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Bakalářská práce

Multicultural World in Zadie Smith's White Teeth

Multikulturní svět v románu Zadie Smith
(Bílé zuby)

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Abstract

Firstly, the thesis focuses on the overall context of contemporary Anglo-American post-colonial literature and in a brief enumeration it covers British and American writers from various ethnic groups, whose novels are currently the most widely read (Zadie Smith, Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie in Britain, Jhumpa Lahiri, Amy Tan, Sandra Cisneros, Sherman Alexie in the USA). The core of this thesis is the analysis of Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*, its language and the overall multicultural context. The thesis includes the thematic aspects of the novel *White Teeth* (mixed marriages, skin colour, nurture of children from mixed families and different ethnic groups) and it focuses on the language and situational humour within the novel *White Teeth*.

Key Words: Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, post-colonial, postmodernism, hybridity, ethnicity

Anotace

Práce se nejprve soustředí na celkový kontext současné angloamerické postkoloniální literatury a ve stručném výčtu se zaměří na britské a americké autory z různých etnických skupin, jejichž próza je v současné době nejčtenější (Zadie Smith, Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie v Británii, Jhumpa Lahiri, Amy Tan, Sandra Cisneros, Sherman Alexie v USA). Jádrem práce bude rozbor díla Zadie Smith *White Teeth* (Bílé Zuby) po jazykové stránce a v celkovém multikulturním kontextu. Práce zahrne tematické aspekty románu *Bílé Zuby* (smíšená manželství, barva pleti, výchova dětí ve smíšených rodinách a různých etnických skupinách) a zaměří se na jazykový a situační humor provázející dílo autorky.

Klíčová slova: Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, post-colonial, postmodernism, hybridity, ethnicity

Table of contents

1. Introduction	1
2. What is post-colonial literature?	2
2.1. Post-colonial literature	2
2.2. Postmodernism	3
2.3. Hysterical Realism	4
2.4. Ethnicity	4
2.5. Hybridity	5
2.6. Globalisation and universalism	6
3. The most talked about current authors of various ethnicities	7
3.1. Hanif Kureishi	7
3.2. Salman Rushdie	8
3.3. Jhumpa Lahiri	9
3.4. Amy Tan	10
3.5. Sandra Cisneros	11
3.6. Sherman Alexie	11
3.7. Zadie Smith	12
4. A Brief Summary of White Teeth	14
5. Individual characters	16
5.1. Archie Jones	16
5.2. Samad Iqbal	19
5.3. Clara Jones (Bowden)	21
5.4. Alsana Iqbal	23
5.5. Irie Jones	24
5.6. Millat and Magid Iqbals	25
5.7. Chalfen's family	26
5.8. Note	27
6. Language and humour in Zadie Smith's White Teeth	28
7. Conclusion	31
8. Bibliography	34

1. Introduction

Firstly, I explain the meaning of the terms: post-colonialism, postmodernism, hysterical realism, ethnicity, hybridity and globalization in order to avoid confusion since all the terms are more or less closely connected and since the majority of the writers within a field of post-colonial literature falls in multiple categories.

Further, I briefly introduce the contemporary Anglo-American writers, who fall within post-colonial literature and who are often compared to each other. The critics have repetitively compared Zadie Smith's debut novel *White Teeth* with work of Salman Rushdie (*The Satanic Verses*, *Shame*), Hanif Kureishi (*The Buddha of Suburbia*) and others. The critics usually point out the similarities of the subjects such as ethnicity and hybridity. James Wood (a British literature critic) coined a new term a hysterical realism as the reaction on Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* and described the shift from Salman Rushdie's use of magical realism to Smith's hysterical realism.

The core of the thesis is an analysis of each main character appearing in the story. The novel is heavily based on characters. The actual overall plot is not as important as the single events, where we can see how the individuals react. Therefore, I explain behaviour of the characters according to which culture, ethnicity, religion and social class they belong to.

Last but not least I focus on the language and humour in the novel, which is an inseparable part of the novel.

Finally I recapitulate the key features of Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* summarizing all the mentioned information.

2. What is post-colonial literature?

The definition of post-colonial literature is not as easy as it would seem at first glance, because we tend to put it together with other subjects (literary categories) such as postmodernism, hysterical realism, ethnicity and hybridity.

2.1. Post-colonial literature

There is no easy answer to that question. We could think that post-colonial literature simply refers to the period after (post-) the colonised countries gained their independence, which once had been ruled by European powers such as France, Spain, Great Britain and Portugal. But as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin point in their work *The Empire Writes Back* the term “post-colonial” covers also the influence of the imperial process from the moment of colonisation up to the present day (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2004: 2).

“Post-colonial as we define it does not mean ‘post-independence’, or ‘after colonialism’, for this would be to falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. Post-colonialism, rather, begins from the very first moment of colonial contact.”
(Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2003: 117)

However, this statement covers only the time period and not the countries in question. Again we could consider all the literatures of once colonised countries including the USA as post-colonial literatures. But due to the fact the USA gained its independence in the 18th century and became one of the global powers, its post-colonial nature is not recognized. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2004: 2)

Another thing is that the term “post-colonial” refers only to mutual aspects of otherwise totally different countries. Post-colonial literature has resulted from the influence of the imperial culture and the culture of the colonised country.

Post-colonialism is regarded as the need of the nations, groups or ethnicities, which have been victims of imperialism, to find their identity in the west world. The identity crisis is also a result of the fact that post-colonial writers are driven to use the imperial language. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2003: 125)

2.2. Postmodernism

The term “post–modernism” is used in so many fields such as art, philosophy, architecture, economics, literature and popular culture. Therefore it is hard to set an exact period of postmodernism in general. If we talk about postmodernism in philosophy we talk about the turn of the 19th and 20th century, but postmodernism in popular culture started after the Second World War during 1950’, when pop art came out. Anyway, postmodernism in literature is what we are interested in. According to Barry Lewis postmodernism in literature was a period between 1960’ and 1990’. It started with several events; assassination of J. F. Kennedy in 1963, Berlin Wall was erected in 1961, rapid technological change in 1960’ and it ended up when it could no longer compete with television and cinema in 1990’. (Stuart Sim, 2001: 121)

During the 1960’ the news was more and more absurd and unreal. The literature needed a change. Writers had two ways how to approach their work. Someone chose to experiment with fantasy and imagination (surrealism), others chose realism and naturalism. Sometimes they combined the two (hyperrealism). It is important to say that postmodernism was not a movement, there were no set rules or approach. The works differed writer from writer. But there were mutual features to all of them; features such as a new perception of time, a pointless use of pastiche, fragmenting material signs, the loose of association and paranoia. (Stuart Sim, 2001: 123)

Postmodernism today can be characterized as a thought refusing to turn the Other into the Same and that the Other cannot speak for itself as the Other. However, postmodernity provides a space for what it denies: otherness. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2003: 125)

What is the difference between postmodernism and post-colonialism? Both are not movements, but as I stated earlier postmodernism in literature has ended with the last century, whereas post-colonial literature is a still going process. Furthermore, as it is pointed out in the Post-Colonial Studies Reader, the prefix “post” has been simply added before word modernism, which entitled a previous period of the western culture. However, the prefix “post-” in post-colonial does not mean simply “after”, because the word post-colonial includes the meaning of whole process of colonisation and interaction as I mentioned earlier. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2003: 117)

Post-colonialism and postmodernism in literature are two totally different subjects. “Post-colonialism is not simply a kind of postmodernism with politics.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2003: 117) The confusing thing is the fact that a lot of writers can be put in both categories. A typical example is Salman Rushdie, whose work has elements of postmodernism as well as post-colonialism, so does the Zadie Smith’s novel *White Teeth* as she is clearly the post-colonial author as she is a descendant of immigrants, but her the has the aspects of postmodernism such as realism and otherness.

