

**OPEN ACCESS****Received: 29-05-2025****Accepted: 24-09-2025****الآداب****للدراسات اللغوية والأدبية****Literature and the Anthropological Turn: Ethnography, Cultural Practices, and Human Behaviour in Selected Works of Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki****Dr. Najwa Mohammed Saeed** <sup>\*</sup> [najwa2016yemen@gmail.com](mailto:najwa2016yemen@gmail.com)**Abstract**

This study examines the anthropological turn in contemporary fiction through the works of Ruth Ozeki and Zadie Smith. It investigates how these writers employ ethnographic methods and anthropological insight to explore human behaviour and cultural norms. Focusing on Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* (1998) and *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), and Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and *On Beauty* (2005), the research analyses how literature and ethnography intersect to represent cultural truths. Using anthropological literary theory and ethnographic approaches, the study explores narrative strategies, thematic concerns, and portrayals of identity, migration, and globalisation. The findings reveal that both authors use fiction as a form of cultural inquiry, blending imaginative storytelling with ethnographic observation. The study concludes that the anthropological turn enables writers to construct culturally engaged narratives that bridge literary and anthropological knowledge, underscoring the significance of interdisciplinary research in understanding and representing contemporary cultural practices.

**Keywords:** Anthropology, Ethnography, *White Teeth*, *On Beauty*, *My Year of Meats*.

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## الأدب والتحول الأنثربولوجي: الإثنوغرافية، والممارسات الثقافية، والسلوك البشري في أعمال مختارة للكاتبين زادي

### سميث وروث أوزيكي

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الملخص:

سلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على التحول الأنثربولوجي في الأدب القصصي المعاصر من خلال أعمال روث أوزيكي وزادي سميث. وتبحث في كيفية استخدام الكاتبين للأساليب الإثنوغرافية والرؤى الأنثربولوجية لاستكشاف السلوك البشري والمعايير الثقافية. بالتركيز على روايتي أوزيكي "عام اللحوم" (1998) و"حكاية للوقت الحاضر" (2013). وروايتي سميث "أسنان بيضاء" (2000) و"عن الجمال" (2005)، يُحلل البحث كيفية تقاطع الأدب والإثنوغرافيا لتمثيل الحقائق الثقافية. باستخدام النظرية الأدبية الأنثربولوجية والمناهج الإثنوغرافية. تستكشف الدراسة استراتيجيات السرد، والاهتمامات الموضوعية، وتصوير الهوية والهجرة والعلومة. تكشف النتائج أن الكاتبين يستخدمان الأدب القصصي كشكل من أشكال الاستقصاء الثقافي، مازجتين السرد القصصي الخيالي باللحظة الإثنوغرافية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن التحول الأنثربولوجي يمكن الكتاب من بناء سردية متفاعلة ثقافياً تربط بين المعرفة الأدبية والأنثربولوجية، مما يؤكد أهمية البحث متعدد التخصصات في فهم الممارسات الثقافية المعاصرة وتمثيلها.

كلمات افتتاحية: الأنثربولوجيا، الإثنوغرافيا، الأسنان البيضاء، عن الجمال، عام اللحوم.

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© تُنشر هذا البحث وفقاً لشروط الرخصة (CC BY 4.0). التي تسمح بنسخ البحث وتوزيعه ونقله بأي شكل من الأشكال، كما تسمح بتكييف البحث أو تحويله أو الإضافة إليه لأي غرض كان، بما في ذلك الأغراض التجارية، شريطة نسبية العمل إلى صاحبه مع بيان أي تعديلات أجريت عليه.



## Introduction

Anthropology and literature meet in a plural and wide field that offers new tales to explore the explanation of culture in action. The outlines of the research here begin with the description of the anthropological turn in contemporary literature, as writers borrow anthropological ideas and ethnographic methods in order to examine the complexities of human societies. In this context, analysing the writing of Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki, this study considers how fiction can serve as a tool for cultural documentation and critique, blending the imaginative power of fiction with the empirical capabilities of ethnography.

Building on this premise, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the significance of the anthropological turn in shaping modern literary practices and to demonstrate how literature can be used as a vehicle for understanding and representing diverse cultural realities. Through the close reading of model texts, the research attempts to address some of the fundamental research questions into the narrative technique, thematic concern, and cultural understanding offered by Smith and Ozeki. In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of work on cross-fertilisation between anthropology and literature, exposing the power of fiction to bridge between artistic representation and social analysis.

To achieve these aims, the research engages anthropological literary theory and ethnographic theory as its primary theoretical frameworks. Anthropological literary theory, as constructed in the writings of theorists like James Clifford and Clifford Geertz, is the extension of anthropological method to the analysis of literature, since it concerns itself with the way literature represents and constitutes cultural practices. Clifford, in his path-breaking work *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, is convinced that "ethnography is a form of storytelling," subscribing to the belief that literature and anthropology have an equivalent role in trying to know human lives by narrative (Clifford, p. 6).

