

# SCIENCE VS FAITH: COMPETING IDEOLOGIES IN HYBRID IDENTITY FORMATION IN ZADIE SMITH'S WORKS

Norbayeva Nasiba Sodiqjon qizi

Uzbekistan state world language university

Independent researcher

**Abstract.** This article explores the ideological tension between science and faith as central forces shaping hybrid identity formation in the literary works of Zadie Smith. As a contemporary British writer, Smith frequently addresses multiculturalism, postcolonial experiences, and the fragmented identities of individuals living in pluralistic societies. The study examines how scientific rationalism and religious belief function as competing yet interrelated frameworks through which characters negotiate their sense of self. Drawing on selected novels such as *White Teeth* and *NW*, the article analyzes how characters embody hybrid identities that emerge at the intersection of empirical knowledge, secular modernity, and inherited religious traditions. The methodological approach combines literary analysis with cultural and sociological perspectives to reveal how ideological conflict influences personal and collective identity construction. The findings suggest that neither science nor faith is presented as a dominant or absolute truth; instead, Smith portrays identity as fluid, unstable, and continuously reshaped by ideological contradictions. The article contributes to contemporary debates on identity formation in globalized societies by highlighting the role of ideological plurality in shaping modern subjectivity. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that Zadie Smith's works reflect the complexity of hybrid identities formed through the ongoing negotiation between rational inquiry and spiritual belief.

**Keywords:** Science, faith, hybrid identity, ideology, multiculturalism, Zadie Smith

НАУКА ПРОТИВ ВЕРЫ: КОНКУРИРУЮЩИЕ ИДЕОЛОГИИ В  
ФОРМИРОВАНИИ ГИБРИДНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В  
ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯХ ЗЭДИ СМИТ

**Аннотация.** В данной статье исследуется идеологическое напряжение между наукой и верой как ключевыми силами, формирующими гибридную идентичность в литературных произведениях Зэди Смит. Будучи современным британским писателем, Смит часто обращается к вопросам мультикультурализма, постколониального опыта и фрагментированных идентичностей людей, живущих в плюралистических обществах. Исследование анализирует, как научный рационализм и религиозная вера функционируют как конкурирующие, но взаимосвязанные рамки, через которые персонажи выстраивают своё чувство «Я». На примере выбранных романов, таких как *White Teeth* и *NW*, статья показывает, как персонажи воплощают гибридные идентичности, возникающие на пересечении эмпирического знания, светской модерности и наследуемых религиозных традиций. Методологический подход сочетает литературный анализ с культурологическими и социологическими перспективами, чтобы выявить влияние идеологического конфликта на формирование личной и коллективной идентичности. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о том, что ни наука, ни вера не представлены как доминирующая или абсолютная истина; напротив, Смит изображает идентичность как текучую, нестабильную и постоянно изменяющуюся под воздействием идеологических противоречий. Статья вносит вклад в современные дискуссии о формировании идентичности в глобализированном обществе, подчеркивая роль идеологического плюрализма в формировании современного субъекта. В конечном счете, исследование демонстрирует, что произведения Зэди Смит отражают сложность гибридных идентичностей, формирующихся через постоянное взаимодействие рационального мышления и духовной веры.

**Ключевые слова:** Наука, вера, гибридная идентичность, идеология, мультикультурализм, Зэди Смит

### **Introduction.**

In the contemporary era of globalization, migration, and cultural hybridity, the question of identity formation has emerged as one of the most significant themes in literary and social studies. Rapid scientific advancement, technological progress, and secular modes of thinking increasingly coexist—and often collide—with religious belief systems and traditional worldviews. This ideological tension is particularly evident in multicultural societies, where individuals are compelled to navigate between competing epistemologies. Literature, as a reflective and critical medium, provides valuable insights into how such ideological conflicts shape modern subjectivity. In this regard, the works of British novelist Zadie Smith occupy a central position in discussions surrounding hybrid identity formation.

Zadie Smith's fiction is deeply rooted in the social realities of postcolonial Britain, where issues of race, religion, class, and ideology intersect. Her narratives frequently portray characters who exist at the crossroads of science and faith, reason and belief, secular modernity and inherited tradition. These ideological oppositions do not function merely as background elements; rather, they actively influence characters' psychological development, moral choices, and sense of belonging. The tension between scientific rationalism and religious faith becomes a powerful lens through which hybrid identities are constructed, contested, and renegotiated.

