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Ethnicity, Religion, Culture and Their Roles in Shaping Gender's Behavior in Critical Times

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Abstract

This research examines how ethnicity, religion and culture influence human behavior as depicted in Cormac McCarthy's The Road (2006) and Zadie Smith's White Teeth (2000). In The Road, McCarthy depicts a post-apocalyptic setting where survival challenges ethical and ethnic limits, whereas White Teeth showcases three culturally diverse families in London, the Joneses (mixed English and Jamaican), the Iqbals (from Bangladesh), and the Chalfens (Caucasian English). These stories emphasize how both ethnicity and religion shape choices and identity, particularly when characters function outside of legal frameworks. The research aims to find out if ethnicity, religion or culture has a more significant influence on human behavior, examined from a postcolonial perspective. It centers on themes of identity, ethnicity, multiculturalism, ethics, and belief to examine how these elements shape both individual and group behavior. The study indicates that deeply ingrained ethnicity and religious beliefs have a substantial impact on behavior. Nevertheless, when faith is weak or not firmly established, cultural standards often take precedence as the main direction. Therefore, the study indicates that without firm religious beliefs, culture plays a significant role in shaping a person's decisions and moral limits.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Religion, Culture, Behavior, McCarthy's Road, Smith's White Teeth, Post-apocalyptic

Introduction

To begin, it is essential to understand the differences between religion and culture and its connection with ethnicity. What do they mean? According to the Collins English Dictionary, "Religion is the belief in a god or gods and the activities that are connected with this belief, such as praying or worshipping in a building such as a church or temple or mosque. Regardless of the specific religion, individuals need to adhere to its values and rituals. “Culture, as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, has multiple definitions: First, it is the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group, also: the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time. Second, the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization. Third, the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. However, Merriam-Webster dictionary defines religion in different definitions: First, the service and worship of God or the supernatural. Second, commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance. Ashcroft and et.al. points out the definition of ethnicity as “… a term has been used increasingly since 1960s to account of human variation in terms of culture, tradition, language, social patterns and ancestry, rather than discredited generalization of race with its assumption of a humanity divided into fixed, genetically determined biological types”(p.80).

The research aims to reveal the similarities and differences between the two novels in terms of ethnicity: religious and cultural values: Cormac McCarthy's The Road (2006) and Zadie Smith's White Teeth (2000), and how they react to the factors surrounding them. It examines what these novels disclose about ethnicity, location, culture, and faith, and how the characters engage with societal expectations based on their ethnic, religious and cultural contexts. The primary inquiry is: which factor will

ultimately dominate, ethnicity, religion and its principles, or culture and its emerging needs? In analyzing The Road, the research explores the travels of the father and child as they navigate the unfamiliar, symbolizing their journey through existence. It examines their actions in a post-apocalyptic setting where devastation prevails, frequently allowing no opportunity for reevaluating choices or fighting to survive while maintaining religious beliefs or cultural obligations. In the same way, the research examines *White Teeth* to explore how the characters deal with the intricacies of ethnicity, identity, culture, and religion within a diverse society. It analyzes how the Joneses, Iqbals, and Chalfens interact with societal norms and how their cultural and religious backgrounds shape their reactions to these expectations.

In *The Road*, the focus is on the father and son as they traverse a post-apocalyptic landscape, examining how their experiences test their moral and ethical beliefs. It explores whether their survival instincts drive them to abandon their religious principles or if they can maintain their cultural and moral integrity in the face of overwhelming desolation and scarcity. Through the comparison of *The Road* and *White Teeth*, this analysis seeks to uncover the intricate interactions between religion and culture in shaping human behavior in severe circumstances. It aims to identify which influences individuals more significantly, religious beliefs or cultural norms, when confronted with the challenges of a significantly changed environment. The examination investigates if characters from both novels can maintain their core beliefs and principles, or if they adjust to the new societal pressures created by their situations. This comparative analysis highlights the continuous battle between upholding fundamental values and adapting to changing societal circumstances, providing important insights into the strength of personal beliefs in the face of transformative obstacles.

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Theory

No one disputes the contributions of Said, Bahbah, Spivak, Ashcroft, and others in shaping the foundational aspects of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory serves as a critical lens that examines the cultural, political, and historical impacts of colonialism and imperialism, especially regarding the lasting consequences these systems of control impose on both the colonizers and the colonized. It examines how colonial connections influenced identities, power relations, and resistance mechanisms, aiming to comprehend and confront the inequalities and conflicts stemming from these historical contexts. Postcolonial theory analyzes the influence of colonial powers on the contemporary world and explores how postcolonial societies still deal with the consequences of these historical injustices, despite having gained formal independence. Central concepts in postcolonial theory encompass matters of power, identity, representation, resistance, and the enduring effects of colonial oppression. These notions are connected with themes of race, culture, and identity, which were significantly influenced by colonial interactions.

Multiculturalism denotes the presence and encouragement of various cultural traditions and identities existing together in one society. Within the framework of postcolonial theory, multiculturalism represents a multifaceted and at times conflicting idea. On one side, it promotes the acknowledgment and appreciation of cultural diversity, endorsing the rights of minority groups in a community. Nonetheless, postcolonial critics highlight that multiculturalism may occasionally obscure or minimize the profound inequalities, power disparities, and historical wrongs resulting from colonial histories. Though it advocates for social unity via cultural variety, multiculturalism may also illustrate persistent conflicts regarding cultural representation, authority, and identity control in postcolonial contexts. In postcolonial settings, multiculturalism transcends being merely a policy or practice;

it serves as a site of conflict where the themes of inclusion, exclusion, and colonial legacies constantly emerge.