Similarly, and complementing Clifford's insights, Geertz, in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, assigns importance to "thick description" in the explanation of cultural phenomena, something that resonates with the richness and depth of narrative in the fiction of Smith and Ozeki (Geertz, p. 9). In line with these ideas, ethnographic fiction, a genre that blends fictional narrative with ethnographic practices, is another indispensable tool for this analysis. According to the literary critic John Dorst, ethnographic fiction "uses the tools of storytelling in order to record and explain culture, to build a space where imagination and observation converge" (Dorst, p. 12).

This methodology applies particularly well to the fictional writing by Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki, which uses novels to capture multiculturalism, migration, and globalisation through drawing on their personal experience and observation of cultural mixing. For instance, Zadie Smith, who in novels such as *White Teeth* and *On Beauty* harnesses the skills of her celebrated talent to portray multicultural richness.

Moreover, an anthropological sensibility consistently permeates her work, as seen through the disparate lives of characters from different cultural backgrounds, explaining the historical, social, and political forces.

In the same vein, Ruth Ozeki's *Tale for the Time Being* and *My Year of Meats* carry distinctly personal narratives while critiquing the broader cultural view, pushing fiction into such issues as environmental degeneration, globalisation, and commodification of culture. Taken together, both writers demonstrate how fiction can be mobilised as a critical instrument to understand how people and societies negotiate the challenges of a transformed global world.

Accordingly, the strategy of this paper is to expose cultural critique through the novel as an instrument to further understanding of how people and societies negotiate the new transformed world. The literary anthropological turn of both Smith and Ozeki represents a significant literary realignment today that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries and opens up possibilities for a more comprehensive understanding of the human experience. The theoretical foundations of the anthropological turn will be examined in later sections, followed by an analysis of the narrative techniques and thematic concerns of Smith and Ozeki. The relevance of their books to the study of literature and anthropology will also be addressed. Ultimately, this paper argues that anthropological approaches enrich literary criticism by revealing how fiction can function as a form of cultural inquiry—one that interprets, represents, and critiques the social realities shaping human experience.

### Background

The history of the relationship between literature and anthropology is long and complex, founded on the shared goal of understanding and representing human experience. Both share a concern with the study of culture, identity, and social organisation, but through different means. For a long time, anthropology has depended on ethnographic fieldwork and practical observation and literature, on the other hand, literature relied on narrative and imagination to explain the complexities of human actions. However, in the past few decades, there has been an increasing overlap between the two fields, which has caused what is referred to as the anthropological turn in literature. It is a movement which captures an increasingly felt desire among writers for input from anthropological data and ethnographic methodologies within their works, thus creating an almost hybrid fiction that fills the middle ground between writing fiction and cultural criticism.

The literary turn in anthropology is said to happen as anthropological postcolonialism and postmodernism began at the end by challenging the definitions surrounding authorship, the idea of representation, and the exercise of cultural authority. Critics and authors began challenging the author as an objective observer, instead bringing attention to situated knowledge and subjective experience. This shift was formed by the evolutionary processes in anthropology, particularly and most importantly the representation



crisis of the 1980s, underlining greater reflexivity and self-awareness in ethnographic discourse. As James Clifford and George E. Marcus's *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* argue "ethnography is a form of storytelling," and like literature, it is also mediated through the prejudices and perspectives of their writers (Clifford & Marcus, p. 6). This recognition of ethnography's literary nature enabled greater interpenetration between literature and anthropology, with writers appropriating ethnographic technique to enhance their narratives and anthropologists venturing into literary forms in an attempt to deliver their narratives.

With the advent of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries came the emergence of globalisation and multiculturalism, and there was a demand for narratives that would address the multiplicity of the globalised world, and writers began to speak about the concerns of migration, diaspora, and cultural hybridity, often drawing upon their own lives as living-in-between subjects. One can learn this from the bodies of the writers like Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki used in their novels to address the issues under globalisation and how the communities and individuals have made their responses to them. Such extensive writing comes in the form of multigenerational sagas of immigrant families in London portrayed in Smith's volume titled *White Teeth*, Ozeki, on the other hand, draws her readers into *A Tale for the Time Being*, wherein the stories of a Japanese teenager and a Canadian writer consolidate to narrate issues concerning identity, memory, and an occurring environmental crisis.

