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Racial and Ethnic Aspects in the Work by Benjamin Zephaniah

Rasové a etnické aspekty v díle Benjamin Zephaniaha

Bachelor Thesis

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Prohlašuji, že jsem svou bakalářskou práci „Racial and Ethnic Aspects in the Work by Benjamin Zephaniah“ vypracoval samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí práce a uvedl jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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Podpis

Srdečně děkuji vedoucí své bakalářské práce, Mgr. Pavlíně Flajšarové, Ph.D., za poskytnutí materiálů potřebných k vypracování, za přívětivý přístup, investovaný čas, drahocenné rady, tipy a její trpělivost.

Obrovské díky právem náleží i mé přítelkyni, rodině a přátelům, bez nichž by to také nešlo.

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Introduction

As the title suggests, the thesis you are reading deals with the topics of racism and ethnicity in the works of Benjamin Zephaniah. He has much to talk about concerning these two terms since he experienced and still come across the issues connected to them.

This work is divided into three chapters followed by a conclusion. The first chapter analyses racism in Britain as such. It outlines its history inevitably connected to immigration that consequently led to growing racism and the problems connected to it. Britain decided to apply some restrictions of immigrants via political acts, so a new section of politics began and it will be outlined how it was changing throughout history since the Second World War. The chapter shows that racism was and sometimes still is present in politics and that there were some politicians known for their racist attitude. The chapter also briefly touches the most prominent issues such as riots. In the past, several groups that were racist and some anti-racist as their counterparts were established. The chapter also demonstrates the development of equality on the facts that coloured politicians are becoming common and that several race-relation acts came into force that help the minorities.

The second section of the first chapter introduces black British writing. It tries to explain what it is and how it changed in the past. The main focus is put on perceiving the notions of identity and belonging of the black authors and how those notions differ from author to author. The text presents four approaches to identity and belonging on short analyses of several particular novels to examine the differentiations.

The second chapter starts with the explanation that Britain changed the way it looks at black works. Then it analyses the considerable changes in perceiving identity and belonging between the first and the second generation of black authors. Later the chapter focuses on black poets and how they are divided. On several anthologies, I will demonstrate that racism is present even in literature. It also focuses on the availability of black British writings. The chapter ends with a brief biography of Zephaniah showing how big a range of activities he does and that his life is similarly rich.

The third chapter moves on to analyses of some chosen works of Zephaniah. The first work in question is the poem concerning the murder of Stephen Lawrence. I will outline the whole case and examine the main messages of the poem. Similar cases will be discussed to show that it was not such a rare situation. Then the chapter focuses on three novels written by Zephaniah, particularly *Face*, *Gangsta Rap* and the stage adaptation of his novel *Refugee Boy*.

My aim is to prove that his works try to highlight issues of today's society such as racism, discrimination, asylum seekers etc. Zephaniah manages to do that through his directness and picturing realistic, sometimes shocking scenes. The thesis demonstrates that Zephaniah's works are educative and try to make

the world a better place by making the readers think and preferably act in accordance. By examining the traces of multiculturalism, it will be proven that Britain moved a lot to be a multicultural society. The analyses will also put effort into positioning Zephaniah among the other black authors.

1 History of ethnic writing in post-war Britain

1.1 Racism in Great Britain

The topic of racism has been much discussed on the British Islands. As we shall see in this section, a lot of racism stems from the influx of immigrants from Commonwealth countries. Since World War II, many political debates focused on immigration and racism as such.

It would be false to think that there was no immigration before the Second World War. For example, already at the turn of the 18th century, there were between 5,000 and 10,000 black people in London alone.¹ However, the Second World War was a kind of landmark — an initial point — of immigration, as we know it nowadays. When the British Empire ended and decolonization started, many territories that had been a part of the Empire joined the Commonwealth of Nations, shortly the Commonwealth. In 1948, the British Nationality Act came into power. It distinguished between British subjects who were citizens of the United Kingdom and its colonies and those who were Commonwealth citizens, but both groups had the right to enter, settle and work in Britain.² Thus, the era of immigration started as people from Commonwealth countries began to move to Britain.

Although the majority of immigrants in 1948 came from the Irish Republic, white Commonwealth countries and other European countries, a lot of publicity drew the arrival of 417 Jamaicans on the ship *Empire Windrush* in May, who were followed afterwards by many other groups in addition to immigrants arriving from other West Indian countries, India or Pakistan. The immigrants coming from West Indies from that time are called Windrush generation. Almost immediately after their arrival, they were considered a problem. In that time, political debates on immigration started as a result of the fear that coloured immigrants would cause problems. During the 1950s, many political debates focused on control of black immigration and the riots in 1958, the first bigger issue concerning blacks, were used as the proof that Britain needed such control. Ironically, in those riots that took place in Notting Hill and Nottingham, the whites attacked the blacks.

As a result, the Commonwealth Immigration Bill was introduced in 1961 and became law as the Commonwealth Immigration Act in 1962. This was the first official British step that we may regard as racist. “The controls introduced by the Bill were justified by the argument that there was a need to halt black immigration because of the limited ability of the host country to assimilate ‘coloured immigrants’.”³ The Act restricted the arrival of black citizens of the Commonwealth via the new rules. Freely admitted were “(...) those who (a) had been born in Britain, (b) held British passports issued by the British government

¹ R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey, *Black British Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 63. Henceforth referred to as BBW.

² John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 51.

³ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 58.

or (c) were included in the passport of a person allowed entry under (a) or (b)."⁴ Thus the free movement of the Commonwealth subjects came to an end. Another option for permission to enter was a Ministry of Labour employment voucher. However, in the period between 1963 and 1972, the number of those vouchers decreased from 30 130 in 1963 to just 2290 in 1972 when they were abolished. The fact that there were no restrictions for Irish citizens, who could still enter Britain freely, made the situation racist even more.

