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# Multiculturalism in Zadie Smith's *The White Teeth*

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### Zásady pro vypracování:

This thesis aims to analyse the multicultural world in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* through anthropological perspective. Its focus is on the ethnic groups and cultural diversity in post-colonial literature. The purpose of this thesis is to describe how Smith looks at the particular ethnic groups she uses in her novels and the relationships those characters have with each other, how she describes their lives and struggles in modern Anglo-Saxon world and if her upbringing had any effect on her writing, in contrast with how contemporary anthropologists view this subject.

### Seznam doporučené literatury:

#### Primary literature:

Smith, Zadie. 2011. *White Teeth*. 2nd ed.. London: Penguin Books. Secondary literature:

Hurst, Andrea. 2017. „Post-Structuralism“. Online. Oxford Bibliographies. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0008.xml>.

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## **PROHLÁŠENÍ**

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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## 1. Introduction

This bachelor thesis aims to analyse the multicultural world in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* (2000) from anthropological point of view. Zadie Smith is a major author from the black British literature canon. In her novels she depicts lives of immigrants in modern British society. Multiculturalism is a theme that Smith is very interested in and one that is recurring in her every work. Whether that is because she herself is of mixed ethnicity, or is just interested in this problematic. The primary objective of this thesis is to analyse the characters and the plot of this novel through anthropological discourse, using sources from renown anthropologists such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and theories of Thomas Hylland Eriksen. Furthermore, I will analyse Smith's view on religion in the novel as this is a topic she describes in detail in her novels as well.

The emergence of Black British literature started in the first half of the twentieth century, along the same time as Harlem Renaissance or Irish Renaissance. The marginalised minorities started to 'revolt' and their voices were starting to be heard. Writers such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston or Richard Wright were the pioneers who wrote about what it is like and what it feels like to be black in a society that favours white people and oppresses the minorities based on prejudice, 'race' and small-mindedness. The term 'black British literature' became current in the seventies, and it was designed to describe the part of the British authors who are British, but have origins in the former British colonies and at that time it was more of a political label than a racial one. It denotes the feeling of alienation, discrimination and loneliness the people felt. Back then this term used to include, besides the black authors, the authors who were of Asian origin, such as Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro or Hanif Kureishi, as well. Such authors are now included in the British Asian Literature category.<sup>1</sup>

"'Black British literature' viewed as a time-limited phenomenon attached to post-war migration to England is likely to become irrelevant to a younger generation of writers born in England, some of whom are of mixed parentage, like Anglo-Jamaican Zadie Smith or Anglo-Nigerian Diana Evans,

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<sup>1</sup> The Oxford Companion to English Literature, ed. by Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16-22.

and whose allegiance might for these reasons be more domestic than was the case for their predecessors.”<sup>2</sup> Viewing the canon of ‘black British literature’ as a space-time isolate will displace the contemporary ‘black British authors who were born and raised in Britain, but still fit into that black British literature category because of their parentage.

The majority of the black British authors have origins in Jamaica, such as Benjamin Zehphaniah, author of *Refugee Boy*, Andrea Levy, author of novels about the Windrush generation and their experiences of coming to England, or Alex Wheatle, author whose novels are based on his experience of living in the Brixton area of South London. What I would say differentiates Zadie Smith from the rest of the black British authors is that her works are concerned with ethnicities other than black as well. Black British authors are not just writing fiction and poetry, but they are also concerned with current contemporary social issues, such as feminism and structural racism as is the case of Reni Eddo-Lodge in her book *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, or research on the value of social position of immigrants as in *Diversify: Six Degrees of Integration* by June Sarpong, as well as promoting body positive image and self-worth among women like Chidera Eggerue in her book *What a Time to be Alone*.

The postcolonial theory suggests that culture can never return to its pre-colonized ways. Cultures merge and become a part of the colonized culture and people have to adapt to survive under the new culture rules which is really frowned upon in the field of cultural anthropology because it is the start of the decay of cultures. The colonized culture starts to look more or less like the dominant culture, in this case the British culture, making the essential and unique part of the colonized culture disappear. Many writers including anthropologists wrote about this. As Edward Said says in his *Orientalism* that the West has come up with ideas about the Orient in an attempt to describe and distance it from Western ideas. It pictures Orient as lazy and cruel, in contrast to hardworking and kind Britain. It uses the image they created to show themselves better. It allows for Western ideas to be shown as universal truths subsequently creating ‘the other’. Moreover, it is a relationship between ‘us’ and ‘them’

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<sup>2</sup> The Oxford Companion to English Literature, 7th ed., ed. by Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16-22.

and we determine ourselves based on our knowledge of them, they serve as a negative mirror that we need for reflecting about ourselves, so that we can justify why we are better than them. It justifies colonization of people and discrimination and marginalizes 'the other' so that they have to operate in the confines of the oppressive group.<sup>3</sup>

“Contemporary fiction achieved some measure of ‘ironic distance’ from a culture of greed and acquisition explored in a variety of ways. Will Self would reserve his greatest scepticism for a culture of inanition running counter to the inner and paradoxical drives of his characters, while Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith mapped the other identities effaced by Thatcherite ideology<sup>4</sup> on one hand, and by intellectual liberalism on the other. The ethnic plurality of London and society’s changing constructions of gender, are central concerns of this new generation of writers.”<sup>5</sup> Dominic Head describes the first period as the ‘Windrush generation’ of West Indian immigrants in the late 1940s and 1950s, named after the Empire Windrush, who migrated to England in pursue of better life, seeking the opportunities it offered as they considered it to be their home as well, thus feeling familiar with it.<sup>6</sup> After the eighties, British culture became urbanized and polarized. The capitalist economy created major differences between the social classes, where the middle class changed for the better at the expense of the lower classes. A culture of greed and wealth was created as well as a new theme for the writers to focus on.

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Said. *Orientalism* (Praha: Paseka, 2008), 50-63.

<sup>4</sup> Thatcherite Ideology is a branch of conservative ideology that originated from the prime minister Margaret Thatcher. It is belief in primacy of competition and free market. It should be restricted to the bare essentials: defence of the realm and the currency. Everything else should be left to individuals, to exercise their own choices and take responsibility for their own lives.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-22079683>

<sup>5</sup> Richard J. Lane and Philip Tew. “Urban Thematics”. In *Contemporary British Literature*, Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham, and Philip Tew, p.71-73.

<sup>6</sup> Dominic Head, “Zadie Smith’s White Teeth: Multiculturalism for the Millennium” in *Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 109.

“The concept of new or forgotten identities came to fore during the end of the twentieth century, emerging from the underclasses and margins...there

are various frustrated attempts to provide ethical value systems for the new context, but new forms of suffering and identity crisis underline the texts. The characters pattern their lives on rituals in the effort to resist the amorphous anonymity imposed by urban density, by the weight of numbers, and by the indifference of contemporary city-dwellers towards those around them.”<sup>7</sup> This is the case of *White Teeth*, as well as N-W as Smith bases her novels around this theme.

Post-colonial authors write about the ethnic and cultural diversity and the problems that arise with it. People of different ethnicities coming to the United Kingdom are expected to integrate and assimilate, which sooner or later leads to an identity crisis that can escalate to other problems, such as alcoholism, drug addictions, or radicalism in religion. Writers have to confront what Bhabha calls the ‘hybrid national narrative’ in order to describe the clash of cultures occurring within the migrants.<sup>8</sup>

*White Teeth* is a novel that is concerned mainly with post-colonial identity crisis, which is portrayed through each of the characters in a unique way. Smith uses the cultural dichotomy in the characters to create the embodiment of current modern society, while each of the characters still manage to keep their own integrity. Through each of the characters Smith depicts different type of struggle, whether that being an internal or external one. While Irie struggles with her body image as a black woman, Millat fights his cultural confusion of second generation immigrant, struggling to please everyone around him and to add up to everyone’s expectations, as Samad is trying to come to terms with the fact that neither of his sons turned out like he wanted to.

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<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Lane and Philip Tew. “Urban Thematics”. In *Contemporary British Literature*, Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham, and Philip Tew, 72.

<sup>8</sup> Dominic Head, “Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium” in *Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 108.