2.3. Hysterical Realism

A British literary critic, essayist and novelist James Wood classifies Zadie Smith’s novel *White Teeth* into so-called hysterical realism, which is a term he coined himself. He picked up the novel *White Teeth* as the finest example. Zadie Smith herself admits that the term is an accurate term for the overblown, manic literature, which is typical for her own novels.¹ Hysterical realism is characterized by a fear of silence, which means that one action is quickly replaced by another action, the story goes fast at all costs. Hysterical realism differs from better-known magical realism, which is strongly associated with Salman Rushdie’s older work.² Magical realism makes no differences between the usual situations and the surreal, unlikely situations.

2.4. Ethnicity

“A term signifies human variation based on culture, tradition, language, ancestry etc. Do not confuse with race which strictly divides humans by biological types.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1998: 75)

There are several essays and articles contemplating about what belong to post-colonial literature and what is simply a question of different ethnicity. Where do the writers born in former colonies belong in the literature world, if they migrated and now live in the former empire and their observation is merely the same as the others? There is a thin line between the two.

¹ Zalewski, Daniel, *The Years in ideas; Hysterical Realism*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/15/magazine/the-year-in-ideas-hysterical-realism.html>, 2002

² Wood, James, *Tell me how does it feel?*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/oct/06/fiction>, 2001

John Mullan stated this question about the Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* in an article "After post-colonialism" at guardian.com. He pointed out that in one way the novel *White Teeth* has the characteristics of post-colonial literature in a sense that it is written by a child of immigrants from former colonies and as we know Zadie Smith's mother migrated to England from Jamaica, which used to be a British colony until 1962. On the other hand the characters in the novel and especially children, who were born and live in London, are more conscious about their ethnic identity than post-colonial heritage.³

2.5. Hybridity

"It refers to creation of a new cultural form by blending one culture to another."
(Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1998: 108)

There is no doubt, that countries such as Britain and the USA are enormously colourful and cities like New York and London are a mixture of lot of different ethnicities and all the cultures are blending together. It could seem that the meaning of hybridity is simply mixture of cultures, which surely is, but according to Kraidy, since hybridity became one of the most discussed subjects in the post-colonial debate, the answer is rather difficult. There is a huge controversy and heap of various points of view. Some explain hybridity as a resistance against the former empire, others search the answer in transnational capitalism. But Kreidy believes that hybridity should be understood just as a practice of transcultural communication. (Kraidy, 2002: 316-339)

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin hybridity is often misinterpreted as denying one's traditions. Hybridity is rather a result of cultural suppression when the empire forced the inhabitants of colonised countries to "assimilate" the western way of life. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2006: 137 - 138)

In Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* we can clearly see the hybridity in children's characters especially Irie Jones and twins, Magid and Millat Iqbals. The fact that their parents had been bringing them up from a perspective of their own culture (Irie's Jamaican mother and Magid's and Millat's Muslim parents) and that children had been also forming by the environment of London and English education system.

³ Mullan, John, After post-colonialism,
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/oct/12/featuresreviews.guardianreview31>, 2002

2.6. Globalisation and universalism

“It is a process of mutual affection of cultures in a global sense. It has started with international economic relations.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1998: 100)

Globalization of the world and universalism lead into two opposite things. One leads into multiculturalism, which is the preservation of different cultures within a society and hybridity, which is blending of one culture into another (as I stated earlier) and the other leads to identity crisis and confusion. In many novels of post-colonial literature we encounter with terms such as roots, routes, rootedness and rootlessness as the characters struggle to find the harmony between their culture and family history (roots) and their lifelines (routes), which have led to the confrontation with the former empire / western world. In an interview at Hay Festival 2012 Salman Rushdie said that the question of the roots and routes is still very important to him and that this question is relevant to the majority of immigrants: “The roots of self are the place that you know, the community that you come from, the language that you speak and the cultural assumptions within which you grow up. Those are the four great roots of the self and very, very often what happens to migrants is that they lose all four - they’re in a different place, speaking an alien language, amongst people who don’t know them and the cultural assumptions are very different. You can see that’s something traumatic.”⁴

⁴ Rushdie, Salman, Hay Festival 2012: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/hay-festival/9309641/Hay-Festival-2012-Salman-Rushdie-on-security-and-The-Satanic-Verses.html>, 2012

3. The most talked about current authors of various ethnicities

Critics always make parallels and distinctions among current authors; therefore, the following chapter deals with a brief list of the most talked about British and American authors of various ethnicities together with Zadie Smith.

3.1. Hanif Kureishi

Kureishi is a British Pakistani playwright, screenwriter, novelist and filmmaker born in 1954 in London to a Pakistani father and an English mother. He attended Bromley Technical High School, then he spent a year studying philosophy at Lancaster University, but he took a degree at King's College London.⁵

His screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which was directed by Stephen Fears, won the New York Film Critics Best Screenplay Award and an Academy Award nomination for Best Screenplay. His debut novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* written in 1990 won the Whitbread Award for the best first novel, and was also made into a BBC television series with a soundtrack by David Bowie. During his career Kureishi has written a number of novels such as *The Black Album* and *Intimacy*, story collections *Love in a Blue Time*, *Midnight All Day* and *The Body*, plays including *Outskirts* and *Borderline* and screenplays *My Son the Fanatic* and *Venus* among the others.

According to Robert McCrum Hanif Kureishi is one of the first “writers of colour” born in Britain and as Kureishi said himself he was a teenager struggling with his identity. He liked Jimi Hendrix, took drugs, denied his Pakistani heritage, but never ran away from it. All these aspects are reflected in his early work. (Robert McCrum, 2014)

Kureishi sometimes strongly comments on subjects such as immigration and similar subjects: “Immigrants have been transformed into a terrible fiction, resembling impossible-to-kill zombies in a video game who will invade, colonise and contaminate, a figure we can never quite digest or vomit”. (Kureishi, 2014)

⁵ Kureishi, Hanif, *The Official Website*, <http://hanifkureishi.co.uk/the-author/>, 2013

3.2. Salman Rushdie

Rushdie is a British Indian novelist, essayist and one of the most well-known personalities in a present literature world. He was born in Bombay in 1947. He studied at Connon School in Bombay, then at Rugby School in Britain and took a degree in history at King's College.

Salman Rushdie is the author of eleven novels: *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children* (which was awarded the Booker Prize in 1981), *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Fury*, *Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence*, and *Luka and the Fire of Life*.

He is also the author of a book of stories, *East, West*, and four works of non-fiction – *Joseph Anton – A Memoir*, *Imaginary Homelands*, *The Jaguar Smile*, and *Step Across This Line*.

Rushdie is one of the few authors of the post-colonial literature, who was born in the former colony and then migrated. Great majority of the writers within the post-colonial literature are children of immigrants.