The literary anthropological turn is much associated with an ethnographic fiction, a form that combines fictional narrative and ethnographic methods for documenting and explaining cultural practices. According to literary critic John Dorst, ethnographic fiction "uses the tools of storytelling to create a space where imagination and observation intersect, offering new ways of understanding and representing cultural realities" (Dorst, p. 12). This approach is particularly well equipped to deal with the porosity of contemporary life, whereby historic boundaries between cultures, identities, and disciplines have become increasingly permeable. Through the integration of ethnographic elements into the novel, writers like Smith and Ozeki are able to present the diversity and richness of human life while inviting readers to critically reflect on the social and political forces that take shape in such life. Apart from ethnographic fiction, the literary anthropological shift has also been impacted by progress in cultural theory and postcolonial studies.

Scholars like Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall have put a strong focus on hybridity and liminality as they describe cultural identities, issues which are central in the literature of the majority of present-day authors. For his part, Bhabha says that the "third space" of enunciation is a space for cultural negotiation and transformation, the site of continuous production of new identities and meanings (Bhabha, p. 37). The reality of cultural hybridism is indeed dramatised in the works of Smith and Ozeki, which frequently depict

characters living in multiple worlds of culture and having to negotiate the tensions and contradictions generated by their hybrid selves.

The turn to anthropology within literature has not been unopposed, nonetheless. Critics have claimed that there is a doubt as to whether fiction can genuinely be considered a form of cultural documentation since the fictionalising function of literature would exclude it from actually describing things as they really are. Other critics have objected to the threat of cultural appropriation when writers within dominant cultures seek to voice those of subaltern groups. These arguments place emphasis on the moral and methodological concerns of blurring literature and anthropology, along with the call for reflexivity and self-consciousness in both discourses.

Nevertheless, despite all that necessitates much challenge, anthropological turn is one of the major trends that novels have introduced in the contemporary fiction of today: a writing that has opened its eyes to the new realities that come with the globalising world. It allows the likes of Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki to experiment creatively and reflectively on cultural practices and human action by bringing anthropology and ethnography into their works. Not only do their novels increase our understanding of the world, but they also provoke into critical thought about how we represent and interpret cultural difference.

This research takes its cue from these developments, exploring how Smith and Ozeki use literature to document and comprehend cultural practices, and the contribution that their own writing makes to the broader field of anthropological literary criticism. In reading their novels in the language of ethnographic fiction and cultural theory, the study seeks to throw light on the scope for literature to be employed as a tool of cultural analysis, and the ethical and methodological pitfalls of such an approach.

### Statement of the Problem

Literature has long been prized for its capacity to map human experiences, emotions, and relationships and provide deep insight into how humans and societies move through their worlds. Yet, its potential as a work of cultural documentation and interpretation is not yet well examined, and there are critical questions to be asked about its capacity to represent and interpret cultural practices. Though the imaginative and subjective space that literature affords stands in stark contrast to the scientific approach of anthropology, there is much that both have in common-interpretation of the human condition. By taking such novels as *White Teeth*, *On Beauty*, *My Year of Meats* and *A Tale for the Time Being* under study, this research shows that the novels could serve as the link between narrative and cultural critique in richly nuanced readings in cultural practices and human behaviour. But then, ethnography and fiction raise methodological and ethical problems, for example, the risk of cultural appropriation and the issue of representation versus



interpretation. Finally, it leads to an anthropological turn in literature, claiming its potential to enrich the understanding of cultural realities while challenging the traditional boundaries of disciplines.

### Research Questions

1. How do Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki incorporate anthropological perspectives into their narratives?
2. What narrative techniques do these authors use to blend fiction and ethnography?
3. How does literature contribute to our understanding of cultural practices and human behaviour?
4. What role does the anthropological turn play in shaping contemporary fiction?

### Literature Review

Underlying the fruitful combination of these two subjects, literature and anthropology, is that both are driven by a desire to understand and represent human experiences. This literature review surveys the literature existing on the intersection of literature and anthropology based on certain theoretical frameworks: anthropological literary criticism, ethnographic fiction, and cultural hybridity. These frameworks thus form the foundation upon which to investigate how contemporary authors like Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki engage in the anthropological turn of literature by applying anthropological perspectives towards their works.

### Anthropological Literary Criticism

There is a consensus among scholars that the two disciplines –anthropology and literature –get closer to each other through their common concern with narrative and cultural representation. The two authors, James Clifford and Clifford Geertz, are the ones who laid the groundwork. *The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986) by Clifford and Marcus is where the challenge over the traditional boundaries between literature and anthropology is primarily done through the declaration “ethnography as a style of storytelling” (p. 6), which is the basis of their argument. The implication of their position is that the two areas do the same thing, i.e., narrate human experience. On the other hand, Geertz’s idea of “thick description” (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973) calls for the very same thing, as he advocates for richly contextualised accounts of human life, a notion that is very much in line with Smith’s and Ozeki’s multi-layered portrayals of diverse societies.