## 2. Zadie Smith

Zadie Smith is a contemporary British novelist and short story writer. She was born in North West London in 1975, and therefore North West London is the setting for most of her novels. She is of mixed origin, her mother being a Jamaican and her father being a Brit. She studied English literature in Cambridge in hopes of becoming a journalist. While in Cambridge she wrote a number of short stories that attracted attention of publishers and gave her the contract for her debut novel, *White Teeth*. She wrote it, when she was still in university, and in her later work we can see her writing evolve and develop. Smith writes mainly novels, but also essays concerned with politics, culture, as well as events of her own life. The topic of Smith's novels in the majority of cases is the subject of immigrants in North-West London struggling with prejudice, and the clash of cultures whether it being physically, as in looking different from the expected stigma of beauty as she does with Irie in *White Teeth*, or internally, whether that being a question of religion, or either personal or cultural opinions on various things. What I find important to mention is that even though the major theme of most of her novels is immigrants encountering the British way of life, she herself does not identify as immigrant. As she said in an interview for Masterpiece Theatre PBS: "The people in *White Teeth* are immigrants. I'm not an immigrant, so it's a different experience. But I was around people who had the experience, who felt separated or cut in two, who had moved from one country to another, who had that sense of leading two lives."<sup>9</sup>

As evident in *N-W* as well, it seems to me that Smith has a habit of picking a one 'white' character, which is not prejudiced about people of colour, whereas the rest of her 'white' characters seem to be borderline racist, or racist completely. That person is usually someone from the younger generation, which for the most part, seems to be anthropologically, as well as historically accurate since the younger generation has been brought up in new, modern environment that is more multicultural and free and subsequently is less prejudiced and more open-minded, not only towards different ethnicities, but also towards the people from the LGBTQ community. I would say that Zadie Smith is the British counterpart to the American author originally from Nigeria, Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche. Their writing is similar and they are both concerned with the

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<sup>9</sup> Phillip Tew. *Zadie Smith*. (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 28.

current and contemporary social issues, depicting them in humorous way in their novels, and adding a more serious tone to them in their essays.

In her first collection of essays called *Changing My Mind* (2009) she gives her opinion on cultural and political topics that somehow inspire her, or affect her life. The book is based on Zadie Smith as a person, it being split into five sections: Reading, Being, Seeing, Feeling, and Remembering. Written in journalistic style the essays give her readers a glance into the life of Zadie Smith. She continues with this type of writing in her more recent work, also a collection of essays called *Feel Free* (2018), where she concentrates more on the political side of things than she does in *Changing My Mind*, but continues to add little fragments that are indisputably a part of her, such as her opinions on music, books or pop-culture.

Another author whose works are concerned with questions of ethnicity, multiculturalism, cultural identity and identity crisis is Salman Rushdie, whose works are also specifically mentioned in the *White Teeth* itself. He expresses the need for an alternative approach to cultural diversity in the UK, other than multiculturalism which he doesn't really agree with. He talks about creating a defined cultural space for the migrants and the new emerging culture in which they can flourish. "Rushdie is the chronicler of the unfettered migrant sensibility, that version of post-colonialism which unhooks historical tradition from place, and which creates new, self-conscious kinds of identity from fragmentary vision."<sup>10</sup> Unlike Smith, who for the most part tends to stick to the reality, Rushdie uses history and magical realism to create imaginative worlds for his novels that are showing an alternative approach to history. Head considers this as creative assertion, but also turning away from the difficulties that the migrants faced and have to face every day.<sup>11</sup>

Smith tends to lean towards Bhabha's approach, who "describes a complex tension between two contradictory (but interacting) forces: the 'pedagogic' tendency to assert

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<sup>10</sup> Dominic Head, "Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium" in *Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 109.

<sup>11</sup> Head, "Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium," 110.

an authoritative national identity based on 'pre-given or constituted historical origin or event', and the 'performative' process of reconstruction, an on-going 'living principle' which 'must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people.'<sup>12</sup> To sum up, the migrants feel torn between their heritage and the culture of their ancestors and the culture of their current home, and their future. In the novel this can be seen in majority of the characters, for example Samad, Irie or Millat.

Smith's writing is influenced by such as Franz Kafka or Vladimir Nabokov, but mainly she finds inspiration within the works of Zora Neale Hurston, E. M. Forster or D. H. Lawrence. Moreover, Smith is majorly influence by the events in her life, and the racial discrimination that is happening around us, as for example the murder of Stephen Lawrence about which is also spoke in her interview with Masterpiece Theatre PBS, blaming this issue of clear racism on economic deprivation, saying that it is a last attempt of poor white kids of trying to make themselves significant.<sup>13</sup> Another topic that seems to be an inspiration for Smith is the urban life, and as is the post-colonial tradition, scenes from suburban and of provincial city life, and particularly of immigrant and working-class cultures with emphasis on historical importance that emerged from the culture of the late twentieth century.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Head, "Zadie Smith's White Teeth: Multiculturalism for the Millennium," 110-11.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Tew. *Zadie Smith*. (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 34.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Tew. *The Contemporary British Novel*. (London: Continuum, 2004), 11.

### 3. Multiculturalism

To understand what multiculturalism is, we first have to know, what a culture is. It is inevitably the one thing that differentiates us people from animals. There are actually two types of culture, one that we use on daily basis and that we link with music, theatres, and mostly art in general, whereas the other is the academic type, the ethnicities we could say. The way we define culture is constantly changing as we evolve. Hana Horáková says: "The points of view on this problematic are evolving along with the changes the humankind is going through. In other words, the researchers are reacting to certain social order that arises in certain social context. This order becomes urgent any time the existing concept or theory is no longer applicable on the new situation."<sup>15</sup> Anthropologists define culture in many different ways which ensures pluralistic view of the world.

"Culture is the central point of social and cultural anthropology. Anthropologist study how cultures develop..., how they are shared...what do cultures have in common and on the contrary what they differ in...They address the relationship between society and culture."<sup>16</sup> When people first started to study culture, the first definition of it was by Edward Burnett Tylor, who is often called by the anthropologist 'father of anthropology', which he gave in his most influential work *Primitive Culture*, he said that culture is "...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>17</sup> This definition was challenged by Franz Boas, who created his own school and his own definition of culture that he believed was more true and more applicable than the previous one.

Raymond Williams, a sociologist on literature, recognized as one of the most significant theorists on culture in Britain differentiates three different meanings of culture. Firstly, culture associated with sophistication and development, secondly culture as a synonym

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<sup>15</sup> Hana Horáková. *Kultura Jako Všelék? Kritika Soudobých Přístupů*, 61-62

<sup>16</sup> Horáková. *Kultura Jako Všelék? Kritika Soudobých Přístupů*, 65-69

<sup>17</sup> Edward B. Tylor. *Primitive Culture: Researches into The Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, And Custom*. (London: Bradbury, Evans, And Co., Printers, Writefriars, 1871)

for civilisation and thirdly, the anthropological meaning of this word as the way of life of certain group of people, which is popularized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the era of colonialism.<sup>18</sup> These three parts cannot really be separated because they are in interaction. Sophisticated culture can be in contrast with barbarism which can mean the anthropological understanding of this word, which is a way of life.<sup>19</sup> Culture in the anthropological meaning can be differentiated as well. It was first done so by an American anthropologist, Leslie Alvin White, who differentiated culture in singular, where the culture represents closed/ united? System, and culture in plural, where individual local cultures never act autonomously because they are constantly affected by their surrounding environment and processes of diffusion. People are 'able' of culture and in this sense refers to basic similarities between people, but on the other hand, in the course of life people learn different things, have different beliefs and traditions that inevitably lead to cultural differences between individual cultures.<sup>20</sup>

“Men have always been endowed with culture: a shared style of expression in words, facial expression, body language, style of clothing, preparation for consumption of food, and so forth. Culture is not identical among all men: cultural diversity is one of the central features of human life...The fact that we are 'capable' of culture at all no doubt has genetic precondition. This genetic predisposition may be identical in all men. Such view has been argued by Noam Chomsky in connection with the human capacity to acquire language, and if this argument is valid, it may well apply not merely to a language in the narrower sense, but to the totality of culture.”<sup>21</sup>

Multiculturalism is a social concept that is connected to migration and in the United Kingdom also with colonialism. In anthropological discourse it is an unwelcome but unavoidable phenomenon. It became more popular during the 1980's because the

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<sup>18</sup> Raymond Williams, "Culture," In *Keywords: A Vocabulary On Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 49-54.

