

SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH'S *REFUGEE BOY* (2001)

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Abstract

The sociopolitical situation in England, such as the question of the crossing of the English Channel by migrants and the issue of nationality, reminds us of Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* (2001). The purpose of this study is to investigate the connections between fiction and society on the one hand and the novel as a vivid portrayal, imitation, or representation of contemporary Britain on the other. Using the New Historicism approach, this study analyzed the social integration and the social exclusion of the main character in a British context as a refugee. Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* addresses issues that are somehow still in the mainstream, and this strengthens the idea that literature helps to question and understand a given society to a certain extent. Moreover, further studies are needed to establish the relationship and interconnection between literary work and contemporary issues, as other fields of research try to do.

Keywords: Asylum seeker, exclusion, inclusion, integration, refugee

*L'intégration sociale dans *Refugee Boy* de Benjamin Zephaniah (2001)*

Résumé

Les événements sociopolitiques en Angleterre, notamment la question de la traversée de la Manche par les migrants et celle de la nationalité, rappellent le roman *Refugee Boy* (2001) de Benjamin Zephaniah. Cette étude vise à explorer les liens entre fiction et société, d'une part, et le roman comme portrait saisissant, voire représentation, de la Grande-Bretagne contemporaine, d'autre part. À travers l'approche du New Historicism, cette étude analyse l'intégration et l'exclusion sociale du personnage principal, réfugié, dans un contexte britannique. Benjamin Zephaniah, dans cet ouvrage, aborde des problématiques qui restent d'actualité, renforçant également l'idée que la littérature contribue, dans une certaine mesure, à questionner et à comprendre une société donnée. Des études complémentaires sont nécessaires pour établir la relation et l'interconnexion entre la littérature et les enjeux contemporains, à l'instar d'autres champs de recherche.

Mots-clés : demandeur d'asile, exclusion, inclusion, intégration, réfugié

*Integración social en *Refugee Boy* de Benjamin Zephaniah (2001)*

Resumen

Los acontecimientos sociopolíticos en Inglaterra, especialmente la cuestión del cruce del canal de la Mancha por los migrantes y la de la nacionalidad, recuerdan la novela de *Refugee Boy* (2001) de Benjamin Zephaniah. Este estudio se propone examinar por una parte los lazos entre ficción y sociedad y por otra, la novela como retrato llamativo, o sea, representación, de Gran Bretaña contemporánea. Mediante el enfoque de *New Historicism*, dicho estudio analiza a la vez la integración y la exclusión social del personaje principal, refugiado en un contexto británico. Benjamin Zephaniah, a través de esta obra, aborda cuestiones actuales lo que refuerza la idea según la cual la literatura contribuye, en cierta medida, a interrogar y a comprender un pueblo muy determinado. Unos estudios complementarios

quedan necesarios para establecer la relación y la interconexión entre la literatura y los desafíos contemporáneos a semejanza de otros campos de investigaciones.

Palabras clave: solicitante de asilo, exclusión, integración, inclusión, integración, refugiado

Introduction

Social integration in terms of race and origin has been one of the major topics that arouse the curiosity of many literary critics, sociologists, anthropologists, cultural researchers, philosophers, and politicians. In the field of literature, novelists produce works that deal with this tricky and problematic question of social integration in a context-based approach. Yet, generally, it boils down to paying attention to the lives of Black people in white society or whites in a Black community, highlighting the complexities of their interactions, experiences, and the societal structures that influence these dynamics

In *Refugee Boy* (2001), the British Benjamin Zephaniah (1958-2023) portrays social integration in many respects. Actually, the main character, Alem, leaves his war-torn country to live in England, where he and other nationalities try to integrate and fulfill their dreams. In the process of integration, he goes through hardships as an asylum seeker or refugee, though he is not alone in the end. To some extent, this narrative accounts for the burning topicality and present-day relevance of the issue within the British society that is divided as far as coping with immigrants is concerned. In November 2025, far-right activist Tommy Robinson led a London anti-immigration march, attracting thousands of participants. In addition, another organisation named “Stand up to Racism” held demonstration in response to the far-right groups during the same month. The new Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer sets out plans to reform the United Kingdom’s immigration rules and promises to reduce immigration significantly. To make the living conditions tougher for immigrants, a new child citizenship law was enforced in December 2025, which requires that children born in the UK to non-citizen parents must meet stricter residency requirements to obtain citizenship. All these demonstrations, debates, opinions, and laws underline that immigration has become a topical issue in British society. The present paper seeks to address the matter in the light of social integration in *Refugee Boy*. Besides, this work is based on New Historicism approach which “is interested not in asserting the transcendent or autonomous aesthetic value of literary texts but, to use Marxist terminology, in searching the

contexts of their production, consumption and status;" (Cuddon 1999, p. 545). At this point, the analysis of the socio-political and the historical context becomes necessary.

Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), a French sociologist, posited the concept of social integration to emphasize the significance of the social bonds that integrate individuals into their respective societies. Furthermore, as articulated by Terry Eagleton (1983), literature functions as a reflection of the ideologies prevalent within a given social milieu. Viewed through this lens and predicated upon discourse analysis-conceived as contextual interpretation through an insistence upon the linguistic, social, cultural, and political environments. The present work intends to demonstrate how literature may serve not merely as a mechanism for comprehending certain social problems, but also as a medium for providing insight into the challenges confronting contemporary societies. In this respect, the paper is bifurcated into two distinct sections. The first part addresses the social exclusion of Alem, the protagonist, whereas the second part examines the elements conducive to social inclusion.

1. Social exclusion

Refugee Boy is broken down into twenty-seven chapters-with two hundred and eighty-five pages (Bloomsbury Publishing edition in September 2017). It reveals the sorry plight of a fourteen-year-old boy, Alem Kelo, from a mixed war zone in Africa, who seeks asylum in England. The story begins in Ethiopia and Eritrea, two African countries, and concludes in London. It takes the opposite journey of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), which is set from England to Africa, even though the themes of the two novels differ in many respects. Actually, as the title implies, Benjamin Zephaniah investigates the theme of immigration, which is far from being a new subject within British literature. This issue has been addressed from the perspective of postcolonialism, particularly in relation to how immigration affects identity and belonging in contemporary society. The seminal work of Edward Said *Orientalism* (1978) can be given as an illustration of "the effects of colonialization on cultures and societies" (Ashcroft *et al.* 2013, p. 204). In addition, as far back as 1902, British people were interested in the immigrants by passing a law named the *Aliens Act* to restrict and control people coming to the United Kingdom. In keeping with the social attitudes towards non-British citizens, the novel depicts in different ways how a young refugee boy finds himself rejected and neglected in spite of the trauma of war and loss he undergoes. One of the most decisive episodes comes from the rejection or exclusion, so to speak, of his mother tongue, and his father warns him many times:

Alem jerked his father's hand and stopped suddenly, 'Abbaye, yaw teguru tekatlowlal,' he said, brimming with excitement. His father turned to him and spoke as if he was trying to shout quietly. 'What did I tell you? From now on you must try to speak English, you must practice your English-all right, young man? Alem panicked. 'Ishi abbaye,' he said. His father's response was swift. 'English, I said.' 'Yes, Father.' (Zephaniah 2001, p. 5)

The above quotation backs up the idea that part of Alem's being is rejected on English soil and somehow he has to speak another language that is not his in spite of the hurdles to master it:

He was trying his best to understand what was being said but most of the time he just couldn't keep up with the pace of people's speech. From the moment that he landed he noticed that the English that he was hearing was very different from the English he had been taught at school. The customs officer had sounded different from the taxi driver and on the television everyone seemed to have his or her own accent. (Zephaniah 2001, p.15)

Language plays a crucial role in the process of social exclusion, and the deprivation of one's mother tongue contributes to this exclusion. The importance of language contact, namely English and other colonial languages, leads some linguists to focus on the immigrants' contribution to English. Thomason (2001, p. 8), for instance, stresses: "There is no evidence that any languages have developed in total isolation from other languages." Language can change and adapt in terms of phonology or new words, as seen in *Camfranglais*, spoken in Cameroon. As the term implies, the Cameroonians blend the indigenous language, French, and English. In Alem's context, there is a distinct difference, as he must exclusively use English, and a proficient one at that, in order to survive in England. The British social context rules out, or excludes Alem's mother tongue since English remains the sole language of communication. Additionally contextualized and in keeping with the underway British policy project, the Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, announced in December 2025 in the House of Commons that the asylum seekers have to speak English to an A-level standard for indefinite leave to remain.