These scholars, although differing somewhat in their focus, agreed on the narrative aspect of culture; however, some of the later critics take their ideas further to encompass postcolonial and transnational contexts. Homi Bhabha in his work, *The Location of Culture* (1994), talks about the concept of cultural hybridity and how the “space of utterance affords a space of cultural negotiation and conversion in which new meanings and identities are continuously produced” (p. 37). This whole idea of cultural negotiation is at the core of Smith and Ozeki’s literature, where the characters are living in hybrid cultural spaces that are full of contradictions and tensions. So, it is this anthropological literary criticism, along with postcolonial theory, that

can be considered a multidimensional framework clarifying the role of fiction in stressing cultural expression and social analysis.

### Ethnographic Fiction

The second important strand in the literature belongs to ethnographic fiction, a genre that combines storytelling with ethnographic observation. One of the proponents of this idea, John Dorst, claims that ethnographic fiction "utilizes the means of storytelling to forge a milieu where imagination and observation cross over, thus providing novel avenues for realising and depicting cultural truths" (p. 12). In this case, the majority of the researchers concur that such fiction wipes out the distinctions between empirical research and artistic production.

Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki are outstanding examples of the merging of these two literary trends. In the case of Smith, she used a multigenerational narrative in her novel *White Teeth* (2000) to follow the immigrant families in London, and in doing so, she demonstrated how the cultural identity changes through and under the historical and social pressures. Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) is another case in point where the author mixes the fictional and the ethnographic to tell the story of the crisis in identity, memory, and the environment at the same time. Other writers, like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, (2013) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, (1988) have also been going in the same direction using fictional stories made with anthropological perspectives to showcase migration and hybridity.

Nonetheless, there is still a disagreement among the academics regarding the significance of the issue. On the one hand, for instance, Dorst, placing great importance on methodological innovation, considers the mixing of ethnography and fiction to be the main point. On the other hand, the critics of ethnographic fiction argue that the latter may confuse fact with the fiction, thus, jeopardizing the objectivity of the cultural representation. The argument between the two sides illustrates a crucial theoretical conflict: how to strike a balance between the freedom of imagination and the duty of ethnographers to be responsible for the truth.

### Cultural Hybridity

The third thematic thread is cultural hybridity, a concept widely discussed in post-colonial and anthropological literary studies. The idea of 'the third space' put forward by Homi Bhabha (1994) facilitates the comprehension of hybrid identities coming forth through a cultural dialogue. There is general consensus among scholars that this concept gives insights into how globalisation and migration are the forces that reshape the notions of identity and belonging.

Thus, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) represents the immigrant populations of London as areas where culture is both clashed and creatively redeveloped, while *On Beauty* (2005) focuses the lens on race, class, and ideology in transatlantic academia. Similarly, Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) and *My Year*



*of Meats* (1998) bring together Japanese and North American points of view, thereby challenging the very idea of cultural purity and revealing the trivialisation of culture that is characteristic of a globalised world.

There is a lot of scholarly work on hybridity in postcolonial literature but still less research looking at anthropological perspectives—before cultural ones—though these are very subordinate. The majority of studies see the hybrid nature as a literary or cultural theme rather than an outcome of fieldwork inquiry or an anthropological approach. This neglect becomes the foundation of the present research's value.

### Relevant Works by Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki

At this junction, Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki can be seen as loquacious representatives of the anthropological shift in fiction. The former's *White Teeth* (2000) and *On Beauty* (2005) exploit complex plots to analyse migration, multiculturalism, and hybridity in contemporary Britain, whereas the latter's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) and *My Year of Meats* (1998) are examples of how fiction can penetrate as well as critique cultures coming from different angles, dealing with matters like environmental destruction and global cultural interchange. These writers provide a clear picture of how literature can be an arena for anthropological contemplation, thus unlocking a new sphere of narrative artistry combined with social scrutiny.

The multicultural aspects of both writers are mostly acknowledged by the scholars, but the anthropological side of their narrative stylistics stays in the shadow. Although earlier scholars have discussed Smith's and Ozeki's works in terms of their social and cultural themes, few have examined them as ethnographic narratives that reflect anthropological processes.

### Identified Research Gap

To sum up, there has been much discourse among scholars regarding the overlaps between anthropology and literature, primarily through the lenses of narrative representation, ethnographic fiction, and hybridity. The integration of these theories, however, remains unaddressed in regard to the analysis of certain writers who deliberately apply the anthropological methods in their fiction. The current research typically regards anthropology as a metaphor rather than an influence on the literary form.

This research fills up the existing gap by looking into how Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki convert the process of ethnographic observation into writing technique, thus proving that fiction can be a tool in cultural inquiry. It maintains that their novels are indicative of the anthropological turn in the literature of today, as they employ fiction in the interest of exploring, reporting, and critiquing the world's diverse human cultural practices in the context of globalisation.

## Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach that integrates detailed literary analysis with interpretive and theoretical examination to elucidate how cultural-anthropological perspectives are embedded within the creative works of authors such as Smith and Ozeki. The analytical framework emphasizes narrative style and cultural identity, particularly through an exploration of ethnographic representation and mediation. By investigating the intersection between literature and anthropology, this study aims to clarify how literary tropes can function as catalysts for interaction between anthropological and ethnographic discourse, thereby transforming the abstract notions of "factuality" into the tangible expressions of "storytelling."

### 1. Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative study is particularly well-suited for this research because it allows for in-depth examination of complex cultural and literary phenomena. Quantitative methods rely on numerical data and statistical analysis, while qualitative study pertains to the interpretation of texts, contexts, and meaning. This aligns perfectly with the objectives of the study, which seek to analyse the role literature plays as a tool of cultural documentation and analysis.

The qualitative approach is also validated through the use of close reading, a method where close, attentive reading of literary texts is utilised. This research requires qualitative study methods especially suited to allow an analysis of complex cultural and literary phenomena. The methods therefore harmonise with the aims of the study which seek to analyse literature's role as a tool for documenting and analysing culture. The method also justifies the qualitative methodology by employing close reading, which entails the close and attentive reading of literary texts.

Close reading enables the researcher to examine the richness of language, narrative development, and thematic content, noting how authors like Smith and Ozeki use literary devices to produce anthropological meanings. This method is particularly appropriate to use in analysing the mixing of the ethnographic with fiction since it provides the basis on which fine-grained inquiry is possible of human behaviour representation as well as representation of culture in the works.

The plot of *My Year of Meats* (1998) explores the intersection of Japanese and North-American cultures through the story of a Japanese-American filmmaker highlighting globalisation's profound impact on cultural identity. These elements serve as precursors to representation, perception, and narrative construction techniques, making the contemporary anthropological turn in literature. The study endeavours to elucidate the methods by which Smith and Ozeki employ fiction to document and interpret cultural realities through the examination of these works.



## 2. Analytical Framework

The alleged question will be grounded on narrative strategies, thematic concerns, and cultural representations. These will be treated by anthropological literary criticism and ethnographic theory as the guiding theory for the research.

- **Anthropological Literary-Critical Approach:** This perspective interrogates the social and cultural context in which literature is produced and read, viewing it as an artefact representing or commenting upon human action. It will take cues from the work of Clifford and Geertz, who argue for a shared agenda between literature and anthropology in the understanding of cultural practices.
- **Ethnographic Theory:** This theory focuses on how ethnographic methods are applied within fiction to explain the ways in which authors have employed narrative strategies to describe and interpret cultural practices. Lessons will be drawn from this research by literary scholars such as John Dorst, who explores the relationship between ethnography and fiction in recent literature.
- **Narrative Strategies:** The research contrasts Smith's and Ozeki's use of narrative strategies such as point of view, voice, and structure, in order to offer anthropological realities. For example, various narrators in *White Teeth* allow Smith to offer a series of cultural-identities perspectives, while *A Tale for the Time Being*'s narrative of ellipses breaks down memory as well as identity.
- **Thematic Concerns:** The study addresses thematic concerns in the novels with respect to migration, globalisation, and cultural hybridity. *On Beauty*, for instance, explores racial, class, and cultural issues in a college town, while *My Year of Meats* explores reservoirs of cultural commodities and effects of globalisation on cultural identity.
- **Representation of Cultural Practices:** The study explores how the texts document the representation of cultural practices, namely their documentation and interpretation of cultural facts. It involves analysing the manner in which Smith and Ozeki apply ethnographic techniques of participant observation and thick description in presenting cultural facts.

## 3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this research are gathered from the primary texts, as well as secondary materials like articles, books, and critical essays. The analysis will follow this sequence:

- **Textual Analysis:** Close reading of the primary texts to identify key narrative techniques, thematic elements, and representations of cultural practices.
- **Theoretical Application:** Application of anthropological literary criticism and ethnographic theory to interpret the texts and uncover their cultural insights.

- **Comparative Analysis:** Comparison of the works of Smith and Ozeki to identify common themes, techniques, and cultural representations.
- **Synthesis of Findings:** Integration of the findings to draw conclusions about the role of literature in documenting and interpreting cultural practices.

#### 4. Ethical Considerations

Following ethical research standards will help the study guarantee that all sources are correctly credited and that the analysis is carried out with regard for the cultural settings shown in the novels. Particularly in the works of writers on civilisations other than their own, special focus will be on problems of cultural appropriation and portrayal.