<sup>19</sup> Hana Horáková. *Kultura Jako Všelék? Kritika Soudobých Přístupů*. (Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství SLON, 2012.), 62-63.

<sup>20</sup> Horáková. *Kultura Jako Všelék? Kritika Soudobých Přístupů*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Ernest Gellner 1998. *Nationalism*. 2nd ed. London: Orion House.

migration multiplied. Multiculturalism gave birth to many problems, one of them being the so called 'identity crisis'. On one hand, identity crises of the people who came from their homeland to find a better future in this case the United Kingdom but coming face to face with clash of their cultures and on the other hand, their kids who were born to the new culture that struggle to live in the new, modern culture and try to keep their culture that their parents brought from their homelands.

“Multiculturalism is not a simple term that can be easily defined. In Oxford dictionary it was first defined in 1957 as a cultural pluralism or diversity as within a society, an organization, or an educational institution, a multicultural social state or a doctrine or policy that promotes or advocates such a state characteristically multicultural societies, politics or process.”  
Now the definition is much more brief, but the content is pretty much the same. ‘The presence of, or support for the presence of, several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society.’”<sup>22</sup>

Humans and their societies are, naturally, not only characterized by the culture that have and live in, but also by the social organisations they structure themselves into. For example, the social structure in Great Britain, or Europe in general, is much different from the caste system in India. Therefore, when people migrate from such countries, they might have difficulties getting accustomed to the new environment. “We imagine that immigrants are constantly on the move, footloose, able to change course at any moment, able to employ their legendary resourcefulness at every turn.”<sup>23</sup> They are expected to be able to assimilate as soon as possible, so they do not cause problems, which makes things even harder on them.

Immigrants to the UK often feel lost and struggle with their racial identity as in this example of Samad. “What am I going to do when this war is over, this war that is already over – what am I going to do? Go back to Bengal? Or to Delhi? Who would have such an Englishman there? To England? Who would have such an Indian? They promise us

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen. *Etnicita A Nacionalismus: Antropologické Perspektivy*. (Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství SLON, 2012)

<sup>23</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 465.

independence in exchange for the man we were. But this is a devilish deal. What should I do? Stay here? Go elsewhere?"<sup>24</sup> This excerpt shows that people often feel very torn about their ethnicity, as well as later on in the book Samad's son Magid also struggles with his identity. He struggles to figure out where he belongs to since he is growing up in Indian-Pakistani family, but he is surrounded by the British, western culture, and Smith also mentions this in the novel. "Because this is the other thing about immigrants ('fugees, émigrés, travellers): they cannot escape their history any more than you yourself can lose your shadow."<sup>25</sup> He does not feel the connections to the traditions of the culture his parents grew up in, a culture that is supposed to be his as well. As he was brought up in the western culture and his peers are mostly of British origin, he just wants to fit in with them and not feel left out.

"...people can finally give the answers required when a place is being designed, or when something is being rebranded, a room/furniture/Britain (that was the brief: a new British room, a space for Britain, Britishness, space of Britain, British industrial space cultural space space); they know what is meant when asked how matte chrome makes them feel; and they know what is meant by national identity? Symbols? Paintings? Maps? Music? Air-conditioning? Smiling black children or smiling Chinese children or (tick the box)?... They know what they want, especially those who've lived this century, forced from one space to another like Mr. De Winter (né Wojciech) renamed, rebranded, the answer to every questionnaire nothing nothing space please just space nothing please nothing space"<sup>26</sup>

The phenomenon of nationalism and multiculturalism is closely tied to ethnicity, 'race' and nationality, both of which are very individual. What does ethnicity even mean? To some people it might be something that defines them, to others it might be just something trivial that they pay no attention to. Ethnicity is the difference in the dichotomy 'us' and 'them'. It is what we define ourselves to be. "But

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<sup>24</sup> Zadie Smith. *White Teeth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 112.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, *White Teeth*, 466.

<sup>26</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 518-19.

multiplicity is no illusion. Nor is the speed with which those-in-the-simmering-melting-pot are dashing towards it."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 466.

#### 4. Analysis of *White Teeth*

*White Teeth* is one of the most significant works that deals with cultural and personal identity and identity crises after dissolving of colonialism. This novel depicts the lives of two friends, an immigrant Bengali Samad Iqbal and mediocre middle aged Brit Archibald Jones and the lives of their relatives. Samad and Archie met during the second world war, when they both served in the army in the same unit. Brought together by the dreadful events of war, they formed an unlikely lifelong friendship. The book itself is split into four parts, each focusing on the life of one of the protagonists, Archie, Samad, Irie and the last part on Magit, Millat and Marcus. The storyline is composed of chronological as well as retrospective passages with the majority of it taking place during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century and continuing to the late nineties. The storyline is set in North West London as most of Smith's novels are, and it is "conscious that the misperceptions about race have often hampered with the development of a multicultural society."<sup>28</sup> The aim of *White Teeth* is not to denounce the prejudice, but instead it focuses on "sense of cultural confusion".<sup>29</sup>

The actual title *White Teeth* represents a certain symbolism that is interlaced throughout the whole novel. The symbol of teeth could be related to a social position as the straight, white teeth in many cultures represent healthy, strong and capable individual, whereas bad teeth health is associated with incompetence and is usually linked to people of lower social status, such as homeless and poor people. The symbol teeth can be related to a social position as well since white teeth in general are prerogative to social class. The character of Clara lacks her front teeth, and there are lot of mentions of her insecurities about this in the book. The author also puts emphasis on lisping in her speech because of that. Also the name of the chapters in each part of the novel has something to do with teeth, for example *Teething*, *Molars* and so on, so the symbol of teeth is intertwined throughout the whole book. But not only that, teeth, or things related to teeth is are a symbol, that Smith managed to intertwine throughout

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<sup>28</sup> Dominic Head, "Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium" in *Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 111-12.

<sup>29</sup> Head, "Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium," 113.

the whole book, the actually text as well as the chapter names, without it seeming forced. In this context I think that she uses this symbol as a reference to age and aging.

This novel is very relevant to the current topics of gender, as well as race equality, and when I think about the fact that this novel was first published in 2000, which is now almost twenty years ago, I realize how much more ground-breaking and relevant it must have been back then. Smith was judged for changing her appearance on the back cover of the book from girl with big glasses and 'African' hairstyle to a sleek and polished 'Asian' look.<sup>30</sup> From anthropological perspective we can see that a woman of mixed ethnicity is being judged based on her looks and the words that we could also called labels, such as 'African' and 'Asian' are being thrown around without any consideration. I think this is a very 'white people' capitalistic prerogative to judge someone based of their ethnicity, or what they identify themselves as.

The characters in *White Teeth* are very complex and they come with a several generations long family history. In an interview for *Atlantis: Women's Studies Journal*, Smith said: "All that is, is an elaboration of things I thought of from a very younger stage. If you take the whole of human history as a body or as a person then there are events within that which are like trauma, like childhood traumas. The Second World War is a trauma like being abused as a child, being slapped over the head with a brick, or whatever, it's a trauma, and it's something that takes generations to get over. And as you know any abuse in the family can be passed down again and again and again... And likewise the characters in the book are [traumatized]. That whole kind of 60s, 70s, liberation ethic that you will be released by knowing your roots, that you will discover yourself, I just always thought was a crock basically, and its partly true, but your roots come with baggage. And the baggage isn't always fun."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Dominic Head, "Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium" in *Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 109.

<sup>31</sup> Kathleen O'Grady. "White Teeth: A Conversation with Author Zadie Smith" in *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Mount Saint Vincent University Press, 2002)

Smith portrays her characters through their speech and their dialogues as well. She uses different accents to accentuate their ethnicity, which makes the characters even more authentic. As we can see with Clara's Jamaican accent for which she got her source and inspiration probably from her mother, who is Jamaican. "*But I tink to myself: de end of de world, d'Lord won't mind if I have no toofs.*" Or "*Hush yo mout! You're nat dat ol'.*" With Clara her speech also shows her lisping because of her lack of teeth. The Jamaican accent is also used with Clara's ancestors in the chapter *The Root Canals of Hortense Bowden*.<sup>32</sup> She also plays with Italian accent in the first chapter, when Archie visits his ex-wife's family. "...he take-a everything, capisce? He take-a her mind, he take-a the blender, he take-a the old stereo – he take-a everything except the floorboards. It make-a you sick..."<sup>33</sup> I think this really adds to her characters and helps the readers to delve themselves into the story more.