In postcolonial thought, identity serves as a key theme, examining how colonialism affects self-identity and cultural representation for both the colonizers and the colonized. For colonized communities, restoring their identity frequently poses a major difficulty, especially following centuries of being characterized by colonial authorities. This process entails conflicts regarding language, culture, and history. In this context, identity pertains to the comprehension of one's self within wider social, cultural, and historical contexts. Postcolonial theory highlights the influence of colonial histories on personal and collective identities, particularly in how underrepresented groups perceive their cultural and social realities. The idea of cultural identity is significantly developed by theorists such as Stuart Hall, who assert that cultural identity is not static but dynamic, influenced by historical and social contexts. While multiculturalism honors the coexistence of cultures, diversity emphasizes the existence of separate groups in a society, accentuating differences over integration. In postcolonial discussions, diversity denotes the diverse cultural manifestations, histories, and experiences of various ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic communities in a postcolonial context. Such disparities frequently result in conflicts and discussions, especially in postcolonial nations where different factions struggle for authority and representation.

Postcolonial theory often explores ethical dilemmas stemming from colonial pasts and injustices. This entails taking into account the moral responsibilities of previous colonial powers to rectify historical injustices, alongside the ethical challenges posed by inherited colonial frameworks (legal, economic, or cultural). Postcolonial theorists critique the Western ethical frameworks enforced on colonized societies throughout the colonial period, frequently rationalized as a "civilizing mission" or a necessity to "rescue" indigenous populations (Said, 1993). These ethical frameworks,

however, often disregarded or undervalued indigenous cultures and moral systems. In postcolonial discourse, ethics pertains to the differentiation between right and wrong and is frequently analyzed regarding historical injustices and the moral duty to address the harms of colonialism.

Faith, particularly regarding religion, occupies an important role in postcolonial theory, as numerous colonized groups faced involuntary religious conversion and the enforcement of external belief systems. Christian missionaries, for instance, were crucial in the colonial initiative, employing religion as a means of domination. Postcolonial theorists examine how colonialism has affected indigenous religious traditions, the merging of local beliefs with external faiths, and the function of spirituality in resistance and the development of postcolonial identities. Faith may function as a mechanism of colonial domination while also serving as a method of resistance, endurance, and the formation of new identities in a postcolonial setting (Spivak, 1988). Within this framework, faith extends beyond mere religious belief; it also encompasses how it has influenced the lives and identities of colonized populations, both during and following the colonial era.

Intisar Khaleel Tikrit (2018) discussed Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* in "Structuralism and Hybridity Theories in Zadie Smith's Novel, White Teeth" to highlight the struggle of the characters and its historical background of their families. She found that hybridity managed to change the society context. However, the hybrids became strangers in the eyes of the English people. The recent study provides an insight on the influence of ethnicity, religion and culture to shape the lives of the characters in critical time in both novels targeted in the recent study.

McCarthy's *The Road*: A Journey of a Father and a Son to the Unknown

McCarthy concentrate from the beginning on the image of the post-apocalyptic world, "Barren, silent, godless" (McCarthy, p. 2). "The city was mostly burned. No

sign of life. Cars in the street caked with ash, everything covered with ash and dust" (P. 9). *The Road* is a harrowing post-apocalyptic novel that intimately chronicles the journey of a father and his young son through a desolate and barren landscape. Following an unspecified catastrophic event, the world has been transformed into a gray, ash-covered wasteland where the sun is perpetually obscured, and nearly all forms of life have perished. In this grim setting, the father and son, whose names are never revealed, embark on a southward trek, driven by the faint hope of finding a warmer climate and remnants of civilization.

McCarthy deliberately chooses not to provide names for the man and his son, referring to them only as "the father" and "the son." This choice underscores the idea that in a post-apocalyptic world, individual identities lose their significance. In such a setting, names no longer convey meaningful information about individuals because the societal structures and cultural contexts that give names their significance have dissolved. The survivors in this world are rendered nearly indistinguishable from one another, united by their shared struggle for survival. What differentiates them are their intrinsic values, shaped by their religious beliefs and cultural principles. Moreover, McCarthy's stylistic decisions, such as leaving spaces and incomplete lines, reflect the anarchy and fragmentation of the post-apocalyptic world. These narrative techniques mirror the chaotic and disordered state of society following the catastrophic event. By presenting the landscape of a ravaged America with stark realism, McCarthy aims to convey the raw and unfiltered reality of life after such widespread destruction. His minimalist prose and fragmented narrative structure enhance the novel's portrayal of a world stripped of order and meaning, emphasizing the desolation and existential despair that permeate the story.

During their adventure, the duo encounters constant obstacles. They face a critical lack of food, struggling with hunger as they search for provisions in deserted homes and shops. The severe weather worsens their situation, as cold and rain frequently

hinder their progress. Nonetheless, the greatest danger arises from fellow survivors, many of whom have turned to cannibalism in their desperate efforts to survive. The father and son need to stay alert, always watchful for possible threats hiding around each turn. Although the surrounding environment is overwhelmingly grim, the main theme of the novel is the deep connection shared between father and son. The father's steadfast resolve to shield his son no matter what offers a ray of hope in the midst of despair. This connection serves as the emotional heart of the narrative, emphasizing love's lasting strength despite appearing to confront overwhelming hopelessness. The main emphasis of the novel is on the fight for existence in a setting where essential resources are limited. The journey of the father and son demonstrates the resilience of humanity and the innate drive to endure despite overwhelming challenges. The novel showcases a clear difference between the "good characters," embodied by the father and son, who hold onto their ethics despite the despair, and the "bad characters," who have forsaken their humanity and turned to savagery. The father's affection and resolve to safeguard his son offer a spark of hope in a largely despairing world.