There were many racist politicians; the Conservative Peter Griffiths was one of them at the time. He tried to defend the interest of the whites against the immigrants using a slogan: "If you want a nigger for a neighbour vote Labour"⁵. Another example might be Enoch Powell, whom I will mention later.

The next important step taken by the British government was the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1968 which restricted the Commonwealth citizens even more. "Under the new law any citizen of Britain or its colonies who held a passport issued by the British government would be subject to immigration control unless they or at least one parent or grandparent had been born, adopted, naturalised or registered in Britain as a citizen of Britain or its colonies."⁶

In this period, a politician Enoch Powell played an important role in the debates over racism and immigration. In his best-known speech "rivers of blood", which he gave in Birmingham in 1968, he suggested that "(...) the long-term solution should go beyond immigration control and include the repatriation of immigrants already settled in Britain (...)"⁷ His speech caused so much uproar that he had to leave the shadow cabinet. Apart from other things, Powell later claimed that "(...) immigration was undermining the entire social fabric of inner city areas."⁸ In 1976, he labelled mugging as a crime of blacks⁹ and earlier he labelled immigrants "alien cultures".¹⁰ Enoch Powell is so strongly connected to the racist thoughts that the adjective "Powellite" is used as a synonym to the word racist in Solomos's book *Race and Racism in Britain*.

Three years later, the British Nationality Act of 1971 came into force. Basically, it took away the right of black Commonwealth immigrants to settle in Britain by differentiating between citizens of Britain and its colonies who were patrial and therefore had the right of abode in Britain, and non-patrials who did not. A similar limitation came with the British Nationality Act of 1981, which effectively deprived British citizens of (mostly) Asian origin of the right to live in Britain.¹¹

⁴ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 58.

⁵ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 60.

⁶ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 60.

⁷ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 61.

⁸ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 121.

⁹ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 126.

¹⁰ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 175.

¹¹ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 65.

Racism in Britain took the form of riots several times in British history. Apart from the riots in 1958 that I mentioned above, the other major outbreaks of unrest happened in 1980 and 1981:

First, in April 1980 violent confrontations took place in the St Paul's district of Bristol between groups of predominantly black residents and the police. Second, during April 1981 violent confrontations between the police and crowds of mostly black youths occurred in Brixton in London. Finally, in July 1981 there were widespread outbreaks of unrest in the Toxteth area of Liverpool, the Southall area of London and various other localities in London, including Brixton.¹²

Further riots took place in the autumn of 1985 in Handsworth in Birmingham, Tottenham and Brixton in London and in Liverpool. Other riots occurred in 2001 in Bradford, Leeds and Oldham.

We can trace strong racism in the relation between police and black people, for this the terms "institutional racism" and "social exclusion" are used. Probably the most crucial event concerning institutional racism is the controversial killing of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 which will be thoroughly discussed in chapter 3.1.

The general stereotype is that blacks commit crimes much more than the white population. To be more specific, the beliefs often held are that the young blacks are a problematic group for the police so they are more likely to be questioned or arrested; that the police use physical violence when dealing with them; and that the attitude and behaviour of the police strengthen the beliefs that young black are involved more in crimes than other groups.¹³ However, the evidence, the statistics proved that none of the beliefs is true. The Select Committee on Race Relations in 1972 claimed:

The conclusions remain beyond doubt: coloured immigrants are no more involved in crime than others; nor are they generally more concerned in violence, prostitution and drugs. The West Indian crime rate is much the same as that of the indigenous population. The Asian crime rate is very much lower.¹⁴

The confrontations between the police and black youth became such a debated issue in problematic areas that urban disorder and street violence became a synonym for those confrontations.

Similar to the acts that controlled the black immigration there were several acts that tried to eliminate racism and integrate the immigrants in

¹² Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 143.

¹³ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 123.

¹⁴ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 124.

housing, education, employment and social services. They were created from the assumption that too many black immigrants and the differences between theirs and British culture might result in racial conflicts. Some of the acts were considered controversial because people saw them as a way of favouring blacks over whites in the respect of jobs, homes and so on.¹⁵

During the 1950s, the debates discussed what should be done to deal with racial discrimination. The first act was passed in 1965 — Race Relation Act and another important one followed three years later — Race Relation Act of 1968. They showed clearly that the government tried to do something about racism. Their main tasks were “(...) (a) setting up special bodies to deal with the problems faced by immigrants in relation to discrimination, social adjustment and welfare, and (b) helping to educate the population as a whole about race relations (...)”¹⁶ Consequently the 1965 Act set up the Race Relations Board and the 1968 one set up the Community Relations Commission. The following Race Relations Act of 1976 merged these two organizations into one — Commission for Racial Equality. This Act focused on racial discrimination in employment. The new Race Relations (Amendment) Act of 2000 strengthened the previous one. Newly, all public authorities have had a statutory duty to promote racial equality.

The fact that in 1987 the first black politicians were elected as MPs proves that Britain became a multiracial country. “For the first time in 60 years black and Asians were represented in parliament, and this was popularly presented as a major change in British political life.”¹⁷ There were four of them, all from Labour party: Bernie Grant, Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng and Keith Vaz. In 1992, there were 23 black and Asian candidates but only five of them were elected. The parties claimed that race was not an issue any more.