The first part of the book concentrates on Archibald 'Archie' Jones, and to me Archie Jones represents transformation. In the beginning Archie is a desperate 'good for nothing' middle aged man, who wants to end his life by gassing himself in his car in front of a halal butcher's shop. He thinks that he is one of the man who are in the world just to make up the numbers.<sup>34</sup> That there is no point to his life and he takes the things he has for granted, making himself believe that he has nothing to live for, nothing to make him happy. The whole transformation begins when the owner of the shop comes running to yell at him that they do not have licence for letting people commit suicide and Archie sees this as a sign that life says 'yes' to him for once. "...for the first time since his birth, Life had said Yes to Archie Jones. Not simply 'OK' or 'You-might-as-well-carry-on-since-you've-started', but a resounding affirmative."<sup>35</sup> Later that day he meets Clara, a young girl who is lost in the worlds and for some reason, Archie impresses her and short time after that they get married. Archie's life turns upside down in the good way. Clara is a very hot headed girl in the beginning of the story. She is still a teenager when

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<sup>32</sup> Zadie Smith. *White Teeth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 356-65.

<sup>33</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 7.

she first appears in the book, and she is kind of all over the place. She is defiant and rebels against her mother and their religion of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The second most prominent character in the book, is Samad Myiad Iqbal. Samad is a Bengali who immigrated to the United Kingdom before the second world war, and fought alongside Archie in Bulgaria. During the war, they have seen parts of each other that no one has seen in them and they form a lifelong friendship. From all the characters in the book, the character of Samad seems to undergo the biggest transformation. He represents the counter character to Archie, him being so depressed, vulnerable and lost in the beginning of the novel, this happens to Samad as the story progresses and he grows older, while Archie grows confident and calm. Samad becomes prejudiced against the British culture, and maybe this originates from the disappointment with his children being so submerged in it, whether that being Magid's immersion in school and science, or Millat's immersion in the pop-culture and everything that comes with it. He doesn't really understand his children and wants them to live like proper Muslims should, and wants them to become the prototype of strong, wise men. Samad is being a hypocrite in that he condemns everything that Britain and the western culture represents, all the while this was what he wanted all along, to live in a free, developed country. He became a part of the culture when he decided to stay after the WWII, and he still continues to be a part of this culture, going to the pub with Archie almost every evening, playing pool for money, subjecting to drug abuse, which in general are things he, as a Muslim, should not do. He is a proud and stubborn man, which does not really agree with the humble Indian nature.

Samad's biggest pride is a member of his family, and the person he looks up to the most, right after Allah is Mangal Pande, his great-grandfather, who started the revolt against the British colonists and sacrificed his life for it.<sup>36</sup> It is a questionable, controversial character because not everyone agrees with Samad's opinion of him, and that is that Mangal Pande is an unappreciated hero. Archie views him as a drunk rebel who started a mutiny and could not even aim properly and thinks Samad's should identify himself with him, also because as it says in the dictionary that Pandy besides the

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<sup>36</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 254-257.

surname of the first mutineer in the Bengal army, furthermore “any sepoy who revolted in the Indian Mutiny of 1857-9”, it also means “any mutineer or traitor” or “any fool or coward in a military situation.”<sup>37</sup> Mangal Pande is Samad’s idol and from anthropological point of view he represents a symbol of the Indian part in Samad, a part he is holding onto in order to not lose this part of his identity. That is also the reason why he does not listen to anyone who badmouths his ancestor and does not let himself believe anything else that he is telling about him, because if he did, he would lose his anchor and that could have fatal consequences not only to his personality, but also his sanity.

In fact, the main reason why he likes Magid better is exactly because of this. He sent him abroad to learn about the way he should live his life. He feels connected more to his son, seeing him follow his father’s path and enjoy the things he once used to enjoy, learning about Islam, their traditions and being humble and thus he understandably feels disappointed when his son, who previously loved education, science and everything that come with it, gets acquainted with free thinking Indian writer R. V. Saraswati, whom Samad hates and decided to become either a lawyer, or even worse a creative writer.<sup>38</sup> Samad wanted Magid to become servant of the God, and not of the people and the society and therefore expects a catastrophe to happen.

Alsana, Samad’s wife, is of Indian origin and she came to England just to marry Samad. It was an arranged marriage and she accepted it. Alsana does not really express her opinions in the beginning of the novel, even if she has any, she thinks that women and men should keep to themselves and not confide in each other. Here rises a question, if she even loves Samad, especially with their marriage being prearranged. Alsana is not really a prominent character in the book, however as the story progresses she has some strong opinions about Samad and his actions, and it is also through her that Smith shows how a person grows to be understanding. In the first pages of the novel Smith portrays her as a bit of a narrow minded, conservative person but nevertheless as the story progresses, Alsana grows to be much more understanding and open minded whether towards the rebelling behaviour of her children, or her bisexual niece whom she previously judged on her behaviour.

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<sup>37</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 250-256.

<sup>38</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 288

The third part of the book focuses on Irie, who is Clara and Archie's daughter. This part brings us to the year 1990. Irie is an insecure teenage girl, who falls exactly into the category of the girls who are heavily influenced by the stereotypical beauty standards of the western culture, meaning skinny, fair skinned, usually blue-eyed and blonde models. Typical feminine features such as breasts and hips are being suppressed. Irie does not correspond to the culturally constructed beauty standards, and like the girls, who are influenced by this culture, feels she has to change nearly everything about herself just to be pretty and for people to like her. "...intent upon transformation, intent upon fighting her genes, a headscarf disguising the bird's nest of her hair, her right hand carefully placed upon her stomach."<sup>39</sup> Irie thinks she got all the bad genes, the afro hair, buck teeth, curves and wants to change herself because she thinks no one, especially not Millat, will love her like that. She's trying to suppress the otherness that makes her, her.

This insecurity is seen as an opportunity by many, for example Paul King (P.K.), who started a business in beauty, opening several hair salons that specialize in straightening afro hair, taking advantage of the fact that these women count with the pain and price that comes with it, so he does not have to worry about being sued, one of them being Irie. This is a question of confidence, connected to the suppression of black people since the early colonising days, where black women were viewed as insufficient and therefore this explains their need to look more 'European'. They yearn for being successful and being equal to white women as they clearly feel they are not, but they lose a part of their identity and the connection to their roots and their culture in the process. Clara, just like her daughter Irie struggled with the body image presented to the public as desirable. That is precisely the reason why she later on in the story gets a set of false teeth, as the cheapest variant for dental surgery.<sup>40</sup> And as Irie takes after her mother, she is just as strong-headed and rebellious as her mother was when she was a teenager and to Irie, this feels like the last straw in all the hypocrisy she feels her parents are feeding her, and runs away from home to her grandma. This is especially influenced by

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<sup>39</sup> Zadie Smith. *White Teeth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 273.

<sup>40</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 378.

the behaviour she saw while spending time with the Chalfens which I will mention later. Spending time with her grandma affects Irie in ways she never knew it would.

Unlike Millat or Magid, Irie never really knew much about her ancestors and her heritage, since her mother never talked about it, nor allowed Irie to spend time with her grandmother, and therefore Archie had to take her there in secrecy. This was probably because Clara, as many others immigrants, who married into a 'white' family felt torn between those two cultures and in the end chose the English one. Choosing the new, modern lifestyle and education, she felt ashamed for her Jamaican heritage. Not knowing about the people she looks so much alike, Irie, on the other hand, felt unrooted. Eventually, as Irie grows more and more accustomed to living at her grandma's she begins to discover and recognize things about her family, and discover new parts of herself that she never knew existed, everything starts to make sense to her and starts to get the sense of belonging.

Hortense Bowden is a peculiar character submerged in her religion. She doesn't believe in, or neither agree with interracial and mixed race marriages, but considers Irie to be the only good thing that ever came out of it. She feels robbed by the 'white people' on behalf of her mother Ambrosia, whom is to the Bowden family a symbol, an idol, just as is Mangal Pande to the Iqbals. Ambrosia Bowden is the embodiment of a strong woman, especially with her giving birth during an earthquake in Kingston. Ambrosia's story is also the stereotypical one of a pretty black girl falling in love with a handsome white captain who came to colonize her country, claiming he would teach her about the world and instead leaving her. It was at that point that Ambrosia found the faith in the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses and that faith has been in the family ever since, until Clara turned away from it. Clara as a second generation child didn't feel the need to have that support in her life, and it was a way for a teenager to rebel against her mother as well.