Salman Rushdie's fourth novel *The Satanic Verses* published in 1988, awarded with Whitbread Award for the novel of the year, aroused a major controversy as a group of Muslims accused Rushdie of blasphemy and mocking their faith. After a so-called fatwa was declared upon him by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, Rushdie went into hiding and took a pseudonym Joseph Anton. Although, according to islamicsupremecouncil.org⁶ a fatwā is not by definition a pronouncement of death or a declaration of war. It is rather an Islamic legal pronouncement, issued by an expert in religious law (mufti), pertaining to a specific issue, Rushdie faced several assassination attempts. The author wrote a book *Joseph Anton: A memoir*, which was published in 2012 and where he recollected his experience during hiding.

“He also found it interesting to write about the moment Muhammad was seduced by the devil. The satanic verses of Rushdie's novel were those Muhammad believed were dictated to him by the angel Gabriel. They said that the pagan goddesses worshipped in Mecca "are exalted females whose intercession is to be desired" – a contradiction of nascent monotheistic Islamic orthodoxy. Only later did Muhammad repudiate these

⁶ Jeffries, Stuart, Salman Rushdie: the fatwa, Islamic fundamentalism and Joseph Anton, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/sep/17/salman-rushdie-blackest-period-of-my-life>, 2012

verses, argues Rushdie, saying he was deceived by the devil, disguised as the archangel. into believing them.” (Stuart Jeffries, 2012)

3.3. Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian American Pulitzer Prize-winning author known for works of fiction like *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, *Unaccustomed Earth* and *The Lowland*.

Lahiri was born in 1967 in London to Bengali parents, who emigrated from Calcutta, but two years after her they moved to USA. Lahiri attended Barnard College in New York then she earned three master’s degrees at Boston University and finally received her doctorate in Renaissance studies.

Lahiri was born as Nilanjana Sudheshna Lahiri, but she is more known as Jhumpa Lahiri, her nickname given by her family

Lahiri’s debut a collection of nine short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* published in 1999 won the 200 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Hemingway Award. Her novel *The Namesake* published in 2003 was adapted into a movie directed by Mira Nair. However, her best-seller was another collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth*, which reached No. 1 on *The New York Times*' best-seller list. Her last novel is *The Lowland* published in 2013.⁷

In her work Jhumpa Lahiri also deals with identity crisis and the themes came mostly from her own experience.

“They’ve lived here now for more than half of their lives, and they raised a family here and now have grandchildren here. ... It has become their home. But at the same time, for my parents, I don't think either of them will ever consciously think, 'I am an American.’”⁸

⁷ Lahiri, Jhumpa: The Biography.com website, <http://www.biography.com/people/jhumpa-lahiri-21465687>, Retrieved, 2015

⁸ Lahiri, Jhumpa: Jhumpa Lahiri's Struggle To Feel American, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97418330>, 2008

3.4. Amy Tan

Tan is a Chinese American novelist born in 1952 in Oakland California, she moved with her mother to Europe after her father and brother died. Tan later returned to USA and attended several Colleges and Universities. After studies Tan worked as a freelance writer and in 1985 she wrote a short story Rules of the Game, which later became her debut novel The Joy Luck Club published in 1989 (and made into a film by Wayne Wang). Amy Tan received the Los Angeles Times Book Award among the others. She is also well-known for her next novels The Kitchen God's Wife and Hundred Secret Senses.

Even though Amy Tan wrote several books for children such as The Moon Lady and The Chinese Siamese Cat, she constantly comes back to her cardinal theme, which is exploration of relationships between Chinese mothers, who immigrated to USA and their daughters, and culture heritage. She chose this theme in her last novel The Bonesetter's Daughter published in 2001.⁹

“I came across a photograph of my grandmother and it was quite a shocking revelation. I went to an exhibition at San Francisco's Asian Art Museum about Shanghai, about how courtesans had been influential in bringing western culture to Shanghai. I bought a book and in it saw this striking group of women in a photograph called The Ten Beauties of Shanghai. They were all wearing an outfit identical to the one my grandmother wears in my favourite photo of her. The fashion detail of the costume was specific to courtesans.

And so I began imagining what if it was true? How would she have made her way in this world? What circumstances shaped my grandmother's life, her attitudes, her beliefs? What did she pass on to my mother, which she then passed on to me?”(Amy Tan, 2013)

⁹ Tan, Amy: The Biography.com website, <http://www.biography.com/people/amy-tan-9542574>, 2015

3.5. Sandra Cisneros

Cisneros is a Latin American (Chicana) novelist renowned for her novel *The House on Mango Street* published in 1984 (more than two million copies sold).

Sandra Cisneros was born in 1954 in Chicago, Illinois as a third child of seven and the only daughter. During her early life Cisneros' family was switching between Chicago and Mexico City, therefore she fully understands both cultures, but has been trying to create a her own unique identity as a result of blending of the two cultures together. Exploring ones identity and the fact of loneliness (the only daughter in family of six brothers) were Cisneros' main themes in her early work.

“The house on Mango Street is ours, and we don't have to pay a rent to anybody or share the yard with the people downstairs or be careful to make too much noise, and there isn't a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom. But even so, it's not the house we'd thought we'd get.” (Cisneros, 1984: 3)

In addition to her well-known novels and short stories such as *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, *Loose Woman*, *Wicked Ways* and *Caramelo or Pure Cuento*, Sandra Cisneros has established the Macondo Foundation to help future writers and also founded another foundation to honour her father. (Rubi, 2011: 236)

During her career Cisneros has won several awards such as MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, Texas Medal of the Arts Award and she also received a doctoral degree from Purchase University.¹⁰

3.6. Sherman Alexie

Sherman Joseph Alexie is a Native American novelist, poet and filmmaker born in 1966 in Wellpinit, Washington. He spent his early childhood in Wellpinit on the Spokane Indian Reservation, later he left the reservation and attended high school in Reardan. Alexie switched within a number of Universities while searching the right specialisation and finally literature won. He gained a bachelor's degree at Washington State University.

¹⁰ Cisneros, Sandra, The Biography.com website. <http://www.biography.com/people/sandra-cisneros-185853>, 2015

“I have enormous cultural power now and it's all out of proportion to the number of books I actually sell. Because of my ethnicity, my age, the times we live in, I have power. The arrogance of this country to have a Holocaust museum, to point out the genocidal sins of another culture is amazing. Philip Sheridan, who was the Colin Powell of his day, said: 'We should kill Indian children because nits make lice.' President Andrew Jackson said: 'Let's kill the Indians.'” (Alexie, 2003)

Alexie is well-known for his poems and short stories describing the contemporary Native American life in reservation: *The Business of Fancydancing*, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven*, for which Alexie won a PEN/Hemingway Award and also for a movie *Smoke Signals* for which he co-wrote the screenplay.¹¹

Sherman Alexie has published twenty four books including and won a number of awards such as the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, the PEN/Malamud Award for Short fiction and the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature.¹²

3.7. Zadie Smith

Novelist Zadie Smith was born as Sadie Smith in the north-west London in 1975 to a Jamaican mother, Yvonne Bailey, and an English father, Harvey Smith. For her father it was his second marriage. As a graduate at Cambridge University Zadie Smith made an astonishing debut with a novel *White Teeth* published in 2000 by Hamish Hamilton. By now Zadie Smith has written five novels; *White Teeth* (2000), *The Autograph Man* (2002), *On Beauty* (2005), *NW* (2012) and *The Embassy of Cambodia* (2013) as well as number of short stories and essays. Over the years Zadie Smith has gained many awards including EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) for Best Female Media Newcomer (*White Teeth*), Orange Prize for Fiction (*The Autograph Man*) and Man Booker Prize for Fiction (*On Beauty*).¹³