What distinguish the father and the son is to keep their religious values and humanity by avoiding eating the people as cannibals: “We wouldn’t ever eat anybody, would we? […] No. We wouldn’t. No matter what. No. No matter what. Because we’re the good guys. Yes. And we’re carrying the fire. And we’re carrying the fire. Yes (128–29). McCarthy's novel is renowned for its sparse, minimalist prose, which mirrors the starkness of the world it depicts. The language is unadorned yet evocative, creating a haunting portrayal of a world stripped of humanity and hope. Through this bleak and desolate setting, *The Road* delves into deep and thought-provoking themes, such as the fundamental struggle for survival, the moral dichotomy between good and evil, and the enduring power of love and hope in the face of overwhelming despair. Ultimately, *The Road* is a powerful meditation on the human condition, exploring how people cling to their humanity and compassion even in the direst

circumstances. The father and son's journey serves as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit, and the novel's emotional depth and stark beauty leave a lasting impression on its readers.

In a world where civilization, as understood by the reader, has collapsed, the boy and the man distinguish themselves from the blood cults through their steadfast refusal to consume human flesh. This aversion to cannibalism serves as a crucial method for underscoring their humanity. It positions those who do resort to cannibalism as fundamentally "other," creating a clear moral divide between the protagonists and the depraved remnants of society. The recurring motif of "carrying the fire" throughout the novel reinforces this distinction. In prehistoric times, fire symbolized the dawn of civilization, providing warmth, protection, and a means to cook food. Similarly, in the post-apocalyptic context of the novel, "carrying the fire" symbolizes the preservation of human decency and moral integrity amidst the collapse of societal norms. By invoking this phrase repeatedly, McCarthy emphasizes that the father and son are not merely surviving; they are upholding the core values of civilization in a world where such values have been all but obliterated. The father's insistence on "carrying the fire" becomes a metaphor for enduring civilization and maintaining a moral compass. It highlights their commitment to preserving the remnants of human dignity and ethical behavior, even when faced with the direst of circumstances. This metaphorical fire represents hope, moral clarity, and the refusal to succumb to the barbarism that surrounds them, thus marking the father and son as beacons of humanity in a world gone dark (Dominy, p. 146).

Religious and Cultural Symbolism in *The Road*

The father often finds himself overwhelmed by the overpowering darkness: “At night when he woke coughing he’d sit up with his hand pushed over his head against the blackness. Like a man waking in a grave” (228). This darkness evokes blindness, symbolizing human powerlessness against both literal and figurative shadows: “They

went on in the perfect blackness, sightless as the blind" (250). This blinding darkness not only obliterates natural and technological sources of light but also erases any genuine sense of hope. The personification of darkness evolves to the point where it is seen as omnipotent from the father's perspective, reigning as the dominant force in the post-apocalyptic world: "he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the interstate earth. Darkness implacable… The crushing black vacuum of the universe" (138). Darkness consumes and ultimately conquers all natural elements: "The snow whispered down in the stillness and the sparks rose and dimmed and died in the eternal blackness" (101). It also dictates the lives of the father and son, often described with battle-related verbs, as they perpetually succumb to it: "Night overtook them on a muddy road" (92).

As the father's illness progresses, darkness transforms into a metaphor for the post-apocalyptic world, as he promises his son, "I will not send you into the darkness alone" (265). Ultimately, the dead father becomes a symbol of this darkness, cold and terrifying: "he knelt beside his father and held his cold hand and said his name over and over again" (301). Although the father experiences a complete separation from his body in death, his sense of corporeality is tenuous throughout the novel. At the beginning of *The Road*, the father awakens from a dream in which he and the boy are "Like pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast" (1). This form of disembodiment, losing control over one's physical presence while surrendering to a greater force, is a recurring theme for the father, who grapples with his bodily existence until his death. His final departure can thus be seen as the ultimate surrender to both the metaphorical and physical darkness (Kaminsky, p. 6).

McCarthy depicts the fire as something very important and it was repeated in different occasion:

And nothing bad is going to happen to us.

That's right.

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Because we're carrying the fire.
Yes. Because we're carrying the fire. (p. 57).

In Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*, fire serves as a central and multifaceted symbol. It represents a variety of themes and ideas that are crucial to understanding the novel's deeper meanings. Here are some key interpretations of fire in *The Road*: The concept of "carrying the fire" is a recurrent motif in the novel. The fire represents hope, moral integrity, and the will to survive. The father repeatedly tells his son that they are the "good guys" because they "carry the fire," implying that they maintain a sense of humanity and goodness in a world that has lost both. It also symbolizes the remnants of human civilization, including compassion, ethics, and the connection between people. It is a metaphor for the inner light of humanity that the father strives to pass on to his son. In addition, it signifies life itself and the continuity of existence. The father's insistence on keeping the fire alive underscores his desire to ensure that his son not only survives but also retains his humanity and religious compass in the face of overwhelming desolation and despair.

The journey to "carry the fire" reflects the perseverance and resilience of the protagonists. Despite the bleakness of their environment and the ever-present threats, the father and son persist in their journey, driven by the fire within them. By teaching his son to "carry the fire," the father is passing on a legacy of hope and moral integrity. This symbolizes the possibility of a future where goodness can still prevail, even in the direst circumstances. In essence, fire in *The Road* encapsulates the enduring spirit of hope, the preservation of human values, and the quest for survival in a post-apocalyptic world. It serves as a beacon of light in the darkness, guiding the characters and offering a glimmer of potential redemption and continuity amidst the desolation.