Magid is the golden boy, the first born son. He is his parents' favourite child, especially Samad's because he thinks that he somehow won over Millat by being born first. He is the nerdy child, who loves school and learning new things. This willingness to learn in the English traditions is exactly the reason why Samad decides to send him back to India to learn about his culture, religion and traditions. This does not quite develop to his expectation as Magid starts to learn from renown Indian writer who proclaims that we

should learn from the English and try to be more like them since they are much more accomplished than the Indians. Furthermore, he starts to correspond with Marcus Chalfen and develops an interest in his genetic, and quite frankly eugenic, experiments on mice.

Millat is a prototypical second generation migrant child, rebelling against his parents, in this case his father. Since he was little, he was a mischievous boy who grew up into a bad boy. To me it seems like he is doing everything to get back at his father, Samad, who had always viewed him as incapable, and since he was born thought that he already lost at life because he was born as second of the twins and that he should try to make up for it all his life and when he 'finally achieved something', lay it at his father's feet, so to speak.<sup>41</sup> But Millat instead decides to rebel against his father, almost as a kind of revenge. He is the leader of the gang of kids in their neighbourhood, he is the bad boy who smokes, makes pranks on people, has sexual intercourse too soon and the other kids follow lead, which is very much disturbing for their parents. The first generation migrants struggle with balancing their cultural habits much more than the second generation because they live in their 'original' culture and so they are a part of it, whereas the second generation grew up in the new culture so they have less problems to identify themselves with it, but on the other hand feel torn because that's not how their parents imagined their lives to be. The fact that he grew up in completely different environment than his father did has probably a lot to do with the fact why the two of them don't really get on. Millat grew up in a country with completely different beliefs than are in Pakistan, or previously Bengal.

"He had to please all of the people all of the time. To the cockney wide-boys in the white jeans and the coloured shirts, he was the joker, the risk-taker, respecter lady-killer. To the black kids he was fellow weed-smoker and valued customer. To the Asian kids, hero and spokesman. Social chameleon. And underneath it all, there remained an ever present anger and hurt, the feeling of belonging nowhere that comes to people who belong everywhere."<sup>42</sup> As I mentioned previously in the chapter about multiculturalism, second generation migrants feel torn. Especially

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<sup>41</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 217.

<sup>42</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 269

Millat, because since he does not feel like he fits in with his ethnicity of Indian-Pakistani, since that is what his father always reminds him, he feels the need to fit in everywhere else, he feels that he should get the love and acceptance he should get from his father, somewhere else. Consequently, he feels like he does not belong anywhere.

This feeling of being unrooted, of not belonging everywhere is the main reason why Millat is so popular with girls. It is because they feel as if they can save him and change him for the better. Later on in the story Millat joins a pseudo-religious group of teenagers with rather radical ideas called KEVIN, which leads to him being even more confused about his personality than before.

Another very important characters are the Chalfens, who are a middle class family of scientists, who engage in eugenics with three children. Through the Chalfen family Smith comically depicts the typical upper middle class British family whose members are seemingly perfect and are partially ignorant to what their behaviour may seem like to others, creating humorous situations. Because they are so 'perfect' and let everybody know how perfect exactly they are, they have no friends whatsoever and interact only with their distant family members. This creates a certain kind of stereotype and boredom within the family. Therefore, when the opportunity strikes that they can educate a pair of mischievous, rebelling teenagers from the school of their eldest son they immediately volunteer to do it, thus bringing Irie and Millat into their lives. At first the Chalfens are ecstatic to tutor them, whereas Irie and Millat are not so keen, but with time they grow accustomed to the way things are done the Chalfen way and they become fascinated by them. Millat sees them as an opportunity to get some money. It is exactly because they give all their attention to Irie and Millat, but primarily to Millat that their own children start to distance themselves from them, and by spending more time with people outside their family seeing that their family is not as perfect as it might have seemed before. It escalates with their eldest son, Joshua joining an organisation that fights for animal rights who plot against his father and his FutureMouse project.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Smith. *White Teeth*, 491-497.

#### 4.1 Views on the world

The way we view the world is majorly influenced by the culture we live in and grew up in as well as our religious or non-religious beliefs. All these things shape the way with think and how we think of the world. In the novel, Smith depicts many different views on the world through her various characters and they often are in opposition with each other as is the case with Magid and Millat, or Marcus and Samad. Smith also depicts many of the social issues such as radical religious groups, or animal rights. Another thing that is masterly portrayed in the novel is the way religion and culture can affect one's opinions. "Smith's vision has the coherence and solidity afforded by one specific context: in this case the post-colonial history of Britain."<sup>44</sup>Smith can put herself in the shoes of the characters she's writing about and she can see a subject from many different perspectives, which is one of the things that makes this novel so relevant.

In the book there's a scene where Clara, Alsana and Neena are sitting in a park and talking about men and their views on relationships and what they think the relationship between men and women should be like. We can see here how the culture they grew up and live in affected their opinions. Alsana had an arranged marriage and married her husband the same day she met him, and because of that she thinks that for the marriage to work the woman has to keep certain things private and doesn't think that communication is that important in a relationship. Her niece Neena, whom she thinks represents the younger generation even though she is only two years younger than herself, strongly disagrees. In India in general women are traditionally supposed to stay quiet and support their husbands. Neena spent more time in London living on her own, and therefore her opinions are different and we can see the two cultures clash here. Clara doesn't really interfere to voice her opinion even though this discussion makes her think about her relationship with her own husband.<sup>45</sup> Neena is the character that Smith uses to open the subject of homosexuality, moreover representing another part of the society. Through her Smith expresses her view on this in the cultural context, using this

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<sup>44</sup> Dominic Head, "Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium" in *Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 117.

<sup>45</sup> Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 73-83.

character to open the door to another aspect of society. This subject is developed when Neena and her girlfriend Maxine are invited over to the Chalfen's for dinner and Joyce keeps prodding them with questions about their homosexuality and explicitly talking about their sexual life.

We can see how the character of Alsana evolves in time as the story progresses and she moves from being strict and conservative to more liberal and understanding person, although remaining her strict façade to the public. I really like the part where Alsana describes the two kinds of people in the world, because I really agree with this. According to her, there are only two types of people, no matter what their religion, ethnicity or gender is. The types are, either the people who live in constant uncertainty that their lives could be threatened by any kind of disaster whether it's illness or natural catastrophe, or those whose lives are stable.<sup>46</sup> I think this is very true to some extent, but then when you take into consideration the individual, personal catastrophes that can happen in anyone's life, no matter how stable or unstable it might be, all people are the same.

Marcus Chalfen is submerged in his work project on what the family calls FutureMouse. He is a scientist, who inclines to eugenics. It is his lifelong project of creating a better species and this is what their family, not only Marcus, have been doing their whole lives, their life seemingly being a hunt for perfection. Towards the end of the novel, as his experiments became a controversial subject with the public, we can see how differently scientists think about the things they are examining and researching and that they cannot really foresee the catastrophic consequences their research could have. He sees people who do not agree with his project and fundamentalism and is in denial of what real consequences to genetic engineering could have. Of course, all of the things Smith talks about in her novel are now a reality. He also starts to correspond with Magid and sees him as his prodigy, seeing the need in immediately getting him back to England, and employ him as his assistant and in this way replacing Millat. As a reaction to Marcus's experiments and his way of thinking, Joshua, fed up with both his parents behaviour joins the organisation FATE (Fighting Animal Torture and Exploitation), which

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<sup>46</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 210.

is the 'hard-core end of Greenpeace'<sup>47</sup> Joshua also undergoes a transformation, joining this organisation and as Irie, running away from home. Joyce Chalfen, who had become obsessed with her fascination with Millat, is in denial that her family is falling apart, instead focuses on 'helping Millat'. She sends him to a psychologist in hopes of his rekindling his relationship with his twin brother, whom he came to hate, as he joined the radical religious group KEVIN, which I will talk about further later.