In Britain, several political groups were established in the previous decades concerning race. Some were racist and some anti-racist. One example is Rock Against Racism; its main target was the political fight against the National Front and similar racist groups whose popularity was growing at the time. Britain supported anti-racist groups by founding Anti-Nazi League (ANL) in 1977, which was most active in the two years after its establishment. Among their activities were rallies, demonstrations and successful musical events that focused on the youth.¹⁸

The National Front was established in 1967 as an organization uniting the neo-fascist and anti-immigration groups. It seems that it was founded as the reaction to the fact that political parties were overlooking the issues of immigration. It was against decolonization, racial mixing and the Jews. Its members used racist expressions such as the alien, the stranger or the subhuman in referring to the immigrants or the Jews.¹⁹

¹⁵ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 76.

¹⁶ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 81.

¹⁷ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 201.

¹⁸ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 203 – 204.

¹⁹ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 178 – 179.

1.2 Black British Writing

Defining black British writing is not an easy task to do and even the specialists cannot agree on one particular definition. Here is how Tracey Walters defined it in her essay *A Black Briton's View of Black British Literature and Scholarship*:

Rather, black British literature has been defined, variously, as literature written by people of African descent who were both born and reared in England, literature written and published by expatriate writers from Africa and the Caribbean who published on both sides of the Atlantic (e.g., V.S. Naipaul or Christine Quanta), literature composed by authors who did not necessarily establish literary careers in England but published in England, and, lastly, literature written by people who are simply dark in color, such as East Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and other Asians, Near Easterners, and North Africans.²⁰

There is a big difference between the black authors who came to Britain during their life and those who were born in Britain. The former ones are usually referred to as the first generation, the latter as the second generation. These two groups differ mainly in the perception of their identity and belonging and of course, they reflect these notions in their works. In this section, I will examine four different approaches of identity and belonging on some of those works.

Both Caryl Phillips and Joan Riley, the first generation writers, moved from the Caribbean as children to the United Kingdom shortly after World War II. Thus, they could depict early post-war Britain and living there. In their books, they demonstrate the first approach that depicts the experience of migration from colonial countries to racist Britain.

The book *The Final Passage* (1985) by Caryl Phillips tells a story set in the 1960s of Leila, a teenage girl of mix-coloured parents. She marries a black man Michael and they have a baby together. They decide to move from their home in the Caribbean to Britain with a dream of a better life. To their shock, however, they face strong racism: They struggle to find any accommodation; in the windows, there are signs such as "No Coloured" so they have to live in horrible conditions. Michael is warned that his employer will treat him worse than a dog. In addition to Leila's miseries, Michael leaves her for a white woman so the only option for her is to return to the Caribbean. The book pictures vividly their home island as full of life and colourful, whereas England as grey and cold.

A similar story gives us Joan Riley's book *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987). Adella is a great seamstress in Jamaica, she comes to England with her Husband and becomes a poor office cleaner. She confronts terrible racist treatment at

²⁰ BBW, 172.

work and she does not receive any support from her husband as he compensates his own suffering on her.

The second approach “(...) highlights the importance of history to identity and the role of imaginative rewritings of marginalized or forgotten histories.”²¹ It can be seen in Caryl Phillips’s novel *Cambridge*. Its story dates back some 200 years ago — the era when slavery still existed. The main character — Emily — travels from Britain to a Caribbean island to a plantation possessed by her father. There she meets a well-educated slave Cambridge who was once freed from slavery but became a slave again. He used to be a servant in England where he learnt noble behaviour and became Christian. Although Emily goes to the Caribbean with abolitionist aims, she is soon driven by her surroundings into hegemonic racism. She looks down on the slaves and the equality between blacks and whites is unthinkable. In her blindness, she cannot see that Cambridge, though a slave, is a man of better dignity than the whites. “(...) the novel challenges the hegemonic racial discourses in play both historically and at the time of its publication.”²²

Let us focus on the third approach that shows how black people lived in Britain in the last quarter of the 20th century. Sam Selvon is one of the Windrush generation writers who wrote *Moses Ascending* in 1975. The book, set in the 1970s, describes Moses’s story and gives a reader a reliable picture of the time. Moses, like his creator, is an immigrant of the Windrush generation; he buys an old house and starts to rent it to various tenants some of whom do illegal practices there. “A key theme of the text is the difference in sense of identity between the Windrush generation of migrants — with their respect for authority and disappointed belief in Britain as the “Mother Country” — and the younger London black people.”²³ Moses’s dream is being a kind old apolitical landlord, but throughout the book, he realizes how racist the British society is through several encounters with the racist and violent acts of the police. It changes his apolitical attitude.

Another author applying the third approach is Diran Adebayo who was born into a Nigerian family. In his novel *Some Kind of Black*, set in 1993, he portrays a few months of the life of Dele, a university student, who encounters racism not only in London in a form of the police’s brutality, but also in Oxford where he is labelled “number one Negro”. Among others, he experiences beating up by the police during which his sister almost dies. His Nigerian family tries to keep all Nigerian traditions, which means that his father is the main figure of the family and suppress him. The novel depicts the relationship between the Nigerian and African-Caribbean diasporas and their attitude towards the white population.

Finally, the fourth approach takes into consideration the impacts of racism on identity and belonging. “The impossibility of achieving a sense of

²¹ BBW, 74.

²² BBW, 84.

²³ BBW, 85.

belonging in a racist, white society is the central theme of much black British writing.”²⁴ To examine this impossibility, let us return to Joan Riley, particularly to her novel *The Unbelonging* (1985). Its protagonist, Hyacinth (11), leaves Jamaica to meet her father in Britain for the first time in her life. Sadly, he abuses her sexually and thus creates in her a fear of black men forever and hate toward herself. She does not feel comfortable in England and since she does not feel comfortable among other people of her kind, she dreams about finding peace in beautiful Jamaica of her childhood, so she goes there. “The Jamaica of her dreams is replaced by a reality of poverty, slum life, and disease. She does not belong there either. Her position has become marginal to both British and Jamaican cultures.”²⁵

Questions of identity and belonging are even more difficult for mixed-heritage people. Lucinda Roy’s novel *Lady Moses* (1998), set in the 1950s – 70s, deals with such questions. Its main character is black Jacinta, whose mother is a white English and the father is of African origin. The father dies when she is still a child, which leaves her alone with her white mother in racist Britain. Therefore, once again, facing racism is in question and Jacinta feels she does not belong even to her family. When she visits her African ancestors, she realizes that again she is different from them as half of her is white. She has to come to terms that she is unique —different from everybody.