From a religious perspective, particularly within Christianity, fire is a significant symbol of the Holy Spirit. It represents God's presence and guidance, as well as

purification and sanctification. In *The Road*, the father emphasizes to his son the importance of these religious values, which protect them from abandoning their moral compass and becoming like the bad people they encounter. He consistently reminds his son that they are the good people, upholding these values. The narrative highlights the deeply rooted religious principles in the boy's heart, with the father continuously urging him to "carry the fire." This fire symbolizes spiritual enlightenment and represents not only a physical light but also their passionate commitment to God's mission and the transformative power of faith.

The road symbolizes the physical and existential journey that the father and son undertake, representing their struggle for survival in a post-apocalyptic world. Filled with challenges and threats, it embodies their constant fight to stay alive. Despite the desolation and uncertainty, the road provides direction and purpose, offering a tangible route that gives the characters a goal and a reason to keep moving forward, symbolizing hope amidst despair. The road is a place of desolation where the father and son often find themselves isolated, highlighting their loneliness in a devastated world. However, it also connects different places and people, suggesting the possibility of encountering others and finding remnants of civilization. This duality underscores the road as both a symbol of isolation and a potential bridge to human connection. The journey along the road forces the characters to confront their fears, hopes, and moral choices, symbolizing the transformative power of their experiences. It serves as a metaphor for the moral path the father and son choose to follow. Despite the chaos and moral decay surrounding them, they strive to maintain their ethical standards and humanity, embodying the righteous path in a fallen world.

The father regards his son as his spiritual pillar. If the boy were to die, the father would lose his will to live. This bond may serve as a motivation for the boy to persevere, never giving up regardless of how dire the situation becomes or how faint the hope appears, all for the sake of his father. As his father tells him, "This is what

the good guys do. They keep trying. They don't give up" (McCarthy, p. 137). After killing a man who is likely a cannibal, the father tells his son, "My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you" (p. 77). This statement underscores his profound sense of responsibility as a father, setting a role model for the boy in understanding family ethics and leaving a lasting impression on him (Qiu-sheng, p.1129).

In apocalyptic stories, the presence of children often symbolizes hope for the redemption of humanity. A child's ability to survive in a post-apocalyptic world filled with violence, harsh weather, and desolation, despite overwhelming odds, suggests that humanity can still be saved. This child's ability to uphold morality in such a bleak environment indicates that the good guys can still prevail. Though the novel ends on an open note, McCarthy leaves readers with a hopeful message about humanity's future. In the final exchange between the boy and the father of another family, the boy asks if there are other children with them. The father confirms that there is a boy and a girl, indicating that these children will continue to survive while "carrying the fire." This implies that the boy is no longer alone and now has other children and good people with him, increasing the likelihood that humanity and morality will be restored. Religion and culture profoundly influence human behavior, often intertwining in complex ways. At times, religious values can take precedence over cultural norms, guiding individuals' actions and decisions. This dynamic is encapsulated in the recurring phrase "we're carrying the fire" (p. 57) from McCarthy's *The Road*. This phrase signifies the preservation of moral and ethical principles in a world where cultural structures have collapsed. It reflects a commitment to maintaining a sense of goodness and hope amidst desolation, emphasizing the power of religious values to sustain humanity even when cultural constructs falter.

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Zadie Smith's *The White Teeth* and Ethnicity: Religious and Cultural Roots and their Impact on Gender

The novel deeply explores the challenges faced by immigrant families striving to maintain their cultural and religious traditions while integrating into British society. The characters struggle with internal and external conflicts while exploring their identities. Zadie Smith explores the complexities of family relationships and intergenerational tensions, emphasizing how the hopes and worries of parents frequently conflict with the wishes and values of their offspring. *White Teeth* contrasts religious belief with advancements in science. Samad's piety sharply contrasts with the secular, scientific environment embodied by Dr. Chalfen, highlighting the intricacies of belief systems in a diverse society. The novel explores how much individuals can control their fates compared to being influenced by their backgrounds and situations, demonstrating how the characters' lives are affected by historical events, personal decisions, and chance happenings. Additionally, it examines the enduring impacts of British colonialism on former colonies and their Diasporas.

The story starts with Archie's unsuccessful suicide attempt and his later marriage to Clara, then explores the relationship between Archie and Samad, who became friends during World War II. The narrative transitions across various timeframes and viewpoints, creating a vibrant, multi-generational depiction of life in London. A key subplot examines Samad's choice to send one of his twin sons, Magid, to Bangladesh to help him preserve his cultural and religious identity. This choice causes a divide in the family, as Magid adopts a more Western lifestyle than his brother Millat, who strongly adheres to a militant interpretation of Islam. In the meantime, Irie grapples with her sense of self, feeling conflicted between her Jamaican heritage and British upbringing. The novel's climax revolves around the Future Mouse initiative, a contentious genetic experiment directed by Dr. Marcus Chalfen, a scientist

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representing the contemporary, secular society. The characters' lives blend in unforeseen manners during a public exhibition of the project, leading to a tense and unclear ending.

The families of Jones, Iqbal, and Chalfen in *White Teeth* illustrate the challenges of adjusting to a different cultural environment. The Jones family, for example, exemplifies the intricacies of an interracial relationship. Archie Jones, a man from Britain, hasn't completely adapted to life in England. He is wedded to Clara Bowden, a young black Jamaican woman, and their relationship illustrates the cultural strains between a native Brit and an immigrant. Their daughter, Irie Jones, encounters difficulties in establishing her identity in a diverse cultural environment. Samad Iqbal, an immigrant from Bangladesh, relocated to England along with his wife, Alsana Begum. They are parents to twin boys, Magid and Millat. Samad insists that his family follows Islam, a challenge in Britain, which leads him to send Magid to Bangladesh. Ironically, Magid ends up being more English than his father had planned. Alsana has an aversion to English culture and desires her sons to be brought up in their own traditions. In contrast, as a teenager, Millat becomes defiant, taking up chain smoking and showing disrespect towards girls at school. His encounters, especially within the Chalfen family, expose the emotional burden of enforcing English principles on immigrants, driving him toward radicalism. The Chalfen family, a Jewish household from North London, comprises Marcus, Joyce, and their son Joshua. Both parents are focused on their jobs, overlooking Joshua’s difficulties. The family's dynamics differ from those of the Iqbals and Joneses, highlighting the diverse effects of cultural integration on various families (Neupane, P. 117).