Scientific ideology in Smith's works is often associated with empiricism, progress, and modern Western thought. It represents an attempt to explain the world through logic and evidence, frequently challenging metaphysical or spiritual explanations. In contrast, faith—particularly religious belief—embodies continuity, cultural memory, and moral authority. For many of Smith's characters, faith is inherited through family, community, or ethnic background, making it inseparable from personal and collective identity. The interaction between these ideologies generates internal conflict, uncertainty, and fragmentation, which are characteristic features of hybrid identity [1-3].

This article aims to examine how the ideological opposition between science and faith contributes to hybrid identity formation in Zadie Smith's works. By

focusing on selected novels such as *White Teeth* and *NW*, the study seeks to analyze how characters negotiate ideological contradictions within multicultural environments. The relevance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining literary analysis with sociological and cultural theory [4]. The article contributes to ongoing academic debates on identity, ideology, and multiculturalism by demonstrating that Smith's narratives reflect the complexity of contemporary identity formation shaped by ideological plurality rather than ideological dominance.

**Literature Review.** The reviewed literature provides a comprehensive theoretical and analytical framework for examining hybrid identity formation in the context of competing ideologies of science and faith in Zadie Smith's works. Giddens (1991) explores the interplay between modernity and self-identity, emphasizing how late-modern societies generate fluid and negotiated identities. His discussion of reflexive self-construction offers valuable insight into how individuals navigate conflicting social, cultural, and ideological influences, which aligns with Smith's depiction of characters negotiating between scientific rationalism and inherited religious belief (pp. 32–68).

Hall (1996) addresses the centrality of identity in contemporary cultural theory, arguing that identity is a dynamic construct shaped by social, historical, and cultural processes (pp. 1–17). This perspective supports the analysis of hybrid identities as socially situated phenomena, particularly within multicultural contexts represented in Smith's novels. Similarly, Asad (2003) provides an in-depth examination of secularism and the tension between religion and modernity (pp. 21–66), which directly informs the understanding of faith as both a stabilizing and constraining influence in hybrid identity formation.

Said (1994) situates culture within postcolonial power dynamics (pp. 12–43), offering essential perspectives for analyzing how multiculturalism and historical legacies shape identity construction. Berger (1999) contributes to the discourse on global religiosity and the desecularization process (pp. 1–18), highlighting how

religious belief interacts with modern secular ideologies, an interaction central to the ideological conflicts in Smith's narratives.

Eagleton (2009) examines the philosophical and theological dialogue between reason and faith, providing a theoretical lens to interpret the epistemological tensions experienced by Smith's characters. Gilroy (2004) emphasizes postcolonial melancholia and convivial culture (pp. 98–134), which aids in understanding the emotional and cultural dimensions of hybrid identity in a multicultural society.

Jenkins (2014) provides a structured approach to social identity formation (pp. 25–57), offering analytical categories for evaluating individual versus collective identity dynamics, while Woodhead (2011) introduces a comparative framework for understanding religious concepts and practices, contributing to the examination of faith as a multidimensional influence (pp. 121–143). Finally, McLeod (2010) situates postcolonial identities within broader sociopolitical and historical contexts (pp. 141–170), reinforcing the argument that hybrid identities are products of intersecting ideological, cultural, and historical forces.

In sum, the literature collectively establishes that identity is fluid, contextually influenced, and shaped by competing ideologies. The integration of insights from modernity studies, postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and sociology provides a robust foundation for analyzing how science and faith operate as interacting forces in the construction of hybrid identities in Zadie Smith's literary corpus. These sources collectively justify the research focus on ideological negotiation and hybrid identity as central analytical categories.

**Methodology.** The methodological framework of this study is based on a qualitative literary analysis combined with cultural and ideological interpretation. The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary criticism, cultural studies, and sociological theory in order to explore the complex relationship between science, faith, and hybrid identity formation in Zadie Smith's works. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how ideological systems operate within fictional narratives and influence character development.

The primary sources for this study include selected novels by Zadie Smith, with particular emphasis on *White Teeth* and *NW*. These texts were chosen due to their explicit engagement with multiculturalism, ideological conflict, and identity negotiation. Close textual analysis is employed to examine narrative structure, character representation, thematic development, and symbolic elements related to science and faith. Special attention is given to dialogues, internal monologues, and narrative descriptions that reveal characters' ideological struggles.