Similar to *Lady Moses* is an autobiographical novel by Charlotte Williams — *Sugar and Slate* (2002). Half Welsh and half Guyanese, Charlotte spent her early childhood in Guyana where she was considered white and grew up in Wales where she was looked at as coloured. The unsatisfying visit of Guyana makes her realise that “until I changed my perception of what it was to be Welsh or what it was to be Guyanese, or both, I would never feel that satisfaction of belonging.”²⁶

²⁴ BBW, 89.

²⁵ BBW, 91.

²⁶ BBW, 94.

2 The position of Benjamin Zephaniah in the post-war literary context

A big interest in Black writers occurred in the 1990s. The works of ethnic authors in 1960s and 70s were regarded as the possession of their own culture, but this perception changed in 1980s when Britain began to sense ethnic works as a part of multicultural Britain. This changed once again in the 1990s when ethnicity and race were put aside and the works of black Britons became a part of British literature thanks to the notion named “cultural diversity”. At last, the black British writing moved from a margin to the centre of literature. The new authors of 1990s such as Bernardine Evaristo, Andrea Levy, Diran Adebayo and Courttia Newland brought big changes concerning mainly the theme of identity but we can see transformation also in, for example, imagery.²⁷ I will briefly examine these two changes that define the new generation of authors.

The reader can see the difference of the theme of identity in the work of Bernardine Evaristo and Andrea Levy. Evaristo’s young character Lara in the novel *Lara* grows up in the 60s – 70s and although she is half-Nigerian and half-Irish (born in Ireland), she considers herself British. She travels to Nigeria to seek her roots but feels that Britain is her home despite the racist taunts. Similarly, the reader can trace the acceptance of Britain as home in Levy’s novel *Every Light in the House Burnin’* in which Angela, its young protagonist, prefers school food to meals of her mother. She labels the school dinners as normal whereas mother’s cooking is somewhat odd in her eyes. Moreover, she tries to assimilate in regard to a haircut, and although her origin is Jamaican, she does not feel a need to visit it. Generally, the new black authors deal with acceptance instead of displacement (as earlier authors sensed it).

Migrant writers used very colourful language in their writings; they often compared their vivid homeland with rainy Britain. They used items of their culture such as tropical fruits and flora in metaphors and other tropes. For instance, an immigrant writer Ferdinand Dennis described a kiss as “sweeter than a Julie mango and twice as watery.”²⁸ The new generation knows only what surrounds them in Britain so for them, a mango is just a tropical fruit, as we can see in *Lara* in which mango is labelled as black food. Therefore, the British-born authors do not write about Africa or the Caribbean because they do not know it; Britain is their home.

Since Benjamin Zephaniah is not just a novelist, but also a poet, allow me to write about contemporary black British poetry. Black poets fall into two groups: urban griots and trickster figures. The latter group named themselves Cave Canem which literally means “beware the (angry) dog”. “The black British poets who view their roles as “urban griots” (Roi Kwabena, Breis, Fatima Kelleher, Merle Collins, Adisa, Vanessa Richards, Malika B) narrate contemporary Britain as a citified and diverse diasporic village, partly defined by its external

²⁷ BBW, 99 – 101.

²⁸ BBW, 105.

connections.”²⁹ The other group, trickster figures, reflects British culture and brings critique of it. To this “camp” belong SuAndi, Roger Robinson, Benjamin Zephaniah, Lemn Sissay, Anthony Joseph, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Patience Agbabi and Lorraine Griffiths. Of course, this division cannot be applied strictly to all the poems by these authors, some of them would fit precisely to the other group.

Racism plays, sadly, an important role in poetry. Regardless of the rekindled interest in the black authors described above, the black poets in Britain are considered somewhat separated from the rest. Even the new modern anthologies do not contain much black poetry if any:

The Columbia Anthology of British Poetry includes not one black British poet, though it purports to chart the entire history of the genre from its genesis to the present. In the second volumes of both *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* and *The Longman Anthology of British Literature* (each over 2,000 pages long), the sole sample of a black British poet is Derek Walcott.³⁰

The times might be changing to the better since *The Oxford Anthology of Twentieth-Century British & Irish Poets* contains eight black poets including Benjamin Zephaniah but more than 120 white poets. The reason for it is that black authors are not deemed canonical. Lemn Sissay suggested that Benjamin Zephaniah, John Agard and Grace Nichols are closest to be canonical but they are not. Moreover, Zephaniah seems to be more a figurehead for critique and rebellion. Similarly to the anthologies, very few poems by black authors are taught in schools, for example, ones by Grace Nichols, Moniza Alvi and Jackie Kay.³¹

Luckily, there are some anthologies being published that focus on Black poets, such as Lemn Sissay’s *The Fire People; IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain*, and *Bittersweet: Contemporary Black Women’s Poetry*. However, for an unknown reason, *IC3* is out of print and its publisher is not planning the second edition. Touching the topic of publishing, it is worth mentioning that a book by SuAndi was refused by a white male publisher to be printed for being too black.³² Another anthology called *Other: British and Irish Poetry Since 1970* is quite specific because, as the title suggests, it focuses on “others” — various authors who write somewhat different poetry. It offers six black British poets out of 55 (again including Benjamin Zephaniah) which is a better percentage than in the works mentioned above.