Irie on the other hand is fascinated by the way Chalfen family works, moreover she loves the way they treat their children as equals, often times the children calling them by their first name instead of 'mom' or 'dad'. She sees them as the stable family she always wanted to have. In the second to last episode she has an outburst about the behaviour and lifestyle of the Joneses and Iqbals, "Did you know that this is how other families are? They're quiet...They're not constantly making the same mistakes. They're not always hearing the same old shit. They don't mind what their kids do in life as long as they're reasonably, you know, healthy. Happy. And every single fucking day is not this huge battle between who they are and who they should be, what they were and what they will be."<sup>48</sup>Irie, as Clara was before, is leaning towards the British culture as well, and obviously wants to leave the past behind and move forward, which her family is not allowing her to do. "In vision, Irie has seen a time, a time not far from now, when roots won't matter any more because they can't because they mustn't because they're too long and they're too tortuous and they're just buried too damn deep. She looks forward to it."<sup>49</sup>

Smith also incorporates important symbols of Black culture throughout the whole novel, for example when Magid buys *The Autobiography of Malcom X*.<sup>50</sup>Malcom X is a very important persona, I dare say one of the most important people along with Martin Luther King, whom advocated equal rights for black people. He also played important

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<sup>47</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 403.

<sup>48</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 514-515.

<sup>49</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 527.

<sup>50</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 352.

role in spreading the Islam among the black people, especially in the United States, which I will discuss further.

The plot of the escalates on the evening of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1993, the day of the launch of the FutureMouse. Everything starts coming to the surface and everything starts to escalate, and what comes as a huge blow for Samad is when he realizes that Archie has been lying to him for the fifty years they knew each other. The thing that he thought that bonded over, doing the one 'heroic' thing in the war, killing the 'Nazi doctor' Perret, turned out to be a lie. Archie let him go, and Samad feels betrayed, but in the end he realizes that his friendship to Archie is more important and that there are more important things in life.

## 4.2 Religion

Another aspect that Zadie Smith focuses on in her novels is religion in different cultures. Religion, like ethnicity can be very individual but in majority of cases is tied to the believes of the family we grew up in. Religion also played an important part in forming multicultural nations. Religion was kind off a glue used to keep the nation together and to suppress potential uprisings. Although the geographical parts of Great Britain mostly managed to keep their own religion and didn't succumb to Protestantism. Nevertheless, it was used to define the differentiation that I mention earlier in this thesis and that is the differentiation of 'us' and 'them'. In the past with the case of England 'us' was the majority of the elite of the non-ruling ethnicity, and 'them' were the Irish and their national movement.<sup>51</sup> The two main religions in this novel, are Islam and Jehovah's Witnesses. She uses the characters of primarily Samad Iqbal and Hortense Bowden to depict these religions throughout the novel and shows how they affect their everyday lives and their thinking. Jehovah's Witnesses is a Christian denomination that refuses the Holy Trinity, therefore believing only in god, not the holy spirit. They do believe in Jesus, saying: "We have faith that Jesus came to earth from heaven and gave his perfect human life as a ransom sacrifice. (Matthew 20:28). However, we take Jesus at his word when he said: 'The Father is greater than I am.'" (John 14:28)' So we do not worship

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<sup>51</sup> Miroslav Hroch, *Národy Nejsou Dílem Náhody: Příčiny A Předpoklady Utváření Moderních Evropských Národů* (Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2009), 56-58

Jesus, as we do not believe that he is Almighty God.”<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, they refuse the hellfire as well as the inherent immortality of the soul. The members establish their own doctrines based on the bible, and one of their main believes is the apocalypse. They believe in the destruction of the world also knows as ‘Apostasy’ and also that only the ones who believe in the true religion, as in the Jehovah, will survive and the non-believers will die a horrible, painful death.<sup>53</sup> Islam, on the other hand, is based on the Quran and they consider the bible to be inadequate as it was written by humans, whereas the Quran was supposedly written by God and sent down to people via angels. Linguistically, Islam is derived from the Arabic word Salam, which means peace. There are five pillars of Islam, which are essentially rules and every Muslim should uphold to them. They are “the shahadah (witnessing the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad), regular observance of the five prescribed daily prayers (salat), paying zakah (alms-giving), fasting (sawm; siyyam) during the month of Ramadan, and performance of the hajj (pilgrimage during the prescribed month) at least once in a lifetime.”<sup>54</sup>

In one particular scene she portrays clash of cultures when Samad goes to parent-teacher meeting in his sons’ school and they discuss the holidays that are celebrated and that the kids have to participate in. He disagrees that his sons should celebrate Harvest and so many in his opinion ‘unnecessary’ holidays, when Islam only has nine. The teacher in this scene argues that the school is just trying to expose the children to all religions and in this particular case the school is just trying to teach them about community, but even so Samad still disagrees, claiming that a man’s community is their god.<sup>55</sup> In Islam it is a commonplace to help those in need and be charitable and therefore he finds such holidays unnecessary. Samad as most Muslims, condemns and ridicules all

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<sup>52</sup> “Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Believe in Jesus?,” About us, Jehovah’s Witnesses, last modified April 24, 2019, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/believe-in-jesus/>

<sup>53</sup> “‘Apostasy’ is a heartbreaking look at life as a Jehovah’s Witness,” Daniel Kokotajlo, The Economist, last modified July 25, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/prospero/2018/07/25/apostasy-is-a-heartbreaking-look-at-life-as-a-jehovahs-witness>

<sup>54</sup> “Pillars of Islam,” Oxford Islamic Studies, accessed April 24, 2019, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1859>

<sup>55</sup> Smith. White Teeth, 130.

other religions and believes. The teacher then asks, if anyone will second his opinion and his wife unwillingly does so, along with few other people. Another important moment in this scene is also when he forces his wife's hand up, it sparks the cliché opinion about subjugated Muslim women with no rights to an opinion, always standing up for what their husbands believe in.

Samad turned to Islam, to religion really, because he's getting old and he's afraid of what will happen to him after he dies. He believes that men at his age should turn to religion just in case, though he really struggles with the rules of Islam, particularly masturbation. He goes to the mosque to talk to the Imam about it. He creates two rules for himself and makes a deal with God, and when he feels like God broke the deal off, he struggles really hard and feels as if God is punishing him by putting temptations in his way. Islam is a religion based on sacrifices, abstinence and self-restraint and he feels as if he had been too Anglicised and wants to redeem for it. He thinks that sins remain in the family, stored in the genes and that is probably the reason for him to turning to religion in his old age.

Nevertheless, in the end Samad succumbs to his desires and starts an affair with Poppy, his sons' teacher, haunted by the commandments of his religion and the meaning of his actions in the afterlife. Shortly after that he starts seeing his twin boys everywhere and takes that as a sign from Allah. As I previously mentioned, Islam is a really strict religion that condemns this sort of behaviour. This whole situation escalates into Samad kidnapping the older of his twins, Magid, sending him to Bengal to be raised 'the right' way. He wanted to send both of his sons away from 'evil England' but unfortunately his financial situation didn't allow that. From an anthropologist's point of view, he feels that the system that is set in the western countries, the moral system of Westerners isn't good enough and isn't compatible with his beliefs and what he wants his children to grow up in. Therefore, he inevitably gets disappointed when he learns that Magid stopped discovering the laws of Islam and their traditions in order to study literature and law.

“...I sent the child there to understand that essentially we are weak, that we are not in control. What does Islam mean? What does the word, the very word, mean? I surrender. I surrender to God. I surrender to him. This is not my life, this is his life. This life I call mine is his to do with what he will. Indeed,

I shall be tossed and turned on the wave, and there shall be nothing to be done. Nothing! Nature itself is Muslim, because it obeys the laws the creator ingrained in it...But we, we do not automatically obey. We are tricky, we are the tricky bastards, we humans. We have the evil inside us, the free will. We must learn to obey. That is what I sent the child Magid Mahfooz Murshed Mubtasim Iqbal to discover..."<sup>56</sup> Understandably Samad feels disappointed because he feels as if the connection between him and his son that he thought he was building has been cut as Magid decided he wants to learn about the profane and mundane things and serve the people, instead of Allah as his father had planned for him. In a way, I think that Samad was projecting his own regrets into his son.