Additionally, being pigeonholed as a coloured person or as a refugee is tantamount to deepening his exclusion. The UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 designated a refugee as someone who, due to a "well-founded fear of being persecuted," leaves his country and settles in another one. Moreover, Mahmood Mamdani, a political scientist at Columbia University, quoted by Jordanna Bailkin, goes further into detail by putting forward: "A refugee is not just a person who has been displaced and has lost all or most of their possessions. A refugee is in fact more akin to a child: helpless, devoid of initiative, somebody on whom any kind of charity can be

practiced; in short, a totally malleable creature.” (Bailkin 2018, p. 3). For one reason or another, Alem’s case epitomizes the real figure of a refugee in England as he lets us know about his origin:

I have stayed in all these places in the last year. To be really honest I would prefer to live in Africa with my mother and my father but they have both been killed and there is war in my country. Things are very hard for me. Look at me, look at all the things that I am capable of, and think of all the things you could call me - a student, a lover of literature, a budding architect, a friend, a symbol of hope even, but what am I called? A refugee (Zephaniah 2001, p. 284)

In light of the above quotation, Alem Kelo makes a plea for leniency, for mercy, for tolerance, and against his exclusion from British society. Backing up his son, his father, Mr. Kelo, voices the necessity to let his son live in England until the end of the war:

You are the product of two countries, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and we love them both equally but they are pulling themselves and each other apart. We hope that it does not go on like this much longer but until the fighting stops and our persecution is over; your mother and I think that it would be best if you stay in England. (Zephaniah 2001, p.24)

Understanding the psychological, economic, and social impacts of war can support the case for living in the host country. However, the political and social trend to reject and blame not only refugees but also immigrants as a whole, particularly those of colour, is gaining ground worldwide and is justified by numerous demonstrations over the past few years. The far-right activist Tommy Robinson organized a march against immigration on 13 September 2025. The gist of the matter of this demonstration, also called the “Unite the Kingdom rally,” was to stand up against mass immigration. Then, politicians have taken over the issue, with names such as Shabana Mahmood, an MP for the Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer, leader of the Labour Party and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom since 2024; and Nigel Farage, an MP and leader of Reform UK, becoming prominent in the discussion. What these leaders have in common is a significant reduction of immigration, stricter visa reapplication processes, and plans for mass deportations. An example of the ongoing efforts in British society to exclude immigrants and make their settlement more difficult is the current parliamentary study on UK-born child citizenship. It will mean that a child born in the United Kingdom will not automatically be British if the parents are immigrants.

As mentioned earlier, a parallel can be drawn between the dominant discourse of our time and the social views in the novel as echoed in the press:

The headlines jumped out at him one after the other: ‘Government to clamp down on asylum seekers’, ‘Gypsies, tramps and thieves’, ‘Refugee beggars flood London streets’, ‘Government

plan to build new detention center for “bogus” refugees’, ‘Opposition party propose prison ship for asylum seekers’, ‘57 asylum seekers found dead in container at Dover’. (Zephaniah 2001, p.121)

The biased and negative vocabulary or tone used in these newspapers (“to clamp down,” “tramps,” “thieves,” “beggars,” and “bogus”) conveys both the social isolation and exclusion Alem and like-minded people undergo and English people’s antipathy towards the immigrants. Likewise, Mr. Fitzgerald, an Irishman who hosts Alem, admits that even some white people, for one reason or another, face social exclusion to a certain extent: “that’s right, boy. There was a time when we had to be careful just because we were Irish.” (Zephaniah 2001, p.122). What matters here is the everlasting question of Britishness, Englishness, and Irishness that draws a line between them. Mr. Fitzgerald would rather Alem understood quite that being white in general, or Irish in particular, does not actually mean being English. Moreover, the debate of social exclusion has just shifted in racial terms: “Now they want to tell us that the blacks and the refugees are causing all our” (Zephaniah 2001, p.122). Mariam, working in the Refugee Council, shares Mr. Fitzgerald’s viewpoint and warns Alem: “*I just thought you should know about the political climate here at the moment*” (Zephaniah 2001, p.122). Thus, this socio-political climate makes Mariam tell him that he is likely to be denied political asylum and sent back to his war-torn country.