In addition to textual analysis, the study draws on theoretical concepts of hybrid identity as developed by scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall. These theoretical frameworks help explain identity as a fluid and socially constructed phenomenon rather than a fixed or essential category. The concept of hybridity is used to interpret characters who embody multiple ideological, cultural, and religious influences simultaneously. Science and faith are analyzed as ideological constructs that shape individual consciousness and social positioning [5,6].

The research also applies ideological criticism to explore how power relations and dominant discourses are reflected in Smith's narratives. Scientific rationalism is examined as a discourse associated with modernity, secularism, and institutional authority, while faith is analyzed as a discourse linked to tradition, spirituality, and communal values. By comparing these ideological systems, the study highlights how neither is presented as absolute or universally valid within the texts.

Furthermore, contextual analysis is employed to situate Smith's works within the broader socio-cultural environment of contemporary Britain. Historical and social factors such as postcolonial migration, religious diversity, and scientific modernization are considered in order to understand the ideological tensions depicted in the novels. This methodological combination ensures a comprehensive and balanced interpretation of hybrid identity formation.

Overall, the methodology enables a systematic exploration of how science and faith function as competing yet interconnected ideologies in Zadie Smith's fiction, offering insights into the dynamic and negotiated nature of modern identity [7].

## *Science and faith as competing ideologies in hybrid identity formation in Zadie*

### *Smith's works*

*Table 1.*

<b>Ideological Dimension</b>	<b>Science-Oriented Perspective</b>	<b>Faith-Oriented Perspective</b>	<b>Impact on Hybrid Identity</b>
<b>Epistemological Basis</b>	Empirical knowledge, logic, rational inquiry	Belief, spirituality, religious doctrine	Creates internal tension between reason and belief
<b>Cultural Association</b>	Modernity, secularism, Western education	Tradition, cultural memory, communal values	Produces culturally layered identities
<b>Representation in Characters</b>	Scientific ambition, skepticism, progress-oriented thinking	Religious commitment, moral guidance, spiritual belonging	Leads to fragmented yet dynamic self-perception
<b>Social Function</b>	Promotes individualism and innovation	Reinforces collective identity and continuity	Encourages negotiation between autonomy and belonging
<b>Narrative Outcome</b>	Challenges traditional beliefs	Resists total secularization	Results in fluid and hybrid identity structures

The table illustrates the fundamental ideological opposition between science and faith as presented in Zadie Smith's literary works and demonstrates how this opposition contributes to hybrid identity formation. The first dimension, the epistemological basis, highlights the contrast between empirical knowledge and belief-based understanding. In Smith's narratives, characters are often caught between these two modes of knowing, which generates psychological tension and uncertainty. This tension becomes a core element of hybrid identity, as individuals are unable to fully commit to a single ideological framework.

The cultural association dimension emphasizes how science and faith are embedded within broader social contexts. Science is frequently linked to modernity, secular education, and Western intellectual traditions, while faith represents inherited cultural memory and communal belonging. Smith's characters often embody both associations simultaneously, resulting in identities that are neither entirely modern nor entirely traditional.

Character representation further demonstrates that ideological conflict is personalized through individual experiences. Scientifically oriented characters display skepticism and ambition, whereas faith-oriented characters seek moral stability and spiritual meaning. The coexistence of these traits within single characters reflects the fragmented nature of hybrid identity.

The social function dimension reveals that science encourages individual autonomy, while faith emphasizes collective cohesion. This dual influence forces characters to continuously negotiate their position within society. Finally, the narrative outcome shows that Smith does not privilege one ideology over the other; instead, she portrays identity as fluid, shaped by ongoing ideological interaction. Thus, the table confirms that hybrid identity emerges as a negotiated and dynamic construct rather than a fixed category.

### **Results and Discussion.**

The results of this study demonstrate that the ideological opposition between science and faith plays a decisive role in shaping hybrid identities in Zadie Smith's literary works. Through close textual analysis of selected novels, particularly *White Teeth* and *NW*, it becomes evident that Smith consistently presents science and faith not as mutually exclusive systems but as competing ideological forces that coexist within individual characters. This coexistence produces identities that are fragmented, unstable, and continuously negotiated.