I also find it important to mention the part where Smith mentions Malcom X. Smith drops this symbolic persona in connection with Millat who, probably influenced by his new ties to the KEVIN group (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic nation) buys his book, *Autobiography of Malcolm X*.<sup>57</sup> Malcolm X was an American Muslim minister and human rights activist. He started off as a good student, who always had been interested in human rights as his family was attacked by the Ku Klux Klan when his mother was pregnant with him and later on they killed his father, which led to him and his sibling living in a series of foster homes. He was a good student especially interested in history, but dropped out of high school after his teacher told him that his aspirations to become a lawyer were not a realistic goal for a nigger.<sup>58</sup> After that he had to do whatever needed to get by and soon ended up in prison, where his big transformation happened. While imprisoned, Malcolm X read a lot of books that including Quran, which made him convert to Islam. After being released he became involved with the Nation of Islam and their leader Elijah Muhammad for quite some time, before he realized what they are preaching is not exactly correct and in order with Islam and the Quran and publicly separated himself from them, creating his own community of followers, and speaking

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<sup>56</sup> Zadie Smith. *White Teeth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 288-89

<sup>57</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 352.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce Perry. *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America*. (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1991)

against the Nation of Islam, which inevitably got him assassinated. What is so important about Malcolm X, and the reason why I mention him in this thesis is because he was one of the few people who managed to give hope and a safe place to immigrants of several generations up until now and his legacy still continues to bring people together. He was also an activist of human rights for black people during the civil rights movement.

Talking about the religion in *White Teeth*, it is important to mention the fictional religious group KEVIN. KEVIN is a short for Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation. It is a radical Islamic group that claims that they want to make the world better and spread the religion of Islam, and one that Millat joined. As Millat was never a religious person, I think that he joined the group from a deep grounded desire to please his father, who took religion very seriously. As I said, Millat was never a religious person and that shows in his behaviour as well, him sleeping around, smoking marihuana, drinking excessively, all of which is forbidden in Islam. Through all this he managed to keep one girlfriend who stayed with him nonetheless and after joining KEVIN, the members started to create tension in Millat's relationships. They disliked him smoking so they gave him leaflets about why it is wrong to smoke. They disliked him dating a white girl, so they gave him leaflets called *Who is truly free? The Sisters of KEVIN or the Sisters of Soho? and Lycra Liberation? Rape and the Western World*<sup>59</sup> about why it's wrong for women to wear revealing clothing, or being too sexual, which he then projected into his girlfriend, eventually resulting in their breakup. Through this subtle manipulation the leadership of the group got their members to do what they wanted in a way they thought it is their decision and they were in no way persuaded to it. This question of clothing, or men telling women how to dress is nicely described in the novel. As Said says in his *Orientalism*, our perception of Islam is influenced by our long history of anti-Arabic and anti-Islamic prejudice<sup>60</sup> and the take on Islam that KEVIN takes is exactly where it all comes from. In the beginning Millat is also the person who likes to date around, and he usually dates "size 10 white Protestant women aged fifteen to twenty-eight, living in and around the immediate vicinity of West Hampstead."<sup>61</sup> And

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<sup>59</sup> Zadie Smith. *White Teeth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 370.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Said. *Orientalism* (Prague: Paseka, 2008), 50-63.

<sup>61</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 369.

after reading those pamphlets he suddenly starts to feel like there is something wrong with that, and something wrong with that type of women.

“First time Millat noticed her was at some local party when he saw a flash of silver pants, a silver boob-tube, and a bare mound of slightly protruding belly rising up between the two with another bit of silver in the navel...He loved when she wore things that revealed it. But now the leaflets were making things clearer. He started noticing what she wore and the way other men looked at her, that she was – as the Right to Bare suggested – ‘prostituting herself to the male gaze’. Particularly the white males...the more he thought about it, the more it pissed him off. Why couldn’t she cover up? Who was she trying to impress? African goddesses from Clapham North respected themselves, why couldn’t Karina Cain?”<sup>62</sup> This excerpt shows the thought processes going through Millat’s mind as he was starting to be affected by the opinions and the underlying pressure from the KEVIN group. This situation later on escalates, when he accuses Karina of dressing for everybody and being too sexual while singing a karaoke song.

“‘Sex is a private thing, between you and me, it’s not for everybody!’ Karina said she was singing not having sex in front of Rat and Carrot regulars. When they made love, he said, ‘Don’t do that...don’t offer it to me like a whore. Haven’t you heard of unnatural acts? Besides, I’ll take it if I want it – any why can’t you be a lady, don’t make all that noise!’”<sup>63</sup> This shows that the men from KEVIN expected their women to be submissive and conservative, to not to be too loud and not to express their opinions, which is not what is right according to the religion of Islam. All this ‘fundamentalism can be a reaction to prejudice and discrimination that immigrants experience.’<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 372

<sup>63</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 372-3

<sup>64</sup> Dominic Head, “Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*: Multiculturalism for the Millennium” in *Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham and Philip Tew (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 113.

This behaviour makes Millat think about what his father had told him about desire, how it is much better when a man can use his fantasy to imagine what a woman looks like under the hijab and the purdah and it is at this point he decides to go to the Chalfens for some advice about what to do. He does not care about the other girls dressing like this, because Karina is the only one he actually loves and cares about. He feels lost and angry and struggles with his cultural heritage the most, out of all characters in this novel. As is said by Neena in the novel: "He's running away from himself and he's looking for something as far away from the Iqbals as possible...Being an Iqbal is occasionally a little suffocating, you know? He's using this other family as a refuge."<sup>65</sup> This is primarily the reason why he chooses to go to the Chalfen instead of how, when he feels like his world is crumbling down around him.

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<sup>65</sup> Smith. *White Teeth*, 346.

## 5. Conclusion

Zadie Smith is one of the major post-colonial literature authors from the black British literature canon, who uses her own personal Anglo-Jamaican heritage to write about multiculturalism in the North-West London. She uses this setting in multiple novels, including *N-W* or *Swing Time*. The reason why she keeps choosing North West London as the setting for majority of her novels is most probably because it is a place where she was born and raised. Smith as a post-colonial writer uses a lot of irony to write about the contemporary social and cultural situation, which helps her to portray it in the novel in a humorous manner. Although the ethnic plurality of London is a great topic to write about, especially in Smith's case, since she is of mixed origin herself, from an anthropological point of view the multiculturalism in these highly urbanised countries can be seen as catastrophic, as it oftentimes leads to the destruction of the original traditions and cultures.

*White Teeth* is a novel that embraces the chaos and unpredictability of life. In her own unique way Smith creates a world in which the characters struggle with the joyful and grave events that life brings, whilst struggling with the tension in their cultural heritage. She uses this dichotomy in their heritage, this multiculturalism, to portray an abundance of characters, who help us understand more not only about first, but second generation migrants, describing the tension between those two generations as well. Smith portrays various types of different personalities in her novel, and through them she manages to depict most, if not all of the current social issues. The story is very well tied together, and she uses even the smallest characters we considered unimportant and Smith brings them back to the end of the novel, as is the case with for example Ryan Topps, or Mo, leaving no loose ends to their stories. *White Teeth* could be a symbolism of the maturing of the characters as the plot progresses, or it could mean the higher social status that comes with whitened teeth. *White Teeth* shows the best and the worst parts of the multiculturalism in Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My aim in this thesis was to analyse these characters in this novel in the anthropological discourse, using the theories of mainly by Edward Said and Thomas Hylland Eriksen, as well as Czech anthropologists and sociologists Hana Horáková and Miroslav Hroch.