In addition to the language and socio-political exclusion, we can bring up the issue of cultural exclusion that becomes conspicuous with Alem’s reaction to British culture. This phenomenon may be true in the case of the British sense of freedom. The discussion between Alem and one of his classmates illustrates this point. When Alem is asked to smoke, he replies adamantly: “*I’m much too young to smoke and look how close you are to school.*” (Zephaniah 2001, p.100). Unlike his British classmates, he does not dare smoke at his age, let alone at school. He also has to change his way of wearing clothes; that is the reason why Mrs. Fitzgerald taken aback utters: “Alem, Mrs. Fitzgerald said loudly, ‘you can’t do that – you can’t wear trainers with that suit.’” (Zephaniah 2001, p.135). Both his clothing habits and food habits have to be changed. Resilience and adaptability become necessary if he is willing to integrate into British society. Nevertheless, the humorous, mocking, and sardonic tone of his answer to Mariam’s question about his stay with his host family betrays the entire predicament he finds himself in: “*the people are nice but the food is strange.*”, and “Well, it’s not too bad but it’s very dry. I don’t understand why they made the food so dry, and then they gave me something

called gravy to make the food more wet.” (Zephaniah 2001, p.29-30). Alem, just as any immigrant or traveller, has difficulties in getting used to eating European food. In many European countries, we notice what is termed as ‘Food Enclave’ referring to places where immigrants sell or purchase dishes, vegetables, and fruit from their own countries. In other words, it is creating ethnic restaurants, markets, stores, or shops for a specific community to gather and find their culinary traditions that account for names such as ‘Senegalese Restaurant,’ ‘Jamaican Food,’ ‘China Mall,’ and so on. These places make the process of integration less difficult, reduce the sense of displacement and social exclusion, and promote social inclusion.

2. Social inclusion

In his novel *Refugee Boy* (2001), Benjamin Zephaniah reflects contemporary British society to a certain extent, and the setting, both place and time, can be pinpointed. The plot, set in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and England during the 2000s, unfolds the recurrent themes of what is called immigrant literature, migrant literature, or ethnic literature, as mentioned on many pages throughout the novel. Identity, effects of colonization, culture, race, assimilation, experience of refugees, and social inclusion are among issues addressed by British authors such as V.S. Naipaul (1932-2018), Andrea Levy (1956-2019), Hanif Kureishi (1954), Doris Lessing (1919-2013), and Benjamin Zephaniah (1958-2023). The latter’s novel under study represents the predicament of asylum seekers in England. The question of their integration divides society. After dealing with the process of social exclusion of Alem Kelo, we are going to pin down what paves the way for his integration, including factors such as community support, access to resources, and personal resilience.

Alem is lucky to find a tolerant, open, generous, and well-organized society with a good reputation, as Alem’s father admits wholeheartedly; “I have never been here but I know that England is a nice country, there are some good people here, you must remember that.” (Zephaniah 2001: 20). Despite the fact that the English people colonized a lot of countries for so many years, the “*Land of Hope and Glory*”, as termed by A. C. Benson (1902) during the coronation of King Edward VII, has kept its respectability. Interestingly, Alem’s foster family illustrates the tolerance within British society in many respects: “Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald had decided that they had to go as softly as they could with him, avoiding references to his homeland and giving him as much space as he needed” (Zephaniah 2001, p.112). The Fitzgeralds and the numerous organizations that try to help Alem to live peacefully in Britain debunk the theories of racism, Eurocentrism, and negative stereotypes among the white people. As asylum seekers,

Mariam and Pamela, who work in the Refugee Council, do their best to help Alem obtain the political asylum status. Moreover, when the adjudicator turns down his application, his classmates take over and start a campaign, as can be seen in the following dialogue:

A campaign to keep you and you dad here, man?' Buck said lazily. 'This planet is for everyone, borders are for one. It's all about freedom.' 'Yes', said Asher, 'there ain't no justice, just us, so we will defend you. Your barrister and them-let them do their thing-but this is where it happens, man, on the streets. (Zephaniah: 2001, p. 230)

Such supportive reactions and attitudes from his classmates against his deportation demonstrate the sense of human rights, diversity, equity, and inclusion among the English people. These students are committed to advocating for Alem's social inclusion. Additionally, the important role of students in defending the minority groups leads some activists, such as Akyaaba Addai-Sebo, to celebrate Black History Month each October in the United Kingdom. Since October is the beginning of the academic year, this event will draw the attention of the students to the African heritage, culture, and contributions of the Black community in the United Kingdom. This celebration reinforces the notion that British society hears the voices of immigrants, regardless of their background.