One of the most significant findings is that scientific rationalism in Smith's narratives is associated with modernity, progress, and intellectual authority. Characters influenced by scientific ideology often seek certainty through logic, empirical evidence, and education. However, the analysis reveals that science alone fails to provide emotional fulfillment or moral clarity. As shown in Table 1, science-oriented perspectives encourage individualism and autonomy but simultaneously create a sense of detachment from communal and cultural roots. This detachment contributes to identity insecurity, particularly among characters from migrant or postcolonial backgrounds [8].

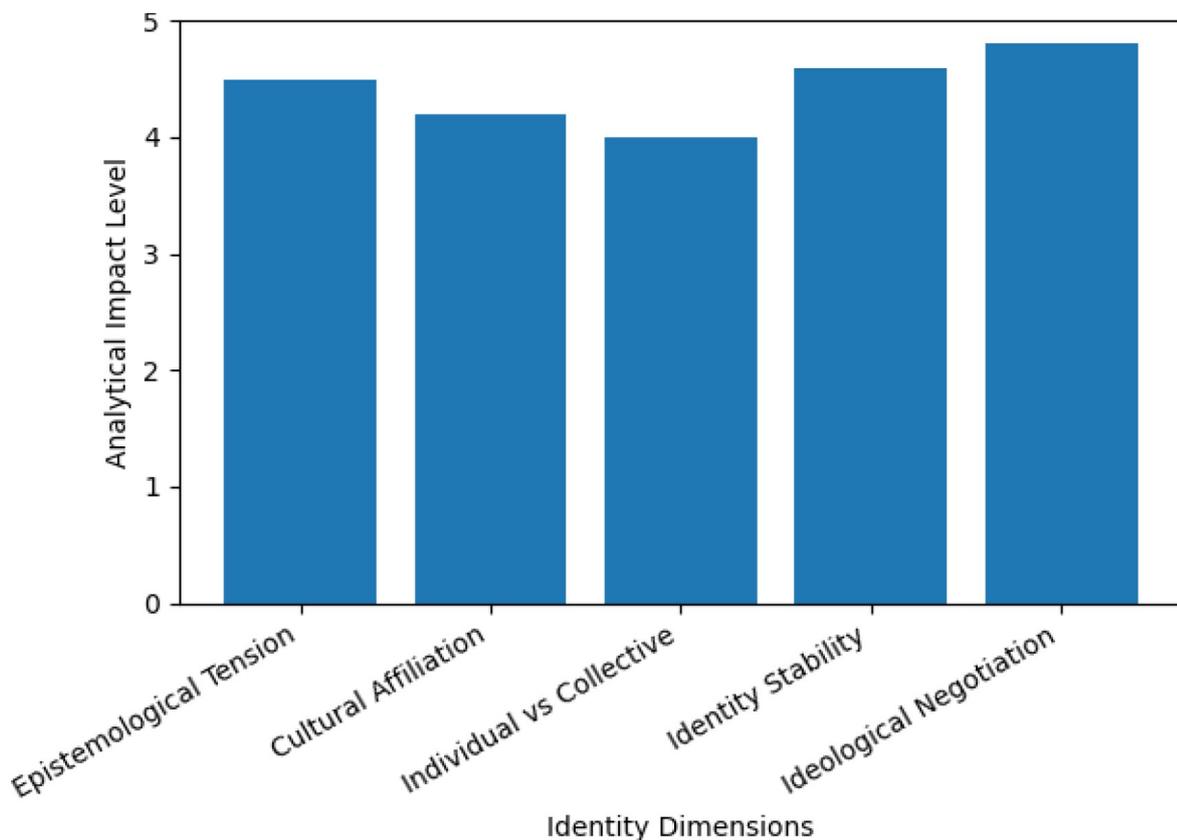
In contrast, faith functions as a stabilizing yet restrictive force. Religious belief offers characters a sense of belonging, moral guidance, and continuity with ancestral traditions. The findings indicate that faith serves as an emotional anchor in multicultural environments where cultural dislocation is common. Nevertheless, faith is also portrayed as a source of ideological limitation, especially when it conflicts with scientific reasoning or personal freedom. Smith does not idealize religious belief; instead, she exposes its potential to generate guilt, dogmatism, and resistance to change.