Critically acclaimed novel *White Teeth* was an enormous success for Zadie Smith, who wrote her debut, when she was only twenty four years old, as we can read on the back cover of the book, Smith won the Guardian First Book Award and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction and even Salman Rusdie himself said: “An astonishingly assured début, funny and serious... I was delighted”. She is often

¹¹Alexie, Sherman, Biography: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/sherman-alexie>, 2010

¹²Sherman Alexie’s official website: <http://fallsapart.com/press/>, 2014

¹³Smith, Zadie, Biography: <http://www.biography.com/people/zadie-smith-40864>, 2015

compared with the well-known author Salman Rusdie; O'Rourke said about Smith: "an impressive versatile prose stylist, at ease with a variety of voices and breeds of urban slang, and in this and in her panoramic approach to multiculturalism she resembles Salman Rushdie, whose influence is obvious" (O'Rourke 2000: 166)

Why did Zadie Smith choose such a title for her debut? The novel explores cultural and racial identity within contemporary British society, the cultural and family heritage and as Nick Bentley stated, teeth are markers of history, genealogy and also they show individual's journey through their lives. (Bentley, 2008: 55) We all are born with a set of teeth, but it is the way of life we choose, the accidental events that happen and the class we belong to, how our teeth look like. People from higher classes with a bigger income have straight teeth simply because they can afford the treatment. On the other hand, it seems that people with darker skin have whiter teeth therefore healthier than the white society. During the story Zadie Smith also highlights the fact that modern society embrace having white teeth, which also refers to "fakeness" in the modern society. Having white teeth is a sign of social status as well as a question of money and being yourself or not.

4. A Brief Summary of White Teeth

“And when your teeth rot . . . aaah there’s no return. They won’t look at you like they used to.” (Smith, 2001: 173)

A divorced man in his upper forties Archie Jones comes to the End-of-the-World party after unsuccessful suicide attempt and finds a nineteen-year-old black girl Clara with unusual smile. Clara has no front teeth. Archie immediately falls in love with her and in a short time they get married and have a daughter named Irie. Samad Iqbal the best friend of Archie is introduced further in the story. Samad is originally from Bangladesh and he is Muslim unlike Clara, who is catholic and Archie, who is atheist. Samad is married to Alsana and they have two sons, twins, Millat and Magid.

One chapter is devoted to Second World War, when the friendship of Samad and Archie started. And we learn how Archie was forced by Samad to shoot an unarmed Nazi scientist.

Back to present; a big break comes when Samad sends one of his sons Magid to the Bangladesh without his wife’s acknowledge. Samad feels that both of his sons slowly become more like the white English boys and forget they Muslim heritage. Unfortunately (or fortunately), Samad has enough money just for one boy. After this event Alsana stops talking to Samad.

Few years passed during which Samad had a love affair Millat grew up into a handsome troublesome boy and Irie into a despaired confused teenager.

Irie falls in love with Millat, but he does not return her affection. One day they are caught smoking a weed. The head of the school believes that both of them miss decent family base and orders them to attend Chalfen’s family a respectable white English family.

Mr. Marcus Chalfen is a respected scientist. He tries to find a cure for cancer using mice for a lot of different experiments. Mrs. Joyce Chalfen is a gardener and she also gives some advice about relationships on the radio program. They have for children and one of them, a young man named Joshua, falls in love with Irie. Irie starts to help Mr. Chalfen with a research and meanwhile Millat becomes a member of Islamic fundamentalists. Millat’s either Irie’s parents do not like the fact, that they children spend so much time with Chalfen’s, but there is nothing to do about it.

Finally, Magid comes back to England. He is calm, but cold. He is smart, but unpleasant. And he did not become a proper Muslim at all. Samad is enormously disappointed and rejects him. Magid finds home with Chalfen's and starts working on a research as well.

Joshua Chalfen gets angry and lonesome because Irie does not return his affection and his parents does talk only about Millat and Magid. He moves to Iqbal's family and becomes a part of the movement against the cruelty to animals as revolt against his father's research and experiments on mice. Irie moves from her family to. Now she lives with her grandmother, who tries converting her to Seventh-day Adventists.

At the climax, all the different movements and groups to which children are devoted (Islamic fundamentalists, Seventh-day Adventists and environmentalists fighting against the cruelty to animals) plan to ruin the introduction day of Mr. Chalfen's research (the FutureMouse conference) for various reasons but mostly personal reasons. On the introduction day Mr. Chalfen introduces his idol, who happens to be the Nazi scientist, who should have been killed by Archie in Second World War. Samad realizes that Archie did not shoot him and they friendship is based on nothing but lies. Meanwhile Millat appears with a gun, stoned and drunk trying to kill the scientists. Archie stops the bullet with his body. Luckily he survives.

5. Individual characters

I would like to go through all the individual characters, their background and development throughout the story to understand their reactions based on a fact that the characters have totally different racial, religious and social background, but linked by the events. They all are influenced by personal issues. There are several collisions: “Britishness” and minority cultures, parents and children, roots and rootlessness and even conflicts within the characters themselves:

“We are split people. For myself, half of me wishes to sit quietly with my legs crossed, letting the things that are beyond my control wash over me. But the other half wants to fight the holy war” (Smith 2001, p.179)

5.1. Archie Jones

“I wanted to write a book about a man who gets through the century in a good way. He lives a good life by accident. That's where Archie came from. He's a kind of Jimmy Stewart-ish character, maybe a bit simpler than that. The rest of it formed itself around him with lots of bits and bobs from my reading and my own life. It was a kind of mishmash, as first novels tend to be.” (Smith, 2002)

Alfred “Archie” Jones is the first main character, who is introduced to us and he is rather a specific one. Archie impersonates a shy working class white man, who lacks true religious believe likewise the majority of western white people, who have sort of replaced a religion with technology and consumerism. Archie also lacks believe in himself. We could say that Archie Jones lets his life pass him by. Like most of the characters in the story Archie struggles with being happy and finding happiness in their chaotic lives, but unlike the others he embraces chaos and uncertainty. However, Archie is not a bad person. He is calm, reserved and caring about his wife, daughter and friends. He simply does not expect much from life. “No white knight, then, this Archibald Jones. No aims, no hopes, no ambitions. “A man whose greatest pleasures were English breakfast and DIY. A dull man. An old man. And yet... good. He was a good man.” Clara realizes who she is married to. (Smith, 2001: 48)

We meet Archie at Cricklewood Broadway while he is sitting in his car attempting suicide after being divorced and losing a will to live. Archie was married to Ophelia

Diagilo for thirty years. They met in Italy during the Second World War and had a quiet life, but at the end of their relationship Ophelia turns mad mostly because Archie's mediocrity and low ambitions. Luckily, the local butcher, Mo Hussein-Ishmael, saves the main character by accident as he want Archie only to drive away his car. Archie feels alive and born again. Driving a car across a town Archie sees a banner announcing "Welcome to the End of the World Party, 1975", which he goes to attend and where he meets (again by accident) astonishingly beautiful young Jamaican woman. Within two months they get married and move into a small house in Willesden Green.