#### 5. Research Limitations

Although the study intends to offer a thorough study of the anthropological shift in literature, its limited scope on a small number of writings by two authors limits it. Future studies might widen the scope of the investigation to include a more varied set of cultural settings as well as a greater spectrum of writers and texts.

#### Analysis

##### 1. Zadie Smith: Multiculturalism and Hybrid Identities

Zadie Smith's novels emblematised what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) terms "thick description" of cultural existence—an interpretive account of the way people perform interlocking meaning-systems. In *White Teeth* (2000), the ethnographic urge is the novelistic detail with which she describes the postcolonial experience of the families as immigrants. As the narrator makes clear, "No fiction, no myths, no lies, no tangled webs – this is how Irie imagined her homeland. Because 'homeland' is one of the magical fantasy words like 'unicorn', 'soul' and 'infinity' that have now passed into language," (p. 2). The myth-making over cultural origins is revealed by Smith. Anthropologically, the moment is one where the constructionalist critique of the essentialist construction of "homeland" as an unproblematic cultural anchor is revealed, where instead the means by which cultural belonging is socially and linguistically constructed is revealed. The hunger of Irie is not towards some reality-based homeland but towards an imagined wholeness—a preoccupation repeated by Homi Bhabha's (1994) "third space" of negotiation on the grounds where identity exists.

The ethnographic imagination is intensified by the sight before her eyes of the immigrant's horror of cultural contamination: "It makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry compared to what the immigrant fears." (p. 245). The irony implicit therein, as also the one intrinsic to anthropological participant observation, betrays the double



consciousness of the migrant belonging and not belonging. The irony points to the heavier load of adaptation carried by the immigrant, always caught between preservation and assimilation. The novel then becomes a field study into postcolonial London, seizing the anthropology of daily hybridity.

In *On Beauty* (2005), the anthropological question is continued into an aesthetics of the gendered family. The narration of Kiki Belsey's body conscience—"It was in the air, or so it seemed to Kiki, this hatred of women and their bodies—it seeped in with every draught in the house..."(p. 22)—is an ethnographic moment. The novel records Western beauty ideals entering domesticity and psychology as causing, as Mary Douglas's work on pollution (1966) suggests, a kind of "pollution" to the body politic. Kiki's distress is the general distress typical among women on the planet to resist the internalised ideals of femininity propagated by consumer culture.

In the same way, the meditation by Smith on kinship and love—"They were just love: they were the first evidence he ever had of love, and they would be the last confirmation of love when everything else fell away" (p. 7), evokes the anthropological universal of relationality. For Smith, the family is a microcosm of society, a stage where personal relationships enact significant cultural assertions about race, belonging, and self-definition.

Most anthropologically evident is the sentence from *On Beauty*, where she puts the following words: "Stop worrying about your identity. The world does not provide meaning to you. You have to make it meaningful" (p.174). The sentence encapsulates the ethnographic ethos: the identity is not found but constructed through meaning-making activity. Culturally, culture is re-defined by Smith as praxis, not essence—a process of interpretation ad infinitum steered by lived experience (Geertz, 1973).

## 2. Ruth Ozeki: Globalisation and Cultural Documentation

Ruth Ozeki's novels operate in the interstice between ethnography, ecology, and mass-media studies. Lastly, her *My Year of Meats* (1998) is outstanding in the anthropology turn by way of the critique poured upon the flow under global capitalism of knowledge, power, and cultural representation. The novel's reiterated thesis is that "ignorance becomes empowering because it enables people to live. Stupidity becomes proactive, a political statement" (p. 26) is an ethnographic remark upon the conditioning by mass media of late-modern society. Alluding to anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's book on "mediascapes" published by him in 1996, Ozeki portrays a world where the excessiveness of information makes everyone immobile but not enlightened—a syndrome of "bad knowledge" within the culture. The direction of her ethnographic glance is shifted toward the way global mass media manufacture cultural ignorance as survival tactics, illustrating how anthropology and the novel mutually are capable of registering paradoxes of modern awareness.

The cycle is repeated when Ozeki reflects, "If we have no way to do something with knowledge, then we have no way to survive except by ignorance" (p. 180). Fiction is one method of theorising practice by the social: knowledge, devoid of agency, is what anthropologist Paul Farmer (2004) calls "structural violence"—recognition of injustice alongside impotence to transform. The ethnographic novel by Ozeki exposes the cultural and psychological mechanisms through which people rationalise their submission to exploitative structures.