Family and Conflict of Generations

Samad is a complex individual whose strong Muslim faith conflicts with contemporary society, cultural traditions, and his self-identity. He confronts issues surrounding intergenerational tensions, cultural integration, and the mismatch

between his background and the evolving identity of London. Frequently, his duties showcase him as hasty, torn, and overwhelmed. Regardless of his shortcomings, Samad's efforts to align his principles with the real world render him an intriguing character in *White Teeth*. Being a first-generation Bengali immigrant, Samad is determined to maintain his identity, which is reflected in his responses. The novel's second phase, taking place in the 1980s, focuses on the relationships within and between families of characters from various ethnic backgrounds. In the concluding part, set in the 1990s, the emphasis changes to the interactions of inclusion and exclusion among religious and scientific communities, influencing the social environment. *White Teeth* delves into the possible lives of ethnically diverse people from Smith's generation in London while aiming to normalize and affirm these experiences as an essential part of daily life in Britain (Fernández, P. 144,146).

Samad resists adopting Western notions to overcome adaptation challenges. When Archie calls him "Sam" instead of "Samad," he angrily responds, "Don't call me Sam... I'm not one of your English boys. My name is Samad Miah Iqbal. Not Sam. Not Sammy. And not, God forbid, Samuel. It is Samad" (112). Samad's reaction highlights one of the most significant fears of immigrants in a multicultural society: the loss of identity when one's name is changed. Samad's greatest source of pride is his great-grandfather, Mangal Pande, who led an uprising against the British colonists and sacrificed his life in the process. Samad idolizes Pande, second only to Allah. From an anthropological perspective, Pande symbolizes the Bengali aspect of Samad's identity that he fiercely clings to. Although many disagree with Samad's view of Pande as an unappreciated hero, Pande remains a hero in Samad's eyes. Samad's belief in Pande's heroism, though not universally accepted, serves as a form of cultural resistance and preservation. It actively shapes his identity within a multicultural society, emphasizing the importance of reclaiming narratives and asserting oneself to shape one's historical consciousness. Samad's steadfast respect for Pande, despite societal disapproval, demonstrates his dedication to upholding his

Bengali roots and challenging prevailing historical accounts that may demonize historical figures. His defense of Pande also represents the struggles of immigrants to preserve their identity in post-colonial times, as they often have nothing left of their home nation except their names and historical documents.

Samad is a complex character constantly torn between opposing forces: the need for change versus religious and cultural beliefs, the comfort of his past versus the uncertainty of his future, and the battle between intuition and reason. His strong religious beliefs, which influence every aspect of his life—from his morality to his cultural identity to his sexuality—exacerbate his troubles. Relocating from Bangladesh to Britain, Samad must navigate the blending of Western and Eastern lives, placing his fervent Islamic beliefs in conflict with the cultural changes he experiences in his new surroundings. Despite his best efforts to adhere to Islamic teachings, Samad repeatedly falls short of his own expectations, causing him immense inner turmoil and preventing him from finding peace. Guilt is a prevailing emotion in his religious struggle, as even his colleague Shiva observes: "You should never have gotten religious, Samad. It doesn't suit you... All that guilt's not healthy" (144).

Samad consistently reminds others of his Muslim identity, frequently discussing God and Islam. The potential disappearance of Islamic religion in a multicultural society is a significant concern for immigrants, deeply influencing their sense of identity. "I am a Muslim, Mickey; I don't indulge anymore" (186). However, Samad selectively follows Islamic principles, engaging in activities that contradict his religious beliefs, such as visiting bars, gambling, and using drugs. These actions are generally considered inappropriate for a practicing Muslim. Millat describes his father: "He prays five times a day, but he still drinks, and he doesn't have any Muslim friends. Then he has a go at me for fucking a white girl" (334). Samad oscillates between extremes, particularly regarding sexuality and basic comforts. In times of crisis, he

attempts to justify his actions to himself, even trying to make Haram items Halal. Despite his efforts to maintain his Islamic identity, he developed the habit of taking a gulp, looking up at the sky like a Christian, making deals with Allah, and saying, "I'm a good man... Give me a break. I have an odd drink" (139-140). His adherence to the Haram concept contrasts with the image of God in Anglican, Methodist, or Catholic churches, highlighting his unique struggles.