Works by black British novelists are not so easy to get. There are some specialized shops in London and other big cities, especially ones with big black diasporas. However, in common libraries, one has to look for it carefully. Black

²⁹ BBW, 110 – 111.

³⁰ BBW, 117.

³¹ BBW, 111.

³² BBW, 114.

literature is too often hidden in the section Commonwealth literature. Even the specialized stores, however, sell more books by American blacks than the British ones. “This is partly because the British reading public has not quite realized that there are many black British writers worth reading and, of course, because black British writers are often overshadowed by American writers.”³³ At this point, it is worth acknowledging that many black British writers saw their models among African American authors — oppositely to the history of American literature which had its foundations based on traditions and culture of Britain.³⁴

Benjamin Zephaniah, fully named Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah, was born in Birmingham on 15 April 1958. His roots, however, are set elsewhere. His parents came to England a few years before his birth, the mother from Jamaica, the father from Barbados.

Zephaniah left school at the age of 13. “Benjamin Zephaniah’s background seems unlikely for a poet: a dyslexic who left school unable to properly read and write; a black British Brummie whose teenage years of petty crime culminated in a prison spell.”³⁵ However, Zephaniah reached his popularity thanks to his witty poems that often use features such as humour, absurdity or parody to point out the issues around us.

Zephaniah has been doing poetry since he can remember and started performing publicly very early. As he said: “But my first performance was at the age of ten, in church, where I performed songs from the Bible in a kind of poetic style.”³⁶ It is no surprise then that by the age of 15 he was already a well-known dub poet in Birmingham.

Zephaniah moved to London in 1978 to earn a living from poetry and succeeded. He started performing at music concerts; meanwhile the bands were changing over he amused the audience with his poems.³⁷ Two years later, Zephaniah’s first poetry book *Pen Rhythm* was published by a small cooperative Page One Books in East London. It was a good success, three editions were created and it interested many big publishers some of which, ironically, refused him only a few months earlier. To reach more people, Zephaniah decided to perform his poetry on TV, so in 1983 he started a short TV program *The Slot* on Channel 4.

Benjamin Zephaniah became the people’s poet; it is proven by the events in the early 80s:

Zephaniah’s poetry could be heard on the demonstrations, at youth gatherings, outside police stations, and on the dance floor. It was once said of him that he was Britain’s most filmed, photographed,

³³ BBW, 172.

³⁴ BBW, 116.

³⁵ “Benjamin Zephaniah,” British Council, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/benjamin-zephaniah>.

³⁶ Benjamin Zephaniah and Victor Ambrus, *Benjamin Zephaniah: My Story* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2011), 22.

³⁷ Zephaniah and Ambrus, *Benjamin Zephaniah: My Story*, 25.

and identifiable poet, this was because of his ability to perform on stage, but most of all on television, bringing Dub Poetry straight into British living rooms.³⁸

In the 90s, his popularity even increased and Zephaniah started performing abroad, for instance, in South Africa, Zimbabwe, India, Pakistan and Colombia.

Benjamin Zephaniah is also a musician; he creates mostly Reggae and Dub Poetry music, but his later music touches genres like Jazz, Hip Hop and Dubstep. So far, he has released several albums and appeared as a guest in many songs by various authors. He got involved in black rights in South Africa and composed a song *Free South Africa* in 1983 as a tribute to Nelson Mandela, who listened to this song while he was in prison and went to meet Zephaniah when he was released.³⁹

Zephaniah got and still gets involved in many beneficent organizations; he is their patron. Some help the minorities, some help disabled people, children, poor, prisoners, refugees, youth and last but not least, he is the patron and life member of The Vegan Society. The vegan lifestyle is often a topic of his poems; he fights for animals' rights and likes to point out unnecessary slaughters — sometimes in a soft and funny way, sometimes in a realistic, shocking one. Some of his books are dedicated to this topic — the first of them, *Talking Turkeys*, is also the first one for children and it was so successful that it had to be reprinted in just 6 weeks after publishing. He has written several other poetry books for children since then.

Moreover, Zephaniah writes novels for teenagers starting with *Face* in 1999 and followed by *Refugee Boy* in 2001, *Gangsta Rap* in 2004, *Teacher's Dead* in 2007 and *Terror Kid* in 2014. These novels describe stories of teenagers in a straight and realistic way.

To date, he released several other poetry collections such as *The Dread Affair* (1985), *City Psalms* (1992), *Propa Propaganda* (1996) and *Too Black, Too Strong* (2001) that points out racist issues in a very straightforward way. Apart from that, he wrote also a few non-fiction books and several plays. Zephaniah played minor characters in several TV series, in a film and documentaries; was a TV presenter in a number of programs. In addition, he received almost twenty university doctorates, a few awards and shockingly, he refused to become an officer of the Order of the British Empire in 2003 because he considers it a reminder of slavery and racism which is exactly what he despises. In 2008, The Times listed him among 50 greatest post-war writers and people chose him the third most favourite poet of all time in a poll in BBC in 2009 (after T. S. Eliot and John Donne).

³⁸ "Biography," Benjamin Zephaniah, accessed April 26, 2019, https://benjaminzephaniah.com/biography/?doing_wp_cron=1554145291.7861580848693847656250.

³⁹ Zephaniah and Ambrus, *Benjamin Zephaniah: My Story*, 35.

3 Analysis of ethnic and racial aspects in selected works by Benjamin Zephaniah

3.1 Stephen Lawrence

Even though the controversial case of the killing of Stephen Lawrence happened more than 25 years ago, its investigation has not come to an end yet. The case will stay forever in British history as one of the most crucial events that highlight racism.