The first character subjected to my analysis is Archibald Jones, who as well as the other main character, Samad, undergoes a major transformation in his life and his thinking. Archie is a mediocre middle-aged Brit, who at the beginning of this story wants to commit suicide because his life unfulfilled, but is saved by a halal butcher and since then he turns his life around and starts to properly live his life, getting married and starting a family. To me it seems Archie functions as a mediator between the other characters. His best friend is Samad Iqbal, a stubborn middle aged man who turns to Islam which in turn destroys his family. His actions, which he justifies with his religion have lead him to send his firstborn son abroad to India to be educated in the traditional way. Even though his sons are twins, he treats them differently and he refuses to accept them as they are. Anthropologically, all this is caused by his need for tradition and the importance of roots for him. The twins, Magid and Millat are complete opposites. Magid is ambitious, intelligent, erudite person and wants to become a lawyer, whereas Millat is hot-headed, defiant and split in his cultural identity more than any of the characters. They are the embodiment of the dichotomy the second generation immigrants struggle with. Another character who struggles with their cultural identity is Irie Jones, the daughter of Archie. She struggles with another side of this problematic, and that is her appearance. As any other teenage girl, she wants to be skinny and pretty, but the beauty standard set in the cultural environment she lives in does not consider her, as a curvy, darker skinned girl with afro hair, to be the ideal of beauty. Later on she realizes that appearances are not important and starts to focus on her education, as well as her heritage. Irie, as an only third generation character feels the need to learn about her heritage and wants to embrace it. Given these points, I conclude that Smith portrays her characters along the lines of the theories of both Edward Said and Thomas Hylland Eriksen. She does not like when people are put into boxes and branded, and that also reflects how she portrays the characters in her novels. Into the lives of these three teenagers enters the family of Chalfens, who are a middle-class family of scientists. In my opinion they are the embodiment of the Britishness in the novel. They are successful, have lovely children, they are financially stable and they think they are perfect, which results in them having no friends and being bored. When given the opportunity to help rebelling teenagers from their son Joshua's class, they take it, ensuing in a relationship that will change their lives. Marcus Chalfen, a genetic engineer is so submerged in his

work that he cannot see the possible catastrophic outcomes of it, which eventually leads to his son Joshua joining an organization FATE, which is a fictional version of PETA, who fights for animal rights.

As to the religious aspect of the novel, Smith portrays the sense of religion in her characters in agreement with Said's theory which I mention earlier. The two main religions, mentioned in this novel, are the Islam and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Smith uses the characters to depict the opinions about the religion of the believers of that religion, as well as the non-believers, which I think makes the plot very authentic. The Islam in the novel is portrayed mainly through Samad and Millat. This religion is the reason why the relationship between this father and son is unstable. At first, Samad considers Millat to be too concerned with the western way of life, and therefore judges him, and in turn Millat starts to rebel. Later on he joins a radical group called KEVIN, which consists of people who want to purge themselves of everything that the western culture represents. Thus, in the end, regardless of everything Millat becomes the son Samad imagined to have. The Jehovah's Witnesses are depicted through mainly Hortense Bowden, Irie's grandmother, and to her this religion is a means of survival. In the end, as Smith portrays the dichotomy between the ethnicity of the characters, she also portrays religion in contrast with science.

Smith could be rendered as an urban anthropologist as her opinions that she gives in not only this novel, but all her works show that she can look at the problematics from several different perspectives and therefore remain objective. She has this incredible ability to pinpoint the important moments and issues, namely radicalism in Islam, animal rights and the question of ethicality in genetic engineering that have become even more controversial and current now, considering the novel was written nearly twenty years ago now. *White Teeth* is one of the most relevant novels about this topic, and it must have been so much more when it was first published in 2000.

## 6. Resumé

Cílem mé bakalářské práce je rozebrat multikulturní svět v románu *Bílé zuby*, celosvětově úspěšného díla britsko-jamajské autorky Zadie Smithové. Zadie Smithová je v současnosti jedna z nejvýznamnějších britských černošských autorů píšících tzv. postkoloniální literaturu. Ve svých knihách se věnuje multikulturnímu prostředí severozápadního Londýna, což je místo, kde se narodila a kde také jako dítě vyrůstala. Proto se právě tato oblast objevuje ve většině jejích románů, včetně *N-W* nebo *Swing Time*. Její díla jsou protkána ironií a sarkasmem, čímž vtipně vyobrazuje současná citlivá společenská témata. Přestože je etnická pluralita Londýna nepochybně zajímavé téma pro literární zpracování, z antropologického hlediska je multikulturalismus vnímán negativně, protože v jeho důsledku zanikají originální a tradiční kultury.

*Bílé zuby* je román, který přijímá chaos a nepředvídatelnost života. Název samotný je dle mého názoru symbolikou pro stárnutí a zrání postav, či symbol pro zobrazení vyššího sociálního statusu. Smithová zde rozebírá otázky multikulturalismu a problémy s ním spojené na příběhu tří rodin z různých etnických prostředí. K vytváření multikulturního světa v tomto románu používá etnickou dualitu postav, která pomáhá uchopit náboženská a kulturní napětí. Román zahrnuje tři generace imigrantských rodin a popisuje problémy, kterým čelí po příchodu do nové země, jako je například asimilace, diskriminace a rasismus, čímž zobrazuje světlé i stinné stránky multikulturalismu. Mým cílem je analyzovat multikulturalismus v tomto románu z antropologického hlediska na základě teorií uznávaných antropologů Edwarda Saida v jeho *Orientalismu* a Thomase Hyllanda Eriksena.

Smithová v tomto románu popisuje příběh založený na přátelství Archieho Jonese a Samada Iqbala, kteří se spřátelili během druhé světové války, kdy sloužili u stejného pluku. Archibald Jones celý román otevírá, je to obyčejný Brit ve středním věku, který projde v průběhu románu zásadní transformací. Dle mého názoru Archie v románu vyplňuje roli jakéhosi mediátora mezi ostatními postavami. Velkou transformací projde také jeho přítel, Samad Iqbal, který s postupujícím věkem konvertuje k Islámu, hledajíc jistotu v životě. Román je rozčleněn generačně a každá generace je vystavena těm či oněm problémům, se kterými se imigranti musejí potýkat prakticky na denní bázi. Ať už je to právě konvertování k náboženství, snaha začlenit se mezi vrstevníky tím, že změní

svůj vzhled či chování nebo právě rozpolcenost mezi jednotlivými kulturními identitami. Smithová zároveň zobrazuje tenze, které mezi jednotlivými generacemi vyvstávají z důvodu rozdílných životních hodnot, které jsou zároveň dány prostředím, ve kterém byli jednotlivci vychováváni.

Jedinečnost tohoto románu spočívá v jeho opravdové přesvědčivosti, kdy autorka využívá jak svého smíšeného původu, tak vlastních zažitých zkušeností, díky čemuž se dokáže lépe vcítit do duše svých postav. Již výše zmíněná kulturní rozpolcenost, tíha „břemene“ své původní kultury a ne/naplněná očekávání kultury přijímané, vede postavy k jakémusi vnitřnímu zápasu se sebou samými. Právě způsob, jakým Smithová dokáže výstižně popsat tyto vnitřní rozkoly jednotlivých postav, činí román vysoce autentickým, i přesto však zůstává zcela objektivním.

*Bílé zuby* je jedním ze stěžejních románů světové literatury zabývajících se problematikou multikulturalismu. Díky svým názorům a schopnosti podívat se na věc z mnoha perspektiv a přesto zůstat objektivní, by mohla být Smithová považována za urbánní antropoložku. Smithová má schopnost zaměřit se na kulturní a sociální problematiku, která je v současnosti ještě více relevantní, než v době, kdy byl román vydán, proto o něm bezpochyby můžeme mluvit jako o nadčasovém díle.

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## 8. Annotation

This bachelor thesis aims to analyse the multicultural world in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* (2000) from anthropological point of view. Zadie Smith is a major author from the black British literature canon. In her novels she depicts lives of immigrants in modern British society. Multiculturalism is a theme that Smith is very interested in and one that is recurring in her every work. Whether that is because she herself is of mixed ethnicity, or is just interested in this problematic. The primary objective of this thesis is to analyse the characters and the plot of this novel through anthropological discourse, using sources from renown anthropologists such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and theories of Thomas Hylland Eriksen. Furthermore, I will analyse Smith's view on religion in the novel as this is a topic she describes in detail in her novels as well.

Keywords: multiculturalism, Zadie Smith, White Teeth, culture, religion, British society

## 9. Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce je zaměřena na analýzu multikulturního světa v románu *Bílé Zuby* od britsko-jamajské autorky Zadie Smith. Zadie Smith je jedna z hlavních autorů. V jejích románech se zabývá životem imigrantů v moderní britské společnosti. Multikulturalismus je téma, kterým se Zadie Smith zabývá, a které se objevuje ve všech dílech této autorky. Ať už je to proto, že ona sama je smíšeného původu nebo se jen touto problematikou zabývá. Hlavním cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza postav a děje tohoto románu skrz antropologický diskurz, dle teorií od významných antropologů jako jsou Edward Said a jeho *Orientalismus* (1978) a Thomase Hyllanda Eriksena. Dále také analyzuji pohled Zadie Smith na náboženství, jelikož je to jedno z dalších témat, které v románu detailně popisuje.

Klíčová slova: multikulturalismus, Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, kultura, náboženství, britská společnost