After grappling with his identity, Samad becomes concerned about his children's ability to maintain their cultural heritage in a multicultural society. Although personally hypocritical in his religious beliefs, he is resolute in raising his children in Islam, hoping that embracing religion will counteract the hostility they face due to their multifaceted identities as second-generation immigrants. Samad moves his family from East London to North London, seeking a more liberal environment for his children. Over time, he develops prejudices against British culture, perhaps due to his dissatisfaction with his children's complete integration of it—whether it be Millat's immersion in pop culture or Magid's dedication to science and education. Samad struggles to get his children to live as devout Muslims and emulate their Bangladeshi heritage. Despite his criticisms of Britain and Western society, Samad longs for the freedom to live and act in ways that bring him comfort. During his children's upbringing, he is determined to preserve their cultural heritage, deciding to send them back to Bangladesh to shield them from Western influences and reconnect them with their religious and cultural origins. Jegu argues that

> In the novel, Iqbal's family, thinking about solving those conflicts, sends one of the twins, Millat, back to Bangladesh. They expect, at least one of the twins, to be raised up according to traditional Islamic values. The other twin brother, Magid, grows up in London. Ironically, the plan collapses and Millat, who grows up in Bangladesh returns to London as an atheist, and their English-educated son Magid becomes a radical Islamic supporter in London. (197)

However, financial constraints force Samad to choose only one of his sons to send back. The results contradict his intentions: Magid returns as an almost flawless Englishman with a dark complexion, shaped by traditional colonial schooling in Bangladesh, while Millat embodies a quintessential cultural composite identity. As his children grow and attend school, Samad closely monitors events and their impact on his children's identity. He tries to prevent his children from integrating into non-Islamic events. “What about the Harvest Festival? That is precisely what I want to know. What is all this about the Harvest Festival? What is it? Why is it? And why must my children celebrate it?” (127). Moreover, Samad represents other immigrants in a multicultural society, highlighting the lack of care for or presence of authentic immigrant identities. For example, when a music teacher mistakenly identifies Samad and his children as Indian immigrants, he patiently corrects her: “I’m not actually from India, you know... No. I’m from Bangladesh” (133).Throughout the novel, Samad strives to maintain the purity of his identity and, by extension, that of his children. Whenever he makes a mistake, his thoughts quickly turn to his children and their future, illustrating his deep concern for their well-being. He believes firmly in the lasting impact of one’s actions: “You must live life with the full knowledge that your actions will remain. We are creatures of consequence. Our children will be born of our actions. Our accidents will become their destinies. Oh, the actions will remain” (102).

Despite his efforts to resist the influences of a multicultural society, Samad continues to seek solutions to this complex problem. For instance, he reaches out to Irie, a friend of his son, believing she understands his sons better than he does. “I came to ask your advice, Irie. What can I do?” (406). By the novel’s conclusion, it is evident that as Samad ages, the anger and despair he once felt towards certain aspects of his personality are gradually replaced by a sense of acceptance and acknowledgment. He becomes more observant and less inclined to suppress his true self, partly due to his advanced age and partly because he recognizes his own tendencies in others. “He

knows what it is to seek. He knows about the dryness. He has felt the thirst you get in a strange land—horrible, persistent—the thirst that lasts your whole life" (530). This growing understanding and acceptance mark a significant shift in Samad's character, highlighting his journey towards reconciling his identity within a multicultural context.

As Clara grows older, she attempts to shed her religious background and break free from the identity imposed by her mother, fleeing into the arms of Archie despite his lack of faith. Consequently, Clara struggles to fully develop her own identity. According to Práce, Clara's identity confusion largely stems from gender-related factors. She is in conflict with her mother and actively seeks support from men, but fails to find the help she needs. This is evident when her daughter, Irie, becomes fascinated with the Chalfens. Clara perceives no harm; on the contrary, she believes that the Chalfens, who are Jewish, positively contribute to Irie's education. Furthermore, consequently, she decides to thank Mrs. Chalfen for the time spent with Irie.

British culture significantly influences Clara, who undergoes a continuous process of transformation. Her identity is not fixed and homogeneous but flexible and diverse. Smith skillfully uses the metaphor of teeth to represent Clara's fluid identity. "When Clara fell, knocking the teeth out of the top of her mouth" (44). Teeth, symbolizing roots in *White Teeth*, suggest that Clara is indifferent to fixing her teeth, indicating her disregard for her roots and identity. Despite lacking love for Archie, Clara marries him to start anew. She stays with him even after he fails to fulfill his initial promise to take her far away, ultimately buying a house in Willesden. These elements highlight Clara's readiness to make concessions. However, Clara sees her situation as one where she gains something but also loses something (45). In contrast, Alsana, a character from the first generation, often struggles to accept British culture.

She is concerned with social norms, familial histories, and cultural heritage, highlighting the generational differences in adapting to a multicultural society.

Alsana Iqbal happily lives in North London, but her heart still belongs to Bangladesh and India. For instance, on the night of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination, Alsana sheds tears, saying, “I am not crying for her, you idiot; I am crying for my friends. There will be blood on the streets back home” (198). However, she repeatedly rejects Samad's offer to take their boys to Bangladesh for a better life, countering, “You say you are thankful we are in England; that’s because you have swallowed it whole. I can tell you those boys would have a better life back home than they ever had” (199). “What is the point of moving here—a nice house, yes, very nice, very nice—but where the food is?” (61). She also reflects, “It was only that here, in Willesden, there was just not enough of any one thing to gang up against any other thing” (67).

However, on Magid’s ninth birthday, when a group arrives asking for Mark Smith, Alsana is shocked to realize the impact of British culture on her children: ‘Mark? No Mark here,’ Alsana had said; only the family of Iqbal is in here. You have the wrong house.’ ‘Hi, guys.’ ‘Hi, Mark.’ ‘Off to the chess club, Mum.’ ‘Yes, M-M-Mark,’ said Alsana (151). This moment terrifies her as she sees her sons becoming more accustomed to English life. She worries about their future in English society, which has altered their views and routines, stating, "The English are the only people... who want to teach you and steal from you at the same time" (356). Unlike her husband, Samad, who is a traditionalist, Alsana is more open to diversity and acknowledges their children's unique upbringing. “But I am not like Samad Iqbal. I restrain myself. I live. I let live” (235).