Stephen Lawrence, an 18-year-old black youth, was waiting at a bus stop in Eltham, south-east London, on 22 April 1993 with his friend Duwayne Brooks when a gang of white young men approached them and stabbed Stephen. He died on the spot. One day later, somebody left a letter with four names of the suspects in a telephone box. The police surveillance began four days after that, but when the killers were not caught within more than a week, Stephen's family complained publicly that the police had not been doing enough. During May and June, the police arrested five youths (brothers Neil and Jamie Acourt, David Norris, Gary Dobson, Luke Knight), two of whom were identified by Duwayne as the killers at an identity parade. Those two (Neil Acourt, Luke Knight) were charged with murder which they denied. On 29 July, the Crown Prosecution Service dropped the charges with the announcement that identification by Duwayne had not been sufficient evidence. The inquest stopped at the end of the year, but it was to continue for many years.

In 1994, the Crown Prosecution Service refused to prosecute and Stephen's family started a private prosecution, which failed two years later. In April of 1997, the inquest started; it was followed by an inquiry in 1998 and in the same year, the police apologized for their mistakes in the case. The suspects talked very evasively in all investigations.

In February of 1999, after two years of a judicial inquiry and an investigation, the Macpherson report was published by a retired High Court judge Sir William Macpherson. The report did not deal just with the murder of Stephen Lawrence. "For example, it includes recommendations on general policies on race relations, racism, education, social policy and numerous related issues."⁴⁰ It blames the Metropolitan Police⁴¹ (Met) for institutional racism.

David Norris and Neil Acourt were sent to a prison in 2002, but not for the discussed murder. Another unsuccessful trial took place in 2004. Two years later, the BBC created a documentary about the case. The new investigation started in 2007 with new technology. A memorial for Stephen was opened in 2008 but its windows were smashed, most likely, by racist vandals only two weeks later.

Another suspect, Gary Dobson, was jailed in 2010 but again not for the murder. In 2012 (19 years since the incident), both David Norris and Gary Dobson

⁴⁰ Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 91.

⁴¹ Henceforth referred to as Met.

were found guilty for the death of Stephen Lawrence thanks to the traces of Stephen's DNA on their clothes. They received life sentences.

So far, the last bit of this case dates back to 2018: "The Met says the investigation into Stephen's murder is "unlikely to progress" without new information."⁴² In different words — the investigation has not finished yet, but whether it will evolve or not nobody knows.

In the poem "What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us", Benjamin Zephaniah expresses strongly his anger about the injustice made in the case of S. Lawrence by the police as a deed of institutional racism. The poem starts with a very explicit line "We know who the killers are". The first stanza then talks about those killers, how they strut in public instead of being in prison, that they are like "sick Mussolinis", but still they are protected by the law.

The second stanza informs the reader that black people do not provoke fights; they encounter injustice, want justice and it is implied that everybody knows it. The last two lines go "And now we know that the road to liberty/ Is as long as the road from slavery." If liberty means the freedom to do what one wishes then these lines say that even though the black people are free, they cannot, apparently, do what they want to do. It refers to the fact that Stephen was just standing on a bus stop and the gang stabbed him just for being there, for daring to stand there when they were going by. It will take a lot of time to reach the point at which blacks are equal in everything to whites.

The last stanza, multiple times longer than the previous two, softly appeals to love one another and it says via irony that blacks had better never dare to wait for a bus and be certain they would get aboard. The text raises a question, after seeing desperate Stephen's parents, why should people, especially blacks, pay for the police via taxes when the police do not protect them, as it should. The text warns people that they should not feel safe on the streets just because they are free since the police cannot secure them.

Zephaniah then talks about institutionalized racism that is being defined by "the academics and the super cops" meanwhile people die in custody. It is implied next that though it might sound absurd the murders of blacks often do not have a murderer which is not a theory, it is a sad reality, a heart-wrenching situation of justice in Britain. Zephaniah underlines this statement by uttering the ironic praise of the Queen — "God Save the Queen". He then begs God to save "black children who want to grow up" perhaps because he does not know who else he could beg for their protection when the police are useless in this sense. God should also protect those who dare to be angry because of all this injustice because anybody can harm them if "You have friends in high places" and oppositely, those in high places will not help you if you are not their friend.

The last several lines of this piece of poetry make an appeal to Mr Condon, to be honest, enter the cruel reality, leave the "well-paid ignorance"

⁴² "Stephen Lawrence murder: A timeline of how the story unfolded," BBC, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-26465916>.

and deal with the blacks as equal. Simply, Zephaniah wants him to confess that the police is institutionally racist. One can easily imagine how unpleasant must be such a direct call on the police Commissioner. Paul Condon is the person who publicly apologized for police's failures in the past concerning Lawrence's case. "However, Sir Paul refused to accept that his force was 'institutionally racist.'"⁴³ The poem ends with the same line with which it begins — "We know who the killers are."

Zephaniah said in one interview in 2004 that racism had not really changed from the times he was growing up but people that cause it have. "I think we shouldn't be fooled by the fact that we don't see groups of skinheads walking round east London. The people who killed Stephen Lawrence weren't your typical skinheads. So I think the struggle hasn't really changed — just that the skinhead now has longer hair and wears a suit."⁴⁴ He continues to explain that in some ways things got even worse because official torturing is legal in some cases.