In *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), Ozeki takes what one is free to call a transnational ethnographic approach by separating her dual protagonists—Ruth, the Japanese-American author, and Nao, the Japanese body —by their disparate histories each lived. The sentence "Every moment happens twice: inside and outside, and they are two different histories." (p. 266) is the observer and the observed ethnographer's quandary. Time, as culture, is lived internally as well as externally, individually and collectively. Ozeki's concept—"Do not understand 'flying' as the only function of time. All moments are the time being" (p. 148)—echoes Zen Buddhist teachings on interdependence while directly challenging the anthropological concept of the "denial of coevalness" (Fabian, 1983). By rendering all beings as contemporaneous, Ozeki repudiates this very denial.

In one scene, she describes, "It made me sad when I caught myself pretending that everybody out there in cyberspace cared what I thought" (p. 30). This moment of regret is an ethnography of loneliness online. Ozeki examines the development of online communities' construction of empathy and identity, with the implication that digital "connectedness" is obscuring radical social disintegration. As such, her text is a cultural archive on the psychological anthropology of the twenty-first century—wherein technology reforms the terms of the human condition (Appadurai, 1996).

Lastly, her contention that "Crazy is the price you pay for having an imagination... It's your superpower" (p. 47)- sets creativity under cultural survival. For Ozeki, imagination is a form of resilience, comparable to what Victor Turner (1969) termed "communitas"—a transformative, liminal state that allows one to transcend the structured frameworks of social order through creativity.

### Literature and Anthropology: A Shared Epistemology

Together Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki embody the purpose of literature as anthropology under the guise of narrative. Both make use of the "partial truths" of ethnographic narrative unearthed by James Clifford (1986)—interpretive, subjective, and vitally contextual. Their novels account for the movement that people make within raced systems, mediatic systems, gendered systems, and temporal systems, converting the analytic glance of ethnography into narrative sympathy.



The results demonstrate that the anthropological turn is not an appropriation of the theory but rather a redefinition of the novel as a cultural study. Smith uses irony and humour to ensure hybrid identities within postcolonial regimes; Ozeki uses the genre of documentary realism to call into question the ethics of global conscience. In each, storytelling becomes a method of cultural inscription, and anthropology becomes a way to read the human. Fiction then becomes a companion ethnographic practice—one that brings into manifest, by means of fantasy, the density of existing as an envoy to the global (Clifford, 1986; Geertz, 1973; Turner, 1969).

### **Findings**

The findings of this research illustrate how Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki employ literature not only to document but also to critique dominant cultural practices, offering an incisive commentary on globalisation, migration, and identity. The erasure of the distinction between fiction and ethnography in the writing of these authors is symptomatic of the anthropological turn in literature and testimony to the strength of fiction to make cultural critique possible. This work provides a detailed analysis of the thematic and narrative techniques through which Smith and Ozeki negotiate the complexities of human action and cultural identity within a globalised world.

#### **Zadie Smith: Multiculturalism and Hybrid Identities**

Zadie Smith's fiction, particularly *White Teeth* and *On Beauty*, demonstrates her artistry at wielding literature as a means of cultural documentation. Her fiction explores the subtle dynamics of cultural politics—examining the individual's precarious negotiation of multiculturalism and hybrid identities. From this perspective, Smith personifies anthropological insights on cultural hybridity, demonstrating how it informs both alien societal structures and the multifaceted, layered worlds of individuals.

#### **Representation of Immigrant Experiences**

Zadie Smith's works delve into the corner life of immigrant families in London, creating a bright image of both the problem and the possibilities surrounding them. The use of multi-perspective narration by Smith allows readers to view the lives of characters through their varied cultural worldviews; indeed, with the ethnographic methods of participant observation.

##### **• Exploration of Cultural Dissonance**

This novel reflects so much tension: the very contradictions of multiculturalism across characters like Samad Iqbal. 'Samad' represents the character who somehow is struggling to absorb his real traditional Bangladeshi values with the settings from Western societies. This phrase means to relate to human beings who have to cope with their conflicts based on different cultural backgrounds. Anthropology provides a name for this idea: it is called cultural dissonance.

### a. Blending Fiction and Ethnography

Smith employs comedy, irony, and intricate cultural detail to craft a narrative that is simultaneously engaging and profoundly perceptive. Her depiction of cultural practices, including the Bengali tradition of arranged marriage, is grounded in ethnographic observation, providing readers insight into the actual experiences of immigrant groups.

### b. Hybrid Identities in *On Beauty*

Intersection of Race, Class, and Culture: *On Beauty* delves into the intersection of culture, class, and race in a college town, portraying contemporary life in a realistic manner. The hybrid identity of Kiki Belsey, a Black American woman who is married to a white British academic, illustrates the complexity inherent in hybrid identities.

**Thick Description of Cultural Practices:** Smith's meticulous adherence to cultural subtlety, as realised in her description of Haitian art and African-American spirituals, is a characteristic of an ethnographic style of storytelling. In situating her story within known cultural practice, Smith constructs a dense and compelling world grounded in anthropological knowledge.