"Where I come from," said Archie, "a bloke likes to get to know a girl before he marries her." "Where you come from it is customary to boil vegetables until they fall apart. This does not mean," said Samad tersely, "that it is a good idea." (Smith, 2001: 98)

As well as Clara we learn that Archie is a good nice modest man, who works in the Direct Mail Company. He has a very few interests and certainly does not like contemplating about almost anything. It seems he lacks self-esteem, which is partly true he also grew comfortable through the years, but the real truth is he is resigned to his fate looking for signs in his life. He flips a coin every time, when he has to decide (he also flipped a coin whether or not to commit suicide, which proves his believe in uncertainty and fate) and most of the time he spends with his friend Samad Iqbal usually in O'Connell's pub and occasionally corresponds with Horst Ibelgauf, a friend from the Olympics in London 1948.

In a fifth chapter Zadie Smith brings us back to the Second World War, when Archie meets Samad for the first time. One day in a Bulgarian village all men from their unit are killed - only Archie and Samad survive. Without a functional radio and knowing the war is over they stay in the village and spend a so much time together, which leads to their friendship. "The kind of friendship an Englishman makes on holiday, that he can make only on holiday. A friendship that crosses class and colour, a friendship that takes as its basis physical proximity and survives because the Englishman assumes the physical proximity will not continue." Russian soldiers appear and inform them about the end of the war and that a certain scientist Dr. Perret, who works for Nazis, is hiding nearby. Once they find him, Archie and Samad take him away in order to kill him and become war heroes as Samad implies.

Years passed and both Archie and Samad have children. One day Samad decides to send one of his sons to Bangladesh. He prepares everything and Archie assists him. We could see here that even if Archie is not a manipulated person, he does pretty much anything what Samad says him to avoid confrontation. It seems that Archie simply does not want to get bothered with augmenting and sometimes even thinking about the events and consequences.

In a chapter nine a terrible hurricane occurs. Samad with his wife and son Millat flee to Archie's better protected house. Samad is praying during the storm unlike Archie, who rather stays calm not caring about the storm as much as the others.

In comparison with other parents he is the least concerned about his child. Surely he loves his daughter, but there is his believe that things will resolve themselves. When Irie is caught with a marijuana joint, Archie lets the decision totally up to the school.

Time goes by and Magid returns to England. The brothers cannot speak to each other mostly because of Millat's stubborn head. When Magid asks Archie whether or not they should meet, Archie flips a coin again.

Everybody is on his way to the FutureMouse conference where Mr. Chalfen together with certain Dr. Perret introduces a research. Archie recognises this name, it is the Nazi scientist, who he should have supposed to kill, but that day the coin said otherwise. Archie realises that his friendship with Samad might be in danger because their friendship is practically based upon his death. He also realises what Samad means to him. Samad is his mentor and apart from flipping coin Samad is the only one who Archie listens. In the end something unexpected happens. Millat appears and shoots at the scientist and Archie jumps and saves him. It was his decision without flipping a coin or asking Samad. It was his decision.

During the story we learn that Archie Jones is the rootless character. Archie does not believe in God (like Iqbal's family) or in reason and ambition (like Chalfen's family). He also does not feel his family heritage like Samad feels about his great-grandfather, Mandal Pande. Although (or therefore) Archie Jones has the easiest life among the others. "I tell you in confidence: my dearest friend, Archibald Jones, is an unbeliever!" (Smith, 2001: 145)

In another interview at guardian.com Zadie Smith explains her inspirations for Archie's character: "There are parts of my father in Archie. He's a product of another era, when things were more fixed and certain, but most people were essentially

unhappy, trapped in awful jobs. In many ways, that's what's so lifelike about the book.”¹⁴

5.2. Samad Iqbal

Samad Iqbal works as a waiter in an Indian restaurant owned by his distant relative, Ardashir Mukhul, where he is often made fun of by his co-workers. Sometimes he feels terrible as he knows he could achieve much more. We can see it when Samad wishes to wear a sign at work saying: “I am not a waiter, I have been a student, a scientist, a soldier, my wife is called Alsana, we live in east London but we would like to move north. I am a muslim but Allah has forsaken me or I have forsaken Allah, I’m not sure. I have a friend – Archie – and others. I am forty nine but women still turn in the street. Sometimes.” (Smith, 2001:58) Samad often blames his crippled hand for the injustice in his life, which he got when he was in the Indian army: “This shitty hand that the useless Indian army gave me for my troubles, I would have matched his achievements. And why am I crippled? Because the Indian army knows more about the kissing of arses than it does about the heat and sweat of battle! Never go to India, Sapper Jones, my dear friend, it is a place for fools and worse than fools. Fools, Hindus, Sikhs and Punjabis. And now there is all this murmuring about independence – give Bengal independence, Archie, is what I say – leave India in bed with the British, if that’s what she likes.” (Smith, 2001: 87-88) We can see here what hatred Samad holds for the Indian army and India in general for its timidity, foolishness and the fact his hand was crippled. It almost seems that Samad despises being Indian himself, but more likely he takes his hand really personal, because on the other hand, he venerates and looks up to his great-grandfather Mangal Pande, who became an unassailable symbol of heroism for Samad. “My great-grandfather Mangal Pande - was the great hero of the Indian Mutiny!” (Smith, 2001: 87) and he also gets quite angry when somebody makes a mistake relating to cultural heritage: “Sultan... Sultan... Do you know, I wouldn’t mind the epithet, Mr Mackintosh, if it were at least accurate. It’s not historically accurate, you know. It is not, even geographically speaking, accurate. I am sure I have explained to you that I am from Bengal. The word “Sultan” refers to certain men of the Arab lands – many hundreds of miles west of Bengal. To call me Sultan is about

¹⁴ Smith, Zadie, Zadie bites back,
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/25/fiction.bookerprize2002>, 2002

as accurate, in terms of the mileage, you understand, as if I referred to you as a Jerry-Hun fat bastard.” (Smith, 2001: 85)

Samad Iqbal is a character full of contradictions. He has a love/hate relationship to every aspect of his life. He loves and hates India as he struggles to be a proper Muslim, he loves and hates England as he is incapable to fit in the western society, he loves and hates himself as he struggles with his religion. All these contradictory aspects fight within himself.

Later in the story Samad hits a midlife crisis and falls in love with Ms. Poppy Burt-Jones, a music teacher at the school, which their children attend. Samad finds himself on the thin line between faith and secularism or we can say tradition and temptation. He tries to repress his desire for Ms. Poppy Burt-Jones and starts to masturbate and drink, which are also the acts of a sin. In the end, Samad is defeated by desire and has a love affair with Ms. Poppy Burt-Jones. However, he is seen with Ms. Burt-Jones by his two sons one day. Samad feels guilty. He fails as a Muslim and as a father. He also believes that there is no way to redeem himself, but he decided to save his sons. He decided that he sends his sons back to Bangladesh to learn a proper tradition to become a proper Muslims, because he also believes that western way of life has a bad influence on children in general as he once describes children of Alsana’s sisters: “All their children are nothing but trouble. They won’t go to mosque, they don’t pray, they speak strangely, they dress strangely, they eat all kinds of rubbish, they have intercourse with God knows who. No respect for tradition. People call it assimilation when it is nothing but corruption.” (Smith, 2001: 190) Unfortunately (fortunately), Samad has not enough money to send both of his sons. There is a big question which one of them to pick, but Samad believes that the older son, Magid, is a better choice. He kidnaps Magid and sends him to India. Since this event his wife Alsana stops talking to Samad.