It is worth mentioning that Stephen Lawrence is not the only one who died in suspicious circumstances involving whites or even the police. One of them is Ricky Reel — a student of Asian origin who went out with his friends and never came home. His family learnt from his friends that they had faced some threats from a group of whites that night and had seen Ricky running towards the Thames. What exactly happened to him remains a mystery, his body was found in the river. The police were not much helpful in the case and the whole truth may never be revealed.⁴⁵ A Sikh youth named Gurdip Singh Chaggar was also a victim of racist murderers.

Another horrible case is the one of Joy Gardner's, a 40-year-old Jamaican woman, who died in the police's effort to deport her. Zephaniah wrote a poem "The Death of Joy Gardner" about her. Similar cases are those of Roger Sylvester and Rashan Charles. The police are involved in both of them.

One case involves a member of Zephaniah's family. Michael Powell, Zephaniah's cousin, was arrested in Birmingham. "He later collapsed and died in suspicious circumstances at Thornhill Road police station."⁴⁶ Zephaniah said that he had tried to reach Tony Blair (the Prime Minister at the time) to ask him for information about the case but had not succeeded and the police had not provided any useful information either. "We have not seen or heard anything of all the reports and investigations we were told were going to take place. Now, all that my family can do is join with all the other families who have lost members

⁴³ "Lawrence Inquiry: Condon apologises," The Guardian, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/1998/oct/01/lawrence.ukcrime>.

⁴⁴ "Benjamin Zephaniah: Rage of Empire," Socialist Review, accessed April 26, 2019, <http://socialistreview.org.uk/281/benjamin-zephaniah-rage-empire>.

⁴⁵ "Do you remember Ricky Reel? I still do," Labour Briefing, accessed April 26, 2019, <http://labourbriefing.squarespace.com/home/2018/1/21/do-you-remember-ricky-reel-i-still-do>.

⁴⁶ Socialist Review, "Benjamin Zephaniah: Rage of Empire"

while in custody because no one in power is listening to us.”⁴⁷ In this interview, Zephaniah encouraged Blair to discuss crime investigation of racist cases with him, though unsuccessfully.

3.2 Face

Martin Turner, the main character of the novel *Face*, is a handsome young boy. He has a pretty girlfriend Natalie and two best friends Matthew and Mark. They love to spend time together. On the last day of school, just before the summer holiday, they go out and meet three girls from Jamaica Marica, Teen and Naz who invite them to a rap club Dancemania so they go there in the evening and have a great time. They leave because a man offers drugs to Matthew. The three boys walk Natalie home and on their further way, they meet a car with Pete, a boy from school, who offers them a lift home. Both Martin and Mark get in, Matthew chooses walking instead. The driver starts driving dangerously fast and refuses to drop them off. The police begin to chase them until they crash. Pete dies on the spot, the driver and Mark are lightly wounded and Martin’s face is heavily burnt.

Martin awakens in the hospital. He is drugged with painkillers; he can hardly move. His parents sit by his bed. He feels that something is wrong with his face, so he demands to see himself in a mirror. After discussing it with the psychologist Alan Green, he is allowed. His face is deformed; he is ugly. He spends almost a whole summer in a hospital. His friends visit him now and then, he proceeds a surgery, and he meets a similarly disabled boy Anthony. When he is released, he decides to go to school normally with the others. He has to face many disgusted looks and rude remarks everywhere. He has to learn how to cope with it.

Martin changes. He becomes a better, more conscientious student. Gradually, due to his appearance, he loses his best friends. He realizes that they are not so good; on the contrary, they are superficial. Martin is chosen to be the captain of a gymnastics team. Once he goes out alone since nobody wants to go with him and visits Dancemania. He meets the Jamaican girls there. Martin notices that they do not judge him according to his appearance. He enjoys the night at the club and invites them to the upcoming gymnastics competition.

Not even Natalie wants to go out with him. In addition, he encounters some children who insult him badly. After this, he refuses to leave home for a few days and eventually goes to visit the psychologist Alan Green. Thanks to his advice, he is back on track. The gymnastics competition takes place and although Martin’s team does not win, they celebrate because their performance was the most impressive in the eyes of the audience. The disfigured boy Anthony and Jamaican girls are and cheer. Natalie wants to approach Martin and be proudly

⁴⁷ “Me? I thought, OBE me? Up yours, I thought,” The Guardian, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/nov/27/poetry.monarchy>.

his girlfriend when she sees his success, but he sends her away implicitly. He feels happy.

The story is set in contemporary East London. One of the first scenes takes us into a fair where Martin with his friends saw an unusually big amount of police officers. They are acknowledged that there was unrest caused by gangs. The reader learns from the narration that this part of London is very culturally diverse and that gangs of different ethnic origins fight between each other and unite sometime to fight gangs from other parts of London. There are "(...) white gangs, black gangs, Muslim gangs, Sikh gangs and Chinese gangs."⁴⁸

Zephaniah mentions many signs of ethnic diversity as well as racism while the friends go down Green Street. What used to be the heart of the Asian community is now a multicultural area. There are kebab houses, Indian takeaways and:

(...) Chinese shops, African dress shops, a Filipino bookshop, shops that sold jellied eels, Jamaican breads and Somalian foods. Then he saw a reminder of the sadder side of life in this area. Many of the shops had metal shutters on their windows and doors to protect them from racist attacks. But here racists had even attacked the shutters. Some of the shutters had racist graffiti painted on them and others had scorch marks left after fire bomb attacks.⁴⁹

The first one who meets the Jamaican girls is Natalie while she is waiting for the boys outside a shop. At this moment, Zephaniah depicted a racist belief often held by whites that every black person embodies a danger to them. The first thing Natalie thinks when she notices that the Jamaican girls are watching her is that "(...) they looked good but dangerous."⁵⁰ As the girls began to approach her, she felt insecure just because of her presumption: "Her heart began to race, the palms of her hands began to sweat. She felt like falling apart but she held herself together."⁵¹ She was expecting trouble so powerfully that she even expected to see a weapon drawn from a pocket of one of the girls. "Natalie swallowed hard as the girl pulled out a couple of leaflets." She misjudged the situation and received an invitation to the rap club Dancemania. Not only the black girls invite her and boys to their favourite club, they are also friendly and they invite them again when they are departing in Dancemania.