**Narrative Techniques:** This use of a third-person omniscient narrator in a novel gives the reader a panoramic view of the life of the characters, mimicking an anthropologist's thick description. Besides, it encompasses the inner world of the characters while putting them in larger social and cultural contexts, with the help of this technique, to enter their subjectivity.

### c. Contribution to the Anthropological Turn

Smith's fiction demonstrates the anthropological turn in literature, revealing the possibilities of fiction as a form of cultural analysis. Merging fiction and ethnography, she creates novels that are creative as well as analytical, and through them readers develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of cultural identity in a globalised world.

#### a. Ethnographic Storytelling in *A Tale for the Time Being*

- **Cross-Cultural Comparison:** Ozeki's fiction-writing, especially *A Tale for the Time Being* and *My Year of Meats*, demonstrates her ability to use literature as a means of cultural documentation. Ozeki's fiction affords an in-depth examination of globalisation, ecological destruction, and cultural identity and thus encapsulates the tenets of anthropological theory regarding cultural hybridity and globalisation-its effect on cultural existence.
- **Exploration of Globalisation:** The novel's double narrative strand, in comparing the viewpoints of a Japanese adolescent Nao with those of Ruth, an American-Japanese writer, is an anthropological



experiment in contrasting cultures. That prominence of the characters and their differences and similarities allows room for a more nuanced construction of cultural identity.

- **Blending Fiction and Ethnography:** Melding fiction and ethnography with footnotes, photographs and accessory texts, Ozeki creates a story that is both literary and documentary. Mixing fiction with some ethnography allows Ozeki to focus on complex cultural issues while also engaging readers with an emotional story.
- **Food and Cultural Identity in *My Year of Meats***

  - **Commodification of Culture:** Ozeki's work examines the extent of commercialisation in culture, especially as it applies to the American meat business and its effects on Japanese consumers. The idea of using cultural customs such as the traditional Japanese washoku to illustrate how food can act as a signifier of cultural identification has been treated by Ozeki.
  - **Autoethnographic Narrative:** In keeping with an autoethnographic stance, the first person narrative in the novel attempts to deliver a close perspective of the heroine's experiences. This lets Ozeki investigate the manner in which personal and group histories affect cultural identities.
  - **Cultural Critique:** Ozeki's use of satire, comedy, and cultural criticism produces a story that is provocative and engaging. Ozeki shows how fiction may be a kind of cultural documentation by firmly basing her narrative on certain customs.

- **Contribution to the Anthropological Turn**

Ozeki's writings epitomise the anthropological turn in literature and show how fiction may be a vehicle for comprehending and portraying cultural reality. She offers readers a better knowledge of the complexity of cultural identity in a worldwide society by combining fiction and ethnography, therefore producing imaginative and perceptive stories.

In short, this study illustrates the place of anthropology in a modern literary context by showing how fiction occupies a site for documenting and interpreting cultural practices as done by Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki, to name a few. When fiction and ethnography are skilfully interwoven, they create a vibrant and insightful narrative. Such texts engage readers by vividly illuminating the complex entanglements of cultural identity within a globalising world. This proves that literature can still serve as a form of cultural analysis and continues the productive conversation about how fiction can understand and represent cultural realities.

### Conclusion

With the writings of Zadie Smith and Ruth Ozeki, this study analyses the anthropological shift in modern fiction by illustrating how their novels integrate ethnography and fiction to question cultural practices, identity, migration, and globalisation. By reading *White Teeth*, *On Beauty*, *A Tale for the Time Being*,

and *My Year of Meats*, this research illustrates how literature is an effective means of cultural criticism in that it reveals how identities are reshaped by historical, social, and political pressures. Smith and Ozeki employ fiction to reveal cultural experiences, illustrating how globalisation constructs identity and cross-cultural relationships. Their writing exemplifies the potential of fiction to approach difficult cultural matters in innovative ways, exemplifying the significance of the anthropological approach to literature. Not only does this methodology improve current fiction, but it also complicates the lines between literature and anthropology, thereby improving communication between several disciplines.

The consequences of the study are that a convergence of ethnography and fiction offers new methodologies to investigate and represent cultural practices, thereby offering literary critics and anthropologists' new visions. The necessity for stories of conveying the richness of cultural identity has never been more intense than when cultures become increasingly entwined. By employing their works to enhance the possibilities and difficulties of living in a world in the process of being globalised, Smith and Ozeki complete this trend in a full circle.

Future studies might continue this subject by looking at other writers who combine anthropological viewpoints or looking at the ethical issues of combining fiction and ethnography. In the end, this study emphasises the need for fiction as cultural analysis because the anthropological turn in literature makes us better understand human experience in a changing world.

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