One day Samad and Alsana receive a letter from Magid, who also sent a photo of himself shaking a hand with the writer R. V. Saraswati. In the letter Magid describes his admiration for Saraswati and for his teaching: “Too often we Indians, we Bengalis, we Pakistanis, throw up our hands and cry ‘Fate!’ in the face of history. But many of us are uneducated, many of us do not understand the world. We must be more like the English. The English fight fate to the death. They do not listen to history unless it is telling them what they wish to hear.” (Smith, 2001: 288) Samad is furious and feels cheated as he believes that people are weak and that everything is the act of Allah.

“What does Islam mean? What does the word, the very word, mean? I surrender. I surrender to God.” (Smith, 2001: 288) Once Magid comes back home he is “more English than the English.” (Smith, 2001: 406)

Meanwhile Millat grows promiscuous and becomes a member of a group called KEVIN, a group of young fundamentalist Muslims. Samad is disappointed as he failed bringing his two sons up. He slowly loses his believe in belonging (Muslim tradition) and assimilation. Closer to the end of the story Samad revises his attitude. “You begin to give up the very idea of belonging. Suddenly this thing, this belonging, it seems like some long, dirty lie . . . and I begin to believe that birthplaces are accidents, that everything is an accident. But if you believe that, where do you go? What do you do? What does anything matter?” (Smith, 2001: 407)

Zadie Smith explains in an interview what the two main characters mean to her: “Those two characters are bits of me. I can be very simple about things, like Archie; and then I have a more intellectual side, like Samad. Also, they're a classic English double act, like a lot of comedy routines. There's definitely a lot of television in Archie and Samad.”¹⁵ Smith continues describing the fact that a lot of characters including Samad Iqbal are immigrants and as immigrants they often feel torn apart: “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 that experience, who felt separated or cut in two, who had moved from one country to another, who had that sense of leading two lives. Samad thinks that way -- that somewhere in the world there is this other Samad who still lives in Bangladesh and is very good and religious and proper. But he has to deal with the real Samad. I think that's a fairly common experience. But that's a guess; I couldn't know.”¹⁶

5.3. Clara Jones (Bowden)

"She was the most beautiful thing he has ever seen, she was also the most comforting woman he had ever met . . . her wide grin revealed possibly her one imperfection. A complete lack of top teeth in the top of her mouth" (Smith, 2001: 24)

^{15, 16} Smith, Zadie: An interview with Zadie Smith, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/teeth/ei_smith_int.html, 2002

For the first time (as well as Archie) we meet Clara Bowden as a gorgeous young woman on a staircase leading to the End-of-the-World party. Archie sees her as the most pristine and unspoiled person full of life. We learn something slightly different in chapter two, where Zadie Smith reveals her history.

Clara is originally from Jamaica. With front teeth like a rabbit she was unpopular among the kids, living with her mother, Hortense Bowden, who happened to be an ardent enthusiastic Jehovah's Witness and her father, Darcus Bowden, who had "a strange mysterious illness" allowing him only to sit and watch television. Clara needed someone to save her therefore she started dating Ryan Topps, who is also one of the least popular kids at the school. After a while she totally replaced religion with a relationship with Ryan only to get shocked, when Ryan became Jehovah's Witness. Clara felt betrayed. One day Ryan tried to get Clara back, they were driving a scooter and suddenly crashed. Clara lost her front teeth, which is an important point in the book. It is said, that it seems people with a darker skin have whiter thus healthier looking teeth, than white British people, although there is a factor of money and a class people are in. According to Bentley it was Clara's fate to lose her front teeth. (Bentley, 2008: 55) In the end she runs away and attends the End-of-the-World party still seeking a savoir.

Clara lost her religious heritage or I should say she forced herself to forget. But unlikely Archie, we know she grew up in religious family. She escapes from the identity created by her mother and runs away into Archie's arms, but Clara will never quite established her identity as strong as the other characters. The identity crisis and confusion in Clara's life is more gender related I believe. Clara has a problem with her mother and she seeks help in men, but she cannot find it. Her father had never really been there for her, Ryan Topps happens to be connected with her mother by a religion and finally in Archie, who "saves" her, but he will never provide her a support, which she really needs.

Alsana and her niece Neena become Clara's friends and apparently the only people except her husband Archie, who Clara can talk to. Throughout the story Clara and Alsana talk mostly about their children. As just the way it is, mothers worry about their children more than their fathers and both Clara and Alsana worry that Millat and Irie do not spend much time at home and they both share hatred for Chalfen's. After Irie and Millat show great improvement in their grades, all three families held a barbecue.

5.4. Alsana Iqbal

Alsana is a strong hot-tempered woman often speaking ironically. We can clearly see it, when she strongly argues against moving to Willesden, which is what Samad wants to: “Useless! Tell me, Samad Miah, what is the point of moving here – nice house, yes, very nice, very nice – but where is the food?” She ends their quarrel by punching Samad in the stomach and slamming the door. (Smith, 2001: 61)

Alsana is also a strong believer as we learn in a dialog with her niece Neena, who is better known as Niece-of-shame: ““I thought that praying was done on people’s knees,” said Neena, laughing lightly. “Both, both, asleep, waking, walking,” snapped Alsana, as she passed under the tinkly bell once more. “We are never out of sight of the Creator.”” (Smith, 2001: 64) But Alsana is not a traditionalist like her husband Samad. She is much more open minded than him and understands that their children grew up in totally different environment than them, thus they are different. “But I am not like Samad Iqbal. I restrain myself. I live. I let live.” (Smith, 2001: 235) Her husband happens to be very very stubborn as a lot of men happen to be. Alsana is also conscious of the fact that no country (either England or Bangladesh or any other country) is perfect. On the other hand the roots of Alsana Iqbal are very strong and when her young son, Magid, once starts to call her “mum” instead of “amma”, Alsana gets terrified and almost starts to cry.

Even though Alsana’s and Clara’s personalities differ greatly, they have something in common, they are married to much older men than them and through their lives both of them deal with gender inequality more than anything. “We married old men, you see? These bumps – they will always have daddy-long legs for fathers. One leg in the present, one in the past. No talking will change this. Their roots will always be tangled.” (Smith, 2001: 80) Further, Alsana express her attitude about the heroism of their husbands during in the Second World War: “Shitty lies! If they are heroes, where are their hero things? ... I’ve never seen a medal.” Unlike Clara who wants to believe in the bravery and heroism of her husband Archie, she wants to believe that her “saviour” is a hero.

Once Alsana finds out, that her husband kidnapped and sent one of their sons to India, she reacts with passive resistance – she stops talking to Samad, the only words she uses are: “Maybe, Samad Miah, maybe not” to make him live in uncertainty. We would expect that this situation will lead to divorce in western circumstances. But in

this case both Alsana and Samad are traditionalists. When their son returns to England, Alsana starts to talk to Samad again: “Yes, Samad Miah, it is in the top right-hand drawer, yes, that’s where it is, yes.” (Smith, 2001: 351) The punishment of uncertainty has ended for Samad.

5.5. Irie Jones

We can clearly see a resemblance between Clara and the author, Zadie Smith, herself. They both are from interracial families, where mother is Jamaican and father is an Englishman.

