance of self-authenticity proves to be related to several issues ranging from class to ethnicity and familial and interpersonal relationships. In this regard, the characters' quests for self-authenticity, to reassert their identity, as well as to adjust themselves to the intensely intermingled conditions of globalized society as a source and serious threat to their self-identification and authenticity are most significant. In his discussion about critical cosmopolitanism, Delanty considers the negotiation of identity in continuous movement. It is not an identity that can be constructed in loyalty to or contrasted with national or other kinds of identity but in relativizing one's own culture and identity. He insists on positive recognition of differences in individual encounters with diversity which suggests a world-disclosing stance that promises self-transformation and the formation of new meanings and relationships. His ideas are formed by drawing on sociological study of cosmopolitanism going beyond shifts in identity to wider discursive, cultural and societal transformations.

Conclusion: In reflecting cosmopolitan ideals as they work out in individual action, choice, decision or orientation Zadie Smith illustrates a cosmopolitan stance activated through different forms of interconnections, rendering it possible for social actors to transcend exploiting discourses such as nationalism and globalism, while leading to cultural reorientations thorough reformulation of self-understanding and self-identification. The cosmopolitanism as exemplified in *White Teeth* invokes new conceptions of history, identity, agency, and future. In doing so Smith's narrative reflects the ways in which the human world is reimagined socially and culturally in terms of its relation to globalization. It entails a new consciousness, a cosmopolitan consciousness, as an imaginary category by which individuals make sense of globalization as embedded in their worlds and constitute self-authenticity in practicing a new kind of self-understanding, by which an alternative understanding of history, future and identity is projected.

Cite this article: esmkhani yuvalari, farnaz & Zarrinjooee, Bahman. "Cosmopolitanism in Process: Seeking for Self-Authenticity in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*". *Research in Contemporary World Literature*, 28 (1), 139-162. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jor.2021.311899.2066>



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Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jor.2021.311899.2066>