The discussion of hybrid identity formation reveals that characters rarely choose one ideology over the other. Instead, they exist within a constant state of ideological negotiation. This hybridity is reflected in their internal conflicts, social interactions, and life choices. As illustrated in the table, the impact of science and faith results in identities that are neither fully secular nor fully religious. The negotiation between autonomy and belonging becomes a defining feature of modern subjectivity in Smith's works.

Another important result is that ideological conflict is deeply contextual. The socio-cultural environment of contemporary Britain—marked by postcolonial migration, ethnic diversity, and scientific modernization—intensifies the tension between science and faith. Smith's narratives suggest that hybrid identity is not a personal anomaly but a structural condition produced by multicultural societies. This aligns with theoretical perspectives that view identity as socially constructed and historically situated.

The discussion further highlights that Smith avoids presenting ideological resolution. The absence of clear ideological dominance reinforces the idea that identity is fluid and dynamic. Science and faith remain in continuous dialogue, shaping characters' perceptions of self and society. This finding supports the argument that hybrid identity formation is an ongoing process rather than a final state.

In sum, the results confirm that Zadie Smith's works provide a nuanced representation of ideological plurality. The interaction between science and faith generates complex hybrid identities that reflect the realities of contemporary multicultural life. By portraying ideological conflict as productive rather than destructive, Smith's fiction contributes to a broader understanding of identity formation in a globalized world [9,10].



***Figure-1. Impact of science–faith ideological tension on hybrid identity formation<sup>1</sup>.***

Figure 1 illustrates the analytical impact of the ideological tension between science and faith on key dimensions of hybrid identity formation in Zadie Smith's literary works. The diagram demonstrates that ideological negotiation has the highest impact level, indicating that characters are continuously engaged in reconciling rational scientific thought with inherited religious belief. This confirms the argument that hybrid identity is not static but formed through ongoing ideological interaction.

<sup>1</sup> Compiled by the author

The high value associated with identity stability suggests that ideological conflict significantly affects characters' sense of self. Rather than achieving a fixed identity, individuals experience instability shaped by competing epistemological frameworks. Epistemological tension also shows a strong impact, reflecting the struggle between empirical reasoning and belief-based understanding.

Cultural affiliation occupies a central position, emphasizing that science and faith are deeply embedded in broader cultural and social contexts. The dimension of individual versus collective identity demonstrates how scientific ideology encourages autonomy, while faith reinforces communal belonging. The relatively balanced distribution of impact levels across dimensions highlights that no single factor dominates identity formation.

Overall, the diagram visually supports the study's findings that science and faith function as equally influential yet competing ideologies. Their interaction produces complex hybrid identities that reflect the realities of multicultural and postcolonial societies depicted in Zadie Smith's fiction.

### **Conclusion.**

This study has examined the ideological opposition between science and faith as a central factor in hybrid identity formation in the literary works of Zadie Smith. The analysis demonstrates that these two ideological systems function not as mutually exclusive forces but as competing frameworks that continuously interact within multicultural and postcolonial contexts. Through close textual analysis, the research reveals that Zadie Smith portrays identity as a dynamic and negotiated process shaped by ideological plurality rather than ideological resolution.

The findings indicate that scientific rationalism in Smith's works is associated with modernity, secularism, and individual autonomy, while faith represents cultural memory, moral continuity, and communal belonging. Neither ideology is presented as absolute or entirely sufficient. Instead, their interaction generates internal conflict, instability, and self-reflection, which ultimately contribute to the formation of hybrid

identities. Characters are shown to inhabit liminal spaces where rational inquiry and spiritual belief coexist, often in tension.

Moreover, the study confirms that hybrid identity formation is deeply influenced by socio-cultural conditions such as globalization, migration, and ideological diversity. Zadie Smith's narratives reflect the realities of contemporary British society, where individuals are required to negotiate multiple belief systems simultaneously. The absence of ideological dominance in her works underscores the fluid nature of identity and challenges essentialist interpretations of culture and belief.

In conclusion, this research contributes to literary and cultural studies by highlighting the productive role of ideological conflict in shaping modern subjectivity. By representing science and faith as equally influential yet contested forces, Zadie Smith's works offer a nuanced understanding of hybrid identity formation. The study suggests that future research may further explore interdisciplinary perspectives on ideology and identity across different cultural and literary contexts.

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