Clara and Alsana discover that they are pregnant simultaneously. Clara is highly conscious of picking up the right name for her child: “...naming seems to her a fearful responsibility, a god-like task for a mere mortal.” Finally she picks up *Irie* meaning everything is OK, cool, peaceful. (Smith, 2001: 75)

Even though Irie was growing up in the modern multicultural London as a child of a white Englishman and Jamaican mother she encounters an identity crisis. She has an appearance of a black Jamaican girl, but she has never been to Jamaica even she does not know much about her mother’s history. She feels not fitting anywhere. According to Edouard Glissant this is typical to second generation of immigrants: “When identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened. Usually an outcast in the place he has newly set anchor, he is forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging.” (Glissant, 1997: 143)

Firstly, Irie tries to “be more English” (which is also encouraged by Chalfe’s family further in the story). Irie creates an obsession with the west concept of a beauty (she was the opposite to the west concept of beauty): “Irie Jones, aged fifteen, was big. The European proportions of Clara’s figure had skipped a generation, and she was landed instead with Hortense’s substantial Jamaican frame [...] the girl had weight; big tits, big butt, big hips, big thighs, big teeth.” (Smith, 2001: 265 and together with the fact she falls in love with Millat, who happens to be attract to white girls, it leads to getting her hair straightened. But soon after a number of attempts to become more English, Irie decides to learn something more about her cultural heritage and moves to her grandmother Hortense and becomes a Jehova’s Witness. From what Clara ran away is the place where Irie finds “herself”. She idealises her Jamaican roots. But at the end, she tries to establish her authentic identity by acknowledging both worlds.

At one point in the story, Irie has sex with both brothers, Millat and Magid Iqbals. She gets pregnant (unknowing which one is the father) and becomes a centre character of the story. In an interview with Kathleen O'Graddy Zadie Smith said: "The reason Irie gets to the centre of the book is not really about her, but about a certain idea of indeterminacy which is in a lot of writing of my generation of my peers, about the centre always being slightly displaced and there are a whole myriad of reasons for that.

I think Irie, is in kind of the centre, I don't write women very well and I don't really enjoy writing about them particularly. At the moment, maybe that will change at some point. I find them quite confusing as a group of people. I think a lot of the women in *White Teeth* are failures more or less in terms of rounded portrayals of people and that is kind of a shame."¹⁷

5.6. Millat and Magid Iqbals

Alsana Iqbal is expecting two boys and even though Millat and Magid are twins, developing of their characters differ a great deal.

Millat grew into a troublesome bad boy, who chases girls and does whatever he wants, combines the family religion (Islam) and heritage of his great-great-grandfather Mandal Pande with the current pop-culture and gangster-like behaviour. Millat chooses this identity because of realisation he has been already labelled by the society as "a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state . . . In short, he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in the country". (Smith, 2001: 233) Therefore it seems only natural when he becomes a member of KEVIN (Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation), an Islamic Fundamentalist group with "an acronym problem". (Smith, 2001: 295

Closer to the end of the story he decides he is about to change the west perception of the minority: "That's it. That's the long, long history of us and them. That's how it was. But no more." (Smith, 2001: 506) Unfortunately, Millat chooses violence (he declares his personal war with the white western society) and decides to kill Dr. Perret (who becomes a symbol of the opposite of everything he stands for) at the "FutureMouse" conference.

¹⁷ Smith, Zadie, *White Teeth: A Conversation with Author Zadie Smith*, http://bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/wstudies/ogrady/zsmith2004.htm#_edn1, 2004

Contrary to Millat, Magid at his early age tries to suppress his roots and become a full member of the white western society. He even starts to call himself Mark Smith instead of his real name which happens to be too exotic. ““I GIVE YOU A GLORIOUS NAME LIKE MAGID MAHFOOZ MURSHED MUBTASIM IQBAL!” Samad has yelled after Magid when he returned home that evening and whipped up the stairs like a bullet to hide in his room. “AND YOU WANT TO BE CALLED MARK SMITH!”” (Smith. 2001, 151)

Once he is sent by his father to Bangladesh to become a proper Muslim he soon meets the Indian writer Sir R. V. Saraswati and learns from him that they (Indians) tend to believe in fate and that they should be more like English and take the action into own hands. (Smith, 2001: 288) Therefore, Magid decides to study law. He returns to England after agreement with Mr. Chalfen. Ironically he is more English than Millat and Irie, who grew up in London and because of this fact Magid refuses to talk with him, so does (sort of) their father, who is really disappointed. These circumstances “force” Magid to move to Chalfen’s and he starts to work on a FutureMouse project.

5.7. Chalfen’s family

Marcus Chalfen, a father and a prominent Jewish genetic engineer. His life is devoted to perfectionism and his faith is in science. He works on his FutureMouse project, where he goes “to the edges of his God’s imagination and made mice Yahweh could not conceive of: mice with rabbit genes, mice with webbed feet...” (Smith, 2001: 311) Like the whole family, Marcus is liberal and open-minded, they openly talk about sex and race, they even create their own philosophy of life called “chalfenism”. Marcus Chalfen is just the opposite of Archie Jones. Marcus is an ambitious man, who wants to eliminate every random aspects of his life, totally contradictory to Archie’s coin flipping.

His wife, Joyce Chalfen, is a horticulturalist. She strongly believes in DNA heritage as we can see in conversation with Clara: “I mean, after a while, you’ve got to suspect it’s in the genes, haven’t you? All these brains. I mean, nurture just won’t explain it” (Smith, 2001:354) and she continues by asking Clara what part of the family is responsible for Irie’s cleverness: “Now, out of my interest – I mean, I really am curious – which side do you think Irie gets it from, the Jamaican or the English?” (Smith, 2001:354) This is greatly disapproved by Zadie Smith herself in the contradiction between the twins, Magid and Millat.

Later in the story Chalfen's have a great influence on Irie, who will spend a lot of time with them and as I mentioned earlier, after Magid's arriving, he moves to them and starts working on the project. This is a simple fact, that both of them feel better with Chalfe's than with their own families (the fact of certainty in life).

There is another thing, which Zadie Smith gives us. The fact that every child (slightly at least) stands against their own parents. We can see it in the story of Chalfen's eldest son, Joshua. It might seem that their family relationships are functional. But in the moment when his parents become more interested in the other children (Millat, Magid and Irie), he joins a group called FATE (Fighting Animal Torture and Exploitation) just because he knows how his father despises this type of people. According to Claire Squires both Marcus and Joyce underestimate the cross-general communication and therefore their son Joshua opposes his father by joining FATE. (Squires, 2002: 50)

5.8. Note

As we can see, no family can manage a generation gap between the parents and children and it does not matter which ethnicity, class, culture or religion they belong to.

At the end of the story one event is quickly switched by another and all the characters act on the spur of the moment. Zadie Smith explained it as her fault: "It is a kind of throwing up of hands and all the difficulties with the end of the book, about the end being too fast, and all of the rest of it, are just me not being able to – not having the kind of hardware in my brain – to deal with the software – I couldn't resolve a lot of the issues that the book brought up. In the end I kind of threw up my hands and so do all of the characters really."¹⁸

¹⁴ Smith, Zadie, *White Teeth: A Conversation with Author Zadie Smith*, http://bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/wstudies/ograde/zsmith2004.htm#_edn1, 2004

6. Language and humour in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

The use of language in the novel *White Teeth* especially in dialogues is one of the important aspects. Zadie Smith denotes that the way we use the language carries a mark of our origin, culture and class. It is almost identical feature likewise the state of our teeth. The language has also a humorous aspect in the novel as we can see in the various dialects used in the novel.