In addition, it is worth emphasizing Benjamin Zephaniah's *modus operandi* to use his characters to voice his viewpoint and express his socio-political concern to a certain extent. In other words, the sources of his literary works come from his Jamaican and African heritage coupled with his political activism, as he pointed out in one of his interviews:

it's usually best for your first novel(s) to be written from your own experiences, but even then there are things you will have to research. I didn't have to do much research when it came to writing Refugee Boy because I lived with many refugees, so I just ate with them a lot, but when it came to the legal procedures I had to write them and then get them checked. it is important to research. If I read something that I know is not right, I go off the book. Fiction is making things up, but if they are placed in the real world that world must feel real.ⁱ

The novel under study features a main character from Africa, and it includes the names of prominent Africans and African Americans throughout. As an illustration, the author quotes names such as Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, who are compared to Alem after his classmates organize a march to support him. The supportive intervention of the characters, for instance Robert, Buck, Asher, and the other students, actually boils down to activism:

All we want is fair treatment for our fellow human beings. Now this the plan of action. We shall march to the town hall on Saturday 11th March to deliver a petition to our MP or one of her people. The week before that, on the fourth, we'll have a benefit gig at the school featuring none other

than Pithead, our own local protest band. We need to let all the churches, mosques and temples know what's happening and we need to tell the local press. (Zephaniah: 2001, p. 238)

The above quotation reveals that some groups, whether non-activists or activists, cannot tolerate witnessing inequity or injustice without responding. For them, all lives matter regardless of social, religious or racial background:

We, the undersigned, protest in the strongest terms against the planned deportation of Alem and Mr Kelo. As British subjects, we believe that it is our duty to offer them protection until it is completely safe for them to return to their homeland. Furthermore, we demand that our elected government set up an inquiry to look into the general treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. (Zephaniah, 2001, p.247)

For this reason, coupled with the killing of his father, Mr. Kelo, Alem's social integration into British society becomes achievable. The lobbying groups of the students and people from all walks of life are so intense that the authorities back down: "Due to the exceptional circumstances of this case, I shall be recommending to the Home Office that the previous judgment be overturned and that you are granted exceptional leave to remain." (Zephaniah: 2001, p. 282). From another viewpoint, what may strike a reader is the diversity, heterogeneity, in terms of social, racial, and age background of the crowd that joins the march for the sake of Alem: "He was astounded by the range of young, old, Black, Asian, White, men in suits, girls in suits, new-age hippies, punks, Rastas and Buck lookalikes." (Zephaniah: 2001, p.254). When applied to the contemporary British context, this passage's relevance and significance become apparent. It is very common to see demonstrators, including disabled, elderly, and young people of different races, religions, and ethnic backgrounds in the name of freedom and democracy in the streets of London.

Thanks to the tolerance of this society, we observe the presence of Sharia councils in some parts of England. The Muslim communities might consult the latter for religious resolutions such as family matters even though they are neither formal courts nor legal jurisdictions. One of the above quotations (Zephaniah: 2001, p.238) mentions the presence of mosques, which gives a hint that the Muslims have voices, provided they do not break the English law. Such a society allows the integration of immigrants and accounts for the freedom of religion or belief, the multiculturalism, the ethnic inclusiveness, and the multiracialism of British society. Therefore, one can be Muslim and British, Black and British, or British and not English. To illustrate this point, the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, comes from a Muslim Pakistani family. Additionally, many other Members of Parliament (MPs) are from ethnic

minorities; for example, David Lammy (his parents came from Guyana), Diane Abbott (her parents are Jamaican immigrants), Kemi Badenoch (her parents are from Nigeria), Janet Daby (her parents are from Guyana), and Marsha de Cordova (her grandparents are from Jamaica), to name but a few. The latter's ancestors are said to be part of the *Windrush Generation*, or *Windrush migrants* who left the Caribbean islands between 1948 and 1971 for the United Kingdom.