Alsana recognizes that English culture offers opportunities for advancement, education, and success, but she also views it as a force that can erode distinct religious and cultural identities. Her concern for her children's potential loss of their cultural background and ancestral origins is evident. Yet, she contradicts herself

when she fears for her son's identity, exclaiming, "I am saying these people are taking my son away from me! Birds with teeth! They're Englishifying him completely! They're deliberately leading him away from his culture, his family, and his religion" (345). Her niece reminds her, "What are you afraid of, Alsi? He's second generation; you always say it yourself; you need to let them go their way" (346). Alsana's journey illustrates the intricate conflict between adopting contemporary cultural standards and safeguarding ancestral religious and cultural values.

Millat Iqbal, one of Samad Iqbal's sons, represents the experiences of the Bangladeshi diaspora in Britain. Born and raised in Willesden, London, Millat's character illustrates the challenges of navigating cultural heritage, identity, and belonging. "It appeared Millat was filled with self-revulsion and hatred... or an inability to reconcile two opposing cultures... and it emerged that 60 percent of Asian men did this... and 90 percent of Muslims felt that" (375). As the second son, Millat struggles under the stereotype that he is less capable than his brother, Magid. At school council meetings, when the music teacher Poppy Burt-Jones discusses Magid and Millat with their father, Samad dismisses Millat as a "good-for-nothing" (135). Millat often rebels against Samad's Islamic and cultural beliefs, preferring a more secular and Westernized lifestyle. However, he maintains his own identity, saying, "he knew himself to be no follower, no chief, no wanker, no sell-out, and no fuckwit— no matter what his father said" (217). The narrator does not justify Millat's actions or the act of book burning but instead shows empathy for the weight he carries as a brown Muslim, a burden passed down from his father and ancestors. In a country where an immigrant's identity is marginalized, it reveals that cultural, ethnic, and religious differences are merely tolerated rather than embraced by the majority. Similarly, Millat's lack of a voice in England reflects the broader exclusion of immigrants from participating in decision-making processes (Küçük, p.255).

Millat's defiance highlights the conflict between the younger generation's desire for independence and the older generation's adherence to tradition. He is constantly torn between British youth culture and his Bangladeshi heritage, struggling to define himself within this multicultural environment. "In the language of the street, Millat was a rude boy, a bad man, at the forefront, changing image as often as shoes; sweet-as, safe, wicked" (217). Smith, in *White Teeth*, uses Millat's character to explore the complexity of multiculturalism, emphasizing the conflicts and opportunities that arise from blending different cultures. Millat's struggle for identity mirrors the broader experience of many immigrants and their descendants, who must navigate multiple cultural identities. During a music lesson, Miss Burt-Jones asks, "What music do you like, Millat? Something you listen to at home, maybe?" (156). Millat's inability to respond underscores his struggle with identity and belonging.

Despite being born in London, Millat feels he will never be considered truly British due to racial stereotypes and discrimination. He feels marginalized, noting, "he was a Paki no matter where he came from; that smelt of curry; that he worshipped elephants and wore turbans; that no one who looked like Millat, spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat..." (234). These feelings fuel his anger and contribute to his rebellious nature. Millat embodies corruption, becoming the gangster he once aspired to be. He joins various organizations, including KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation), not out of belief but a desire for community and leadership. Despite this, he remains angry and hurt, feeling like he belongs nowhere: "there remained ever-present anger and hurt, the feeling of belonging nowhere that comes to people who belong everywhere" (131). His radicalization reflects the challenges faced by many second-generation immigrants who must navigate social norms and cultural tensions. Millat's relationship with his father, Samad, is strained due to Samad's rigid adherence to Islamic customs. This tension pushes Millat to embrace a more secular, Western way of life while still grappling with his Bangladeshi heritage. His struggle to reconcile these conflicting identities leads him

to rebel, seeking to lead others who share his sense of marginalization. In contrast, Magid, another second-generation immigrant, strives to integrate into British society, often ignoring his roots throughout the novel. This juxtaposition between Millat and Magid further highlights the diverse responses of the second generation to their cultural heritage and identity.

Magid feels humiliated by his Eastern heritage and wishes to grow up in a Western family. He wants to participate in Western traditions like the Harvest Festival, but his father, Samad, insists, "Dammit, you are a Muslim, not a wood sprite!" (151-152). Samad also desires Magid to accompany him on the hajj, but Magid refuses, prioritizing his education over religious obligations: "I CAN'T GO ON HAJ. I've got to go to school. I DON'T HAVE TIME TO GO TO MECCA. IT'S NOT FAIR" (152). Sakiz illustrates that

> The second generation children, Magid and Millat Iqbal, have more individualistic attitudes towards multicultural experience than their parents, Samad and Alsana Iqbal. Similarly, despite her obsession with her roots (as suggested by her association with *white teeth*, tooth canals and tooth decay), Irie Jones differs from her parents, Archie Jones and Clara Bowden, in that she finally recognizes that roots are neither actually accessible nor more responsible for her current social positioning than her spatial and multicultural relations. (P. 26)

Samad is against his children's involvement in Western social life, but Magid, in particular, insists on adopting Western habits. Concerned about losing their cultural identity, Samad decides to send Magid to Bangladesh to learn true Islamic and cultural values, concentrating more Islamic values and rituals. However, despite growing up in Bangladesh, British culture continues to influence Magid. His identity evolves through interactions with diverse experiences, reflecting the malleable nature of identity.