The character most conscious of the connection of the language and perception of society, is Clara Jones. Clara Jones normally speaks with accent resembling to Cockney. It is characterised by changing the pronunciation of initial *th* in words like *think* and *this* so it is pronounced like *fink* and *dis* and often glottal stopping such as *wan'* instead of *want* and *goin'* instead of *going*.¹⁹ The example of Clara's speech, when she invites Archie to the End-of-the-World party: "Well, come and join de club. Dere are a lot of us about dis marnin'. What a strange party dis is. You know." (Smith, 2001: 25) But later in the story when Mrs. Chalfen asks Clara which side of her family is responsible for the Irie's cleverness, Clara changes her accent in order to be on the same level as Chalfen's, who happen to be really posh: "[...] But seriously, it was probably Captain Charlie Durham. He taught my grandmother all she knew. A good English education. Lord knows, I can't think who else it could be." (Smith, 2001: 355)

In the use of language by the young generation we can clearly see the resemblance to Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange*. In the novel *White Teeth* Millat establishes a street crew called Raggastani, which speak "a strange mix of Jamaican patois, Bengali, Gujarati and English" (Smith, 2001: 231) as we can see in a conversation of the crew members, when they head towards Bradford: "Tax the window seat, yea? Nice. I've blatantly got to have a fag in here, yeah? I'm fuckin' wired, yeah? This whole business, man. This fuckin' geezer, man. He's a fuckin' coconut – I'd like to fuck him up, yeah?" (Smith, 2001: 233) In the novel *A Clockwork Orange* the main character, Alex (a chief of his street gang), speaks a fictional language called "nadsat", which is basically a mixture of English slang and Russian language. In general the young generation in Zadie Smith's novel use a lot of idioms and swearing: Josh, mate, could you just read me the minutes for couple of minutes ago, if you get my drift? [...] The minutes, Josh. After the stuff Joley was saying about

¹⁹ British Accents, <http://dialectblog.com/british-accents/>, Copright (c) 2011 by Ben Trawick-Smith. All rights reserved

protest strategy. [...] I guess I missed that. Er, well that was actually really important, Josh. You've got to keep up I mean, what's the point of doing all this talking. Cunt, cunt, cunt." (Smith, 2001: 483)

According to Claire Squires Zadie Smith's novel is also influenced by Lewis Carroll's work and the use of untypical compounds, which Smith acknowledged. (Squires, 2002: 16) We can see the use of such compounds when Alsana reacts to Samad's comment on the fall of the Berlin Wall: "And who does he think he is? Mr Churchill-gee? [...] Original whitecliffsdover piesnmash jellyeels royalvariety britishbulldog, heh?" (Smith, 2001: 241)

There is no wonder that soon after publishing the novel *White Teeth* was adapted as a TV show. The novel itself has a lot of drama and sit-com characteristics. Zadie Smith commented at guardian.com on the fact her novel will be a TV show: "It's weird, but often I feel when I'm writing certain characters and their traits that I have already seen them on TV. In sitcoms or whatever. The humour, I suppose, is TV humour to a great extent, absorbed from the usual suspects - Python, Pete and Dud and the rest. Plus, everything is always moving towards a certain point, and that's a very TV thing. A lot of American writers, like Jonathan Franzen or David Foster Wallace, are aware of these traits and go out of their way to avoid them." ²⁰

In another interview Smith explains the difference between the characters of Samad Iqbal and Archie Jones: "They're a classic English double act, like a lot of comedy routines. There's definitely a lot of television in Archie and Samad." ²¹

If we want an example of the resemblance to sit-com humour, we do not need to get so far in the story. At the very beginning, when Archie attempts suicide and is saved by a well-known halal butcher, Mo Hussein-Ishmael; Hussein-Ishmael saves Archie not out of altruism but out of protection of his business with kosher meat: "No one gasses himself on my property. [...] We are not licensed. [...] Do you hear that, mister? We're not licensed for suicides around here. This place halal. Kosher, understand, if you're going to die round here, my friend, I'm afraid you've got to be thoroughly bled first." (Smith, 2001: 7)

Although, the novel has characteristics of situation comedy, the humour lies in the dialogues (mostly between Samad and Archie). "'I'm a Muslim'" Said Samad,

²⁰ Smith, Zadie, *Zadie bites back*,
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/25/fiction.bookerprize2002>, 2002

²¹ Smith, Zadie: *An interview with Zadie Smith*,
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/teeth/ei_smith_int.html, 2002

pushing a plate of pork away. [...] “Why don’t you eat it?” said Archie, guzzling his chops down like a madman. “Strange business, if you ask me.” “I don’t eat it for the same reason you as an Englishman will never truly satisfy a woman.”” (Smith, 2001: 96)

Another example is the conversation between Samad and Archie about getting married: ““Oh, but I have still some time to wait” [...] “Unfortunately, the Begun family do not yet have a female child of my generation.” “You mean your wife’s not bloody born yet?” “What of it?” asked Samad. [...] “Where I come from”, said Archie, “a bloke likes to get to know a girl before he marries her.” “Where you come from it is customary to boil vegetables until they fall apart. This does not mean”, said Samad “tersely, that it is a good idea.”” (Smith, 2001: 98)

7. Conclusion

In the thesis I described the difference between the post-colonial literature and postmodern literature and the meaning of the currently most used terms: hysterical realism, hybridity, ethnicity and globalisation with intention to classify Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*. I found out and proved that the novel *White Teeth* carries characteristics of all the terms; Zadie Smith is clearly the post-colonial author as she is a descendant of immigrants and her novel brings the theme of identity crisis of immigrants, which is typical to post-colonial authors, but her style of her work has also the aspects of postmodernism literature: the use of realism, perception of time, the aspect of "otherness" and themes such as gender equality. The term "hysterical realism" was even coined as a James Wood's reaction to this very novel. The terms hybridity and ethnicity are closely related to the main theme of the novel, which is identity crisis of the characters, who often fail to find themselves as they are confused by the diversity of their origin culture and the culture of the former empire.

I covered the current writers within the post-colonial literature to compare their work with Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*. As I demonstrated all the authors has surely one thing in common and that it is a theme of identity crisis and confusion within the cultures and society. I also demonstrated the evolution of literature realism; from Salman Rushdie's magical realism to new coined hysterical realism of Zadie Smith.

The core of the thesis is focused on the characters of Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth*. I analysed their behaviour according to their social status (culture, ethnicity, class and generation) and I gave examples from the novel *White Teeth* itself.

Last but not least, I focused on the aspect of the language and humour within the novel. I brought up the resemblances to other authors and also gave examples from the novel.

Finally, I want to state that the novel *White Teeth* was not written with the intention to bring up all these questions concerning immigration and multiculturalism, but it is not less important for that. The novel describes modern London society as it is observed by a young author, Zadie Smith.

*“I didn't want the community in White Teeth to be representative of immigrants in England, that's not my job really, I'm not a politician, and I wouldn't claim such an optimistic vision of other people's experience, but I have a good time. I love living here (London).”*²²

²² Smith, Zadie, *White Teeth: A Conversation with Author Zadie Smith*, http://bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/wstudies/ograde/zsmith2004.htm#_edn1, 2004

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