Thus, in the light of the aforementioned information, the novel *Refugee Boy* (2001), to a large extent, reflects the social diversity of the British society that gives room to Alem's social inclusion. The novel displays a British social diversity with characters who are not English but British, like Mr. Fitzgerald and his wife, and others coming from Africa, such as Alem and his father, and the Caribbean, such as Asher.

More broadly, caught between opposed social, political, and linguistic forces, the hero, Alem, can be seen as the man in between. Torn between the desire to find asylum status in England and his wish to return to his country, between his mother tongue and the English language, and between the lack of peace at home and the stable host country, the reader is somehow called to sympathize with him. Psychologically, Alem's predicament evokes deep empathy in the reader. Additionally, as the novel progresses, the suspense and expectation intensify until the resolution is revealed through Alem's acceptance of asylum seeker status and positive news from home: "On Tuesday 20th December, 2000, the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean government signed a peace treaty in Algeria." (Zephaniah: 2001, p.283)

The asylum seeker status and the peace agreement facilitate Alem's inclusion and social integration. He either stays and lives peacefully in England or goes back to his fatherland. Trying to make himself understood and avoiding misrepresentation, he puts it in these sentences:

Some people believe that I gave up my homeland and lost my parents in order to become a refugee; some people actually believe that I gave up thirteen months of sunshine to live in the cold and to be called a scrounger. I didn't. Circumstances beyond my control brought me here, and all that I can do now is pick myself up and try my best to make something out of what is left of my life. (Zephaniah, 2001, p.284-285)

In light of the above quotation, it is obvious that even though he attempts to justify his situation, he is unwilling to return now, as is the case for many asylum seekers worldwide. Despite the absence of risks in their home countries, many individuals prefer to obtain refugee

status and earn a living. Some anti-immigration associations, organizations, activists, or politicians keep on denouncing and fighting this tendency. They argue that it undermines national security and economic stability. Human rights organizations, or whatever they may call themselves, some believe that these immigrants have a great role to play in the development of the country, as pointed out by Mr. Fitzgerald: “And you know, if people didn’t come from abroad, we wouldn’t have a health service, or a bus service, and most of the great British corner shops would be gone.” (Zephaniah, 2001, p.122). In keeping with Mr. Fitzgerald’s mindset, Alem states at the end of the novel: “Fortunately, I have some good friends and a family that cares about me I am not alone. I’m going to get some qualifications, a bike, and a girlfriend maybe, and if I’m able to, some time in the future I shall repay all that this country has given me. I am not a beggar, I am not bogus.” (Zephaniah, 2001, p.285)

Alem's social integration is facilitated by his friends and family, allowing him to dream like any other ordinary British citizen. Socially and politically speaking, it is obvious that he no longer becomes the double victim, to quote George Goodin (1972) in his essay “Walter Scott and the Tradition of the Political Novel” but becomes fully included.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Benjamin Zephaniah’s *Refugee Boy* offers a far-reaching analysis of social integration as far as a Black refugee is concerned in a British social context. The noteworthy relevance of the novel lies in its ability to connect the narrative and events to the contemporary issue of immigration, which sparks social and political debate in the United Kingdom. Coming from Ethiopia on his father’s side and Eritrea on his mother’s side, he seeks peace in England. The question of his social exclusion or social inclusion needed to be answered throughout the novel, like the heated debate of legal or illegal immigration that divides current British society.

Although some stand up against his integration, Alem, with the help of his classmates, some organizations, and the tolerance that characterized the society, succeeds in having the asylum seeker's status that allows him to live freely in England. Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* and other immigration literature serve as examples, particularly in the debate over whether or not to deport immigrants crossing the English Channel to the United Kingdom. What does concern us in this study is to show that the importance or “challenge of literature” (Rosenblatt 1937:3) lies in the fact that it can help to grapple with and fathom the current events that human

beings are undergoing. All in all, Benjamin Zephaniah's main character in *Refugee Boy* leads us from a literary sense to real socio-contextual meaning and, as such, triggers political and social consciousness of readers.

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