For example, Magid writes, "We Indians, we Bengalis, we Pakistanis, throw up our hands and cry 'Fate!' in the face of history. But many of us are uneducated, and many of us do not understand the world. We must be more like the English" (287-288). His English eloquence and Anglicized dressing style surprise his family, as Clara notes, "Look at his nose! He's got a Roman nose now. He looks like a little aristocrat, like a little Englishman" (216). When Magid returns to England after eight years, his family barely recognizes him: "I don't recognize him. There is something peculiar about him," says Alsana, while Samad remarks, "This is some clone; this is not an Iqbal" (424). Magid's journey demonstrates the profound impact of a multicultural society on Islamic and cultural identity. Despite his upbringing in Bangladesh, his adoption of Western cultural influences extends beyond geographical boundaries. His choice to order a bacon sandwich upon returning to England signifies his embrace of British culture: "I think," replied Magid, "I should like a bacon sandwich" (450).

However, In *White Teeth*, Smith uses teeth as a metaphor for the characters' rootedness. Roots are essential for individuals as they play a key role in shaping their identity. Much like teeth, which are a unique and deeply embedded part of the body, roots are difficult to remove, making them hard to escape. Therefore, breaking away from one's roots is not a simple task; even if one attempts to do so, the process is fraught with difficulty and pain. Just as with teeth, the void left behind is not easily filled, as roots and history are integral to self-identification (Rizgar, p, 8). This highlights the complexities of identity formation in a multicultural world where religious and cultural boundaries are increasingly blurred. In contrast, Irie, another second-generation immigrant, strives to integrate into British society but eventually seeks to reconnect with her original roots as the novel progresses.

In McCartney's *The Road*, In McCarthy's *The Road*, the child's religious and cultural background, combined with his father's perspective, leads him to be seen as a Christ-

like figure. The father's reverence and protective nature reflect a belief that the boy embodies purity and hope in a world ravaged by despair. This connection to Christ-like imagery elevates the boy's role beyond mere survival, positioning him as a symbol of redemption and moral integrity amidst the bleakness of their journey. The father may fail in his religious and cultural value while the boy supposes to be a symbol of purity and religious and cultural values. Here the religious concepts and values of Christianity dominate his journey and he wants to be like the Christ to help the people. If he sees any one in his journey needs help, he will ask his father to help. However, Majid in *White Teeth*, he fails to keep his Islamic values despite his father's insistence to learn the Islamic and cultural values of his people in Bangladesh. As Samad himself, he wants to keep the Islamic value but he does not hesitate to drink wine and live the British life. Islamic values becomes fragile.

Like The Father, in *The Road*, Samad does not want his children to be assimilated with the British religious and cultural values. He requires them to keep their Islamic and cultural value, while he himself does not manage to keep all the manifestations of the Islamic life. Samad is very upset to be called Sam "Don't call me Sam... I'm not one of your English boys. My name is Samad Miah Iqbal. Not Sam. Not Sammy. And not, God forbid, Samuel. It is Samad" (112). However, he keeps the manifestations of Islamic values, ignoring the essence of Islam and the Islamic values. "He prays five times a day, but he still drinks, and he doesn't have any Muslim friends. Then he has a go at me for fucking a white girl" (334). Like the father of *The Road*, he drives his son to be an example as Christ, not to commit sins while he himself violates his Christianity teachings and values.

Conclusion

The research investigates what primarily influences human actions as represented in fiction: ethnicity, religion or culture. This study is demonstrated by examining Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. In *The Road*, the trek

of the father and the boy takes place in a post-apocalyptic setting, where hunger and basic instincts may seem to govern human behavior, especially when religious beliefs and cultural ethics are the sole surviving principles. The father works to maintain his son's innocence, presenting him as a representation of purity and spirituality, reflecting Christ-like traits. The son, although young and inexperienced, is depicted as naive and kind-hearted, always ready to assist others. At the same time, the father, who sometimes shows his own fragility and shortcomings, is intent on ensuring his son does not acquire these characteristics. He appears as an educator, determined to mold his son to surpass him, highlighting the significance of upholding moral principles in a hopeless world.

Like the father in *White Teeth*, who desires his sons to embrace Islamic values, teachings, and rituals, he also finds it challenging to completely adhere to the rigid expectations of his faith. Even with his own weaknesses, he wishes that his sons will exceed him in their dedication to religious values. Nevertheless, the second generation frequently pursues their ambitions, overlooking the Islamic principles and cultural traditions that their father cherishes. For instance, Majid declines to join his father on the pilgrimage to Mecca, suggesting that the ritual does not inspire him to feel devoted to Allah, his Creator.

The research shows that in *The Road*, ethnicity, and religion particularly Christianity, serves as a significant influence on the father's behavior. His belief compels him to protect his son's innocence, aiming to mold him into a heavenly, Christ-like being. In contrast, Samad in *White Teeth* passionately adheres to the visible symbols of Islam, demanding to be addressed by his complete name instead of the anglicized "Sam." Nonetheless, his dedication to the faith is troubled; he shows no apparent regret for breaching Islamic principles, like visiting bars or participating in forbidden relationships. However, in spite of his own shortcomings, Samad passionately urges his children to follow the Islamic and cultural customs of their background. In *White*

Teeth, Islam holds a vital role in the family's traditions and convictions, yet there is consistent friction between their behaviors and the principles of the faith. Still, they hold Islam in high regard as the holy word of Allah, even when they sometimes wander from its teachings. In both *The Road* and *White Teeth*, cultural traditions and religious values are greatly respected, although they are more distinctly honored in *The Road*. In both novels, religion assumes an important role, becoming an almost fervent drive for the fathers, who are intent on leading their sons down a moral path, frequently in contrast to the impacts of a diverse, Western culture. Regardless of being Islamic or Christian, it seems that religious values have a greater impact on the characters' actions than their cultural heritage. The prevalence of religious values over cultural ones differs in strength across the two works, yet in both cases, it highlights the fathers' strong wish to maintain and impart their faith to future generations.

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