A rather important scene is when the four are deciding where to go that evening. It is Martin who turns out to be a racist to a considerable extent. He refuses to go to Dancemania "I'm not going there, it's all black music."⁵² and continues with uttering his fears that "The place is gonna be full of blacks, they

⁴⁸ Benjamin Zephaniah, *Face* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999), 19.

⁴⁹ Zephaniah, *Face*, 28.

⁵⁰ Zephaniah, *Face*, 25.

⁵¹ Zephaniah, *Face*, 25.

⁵² Zephaniah, *Face*, 32.

don't like us ... OK, some like us but not in their clubs."⁵³ The reader learns that Martin considers blacks different to which as a response Natalie says wisely: "If you don't like someone just because they're different you got problems. What do ya expect, everyone to be like you?"⁵⁴ She also tells him he had to respect people. As we know from the summary, it is Natalie who will not respect him after the crash and it will be Martin who will be glad for everyone who would respect him with his new face.

Racism is strongly connected to the term discrimination; well, racism itself is nothing more than discrimination of race. Discrimination might have many forms. In *Face*, we meet discrimination of appearances that helps Martin to understand and overcome his own racism. Martin feels this discrimination many times throughout the book and feels the first signs of it in the hospital in which even his best friends cannot look at him for a long time. Martin has to learn to face discrimination in many forms such as the disgusted expressions on people's faces that walk by or several verbal attacks by pupils at school. He even gets into a physical fight with a classmate on the first day of school when he tells him "I don't care if you look a bit poxy."⁵⁵ Since then, he learnt to control his rage and convert it into mere verbal defence. He has to struggle with a perception of some people who treat him like disabled and believe he is just temporarily ill.

When Martin visits Dancemania alone, the text does not mention a single word of any disgust toward Martin's face; quite the opposite, immediately after he meets familiar faces, they start conversing with him and praises his dance moves from his previous visit. The Jamaican girls even ensure him that they still like him "It was bad news, man, but we know you're cool. So just stay cool, all right, brother?"⁵⁶ Moreover, a boy unknown to him approaches him and says "Just stay strong — it's nice to see you here."⁵⁷ Before he says goodbye to the girls they suggest that they should go to watch a football match sometime and Martin invites them to the gymnastics competition.

A beautiful message can be seen in this novel, it looks like Zephaniah tries to make the readers aware of the fact that, simply put, discrimination is bad. People should not discriminate each other because something might change and the discriminators might become the discriminated ones. Consequently, it also explains how racism is useless because black people, in the book Jamaican girls, can be even better people than superficial whites. The book also conveys a message to appreciate what we have.

It seems in all of his novels, that he educates his readers. In one interview for *The Guardian* Zephaniah confirmed my assumption. To the question if he tries to change the world via his books, he answered:

⁵³ Zephaniah, *Face*, 32.

⁵⁴ Zephaniah, *Face*, 33.

⁵⁵ Zephaniah, *Face*, 125.

⁵⁶ Zephaniah, *Face*, 169.

⁵⁷ Zephaniah, *Face*, 170.

Yeah, I seriously do but I realise that that's not possible. What I can do is make individuals think. I can make individuals think about the issue a bit deeper than they would have if they'd just heard it on the news. A lot of those people go on to being in positions of importance and in that way I'm — indirectly — I'm helping to change the world. So yes, I kind of write for the good of mankind. But I know my limitations.⁵⁸

In the same interview, he also said that if people, especially young ones, want to change something about the injustice they have to get up off the couch and be activists.

3.3 Refugee Boy

Alem is a fourteen-year-old refugee boy from the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. His mother is Eritrean and father Ethiopian. That means that Ethiopians hates them because they are Eritrean family and vice versa. There is a war between the two nations and it is the war from which Alem with his father Mr Kelo escape. They come to England and accommodate in a bed-and-breakfast. Without discussing it or at least letting him know, Mr Kelo abandons Alem at night leaving him only a letter. The owner of the place contacts the Refugee Council and Social Services that arrange for Alem to be taken into care. First, he goes to a children's home and later to the kind and supportive foster family — the Fitzgeralds.

In the children's home, Alem meets Mustapha and Sweeney. Sweeney is a bully (white); he likes to tease Alem as well as Mustapha. Mustapha is also a refugee boy and becomes a good friend of Alem. His new foster family consists of Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald and their daughter Ruth. They try to prepare Alem for the court by teaching him what to say, they play it like a theatre. Alem starts going to school and enjoys it. The family receives a sad letter from Mr Kelo informing Alem that his mother was murdered. Alem has flashbacks from the hard times back at home in Africa (violent encounters with soldiers). In addition to the sad news, Ruth reveals that used to take care of Themba, also a refugee, who committed suicide. In all his distress he experiences some bright moment such as the first encounter with snow.

Later, Alem learns Mustapha's story of his father who was dragged away in a car and Mustapha still hopes he will once return for him. One day, while waiting on a bus stop, a hooded man approaches Alem and threatens him he will kill him unless he gives him his bike. He makes Alem angry when he calls him

⁵⁸ "Benjamin Zephaniah: people all over the world are living in fear and to me all those people are being terrorised," The Guardian, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/nov/04/benjamin-zephaniah-terrorism-revolution-interview-terror-kid>.

Refugee Boy so Alem wants to fight him with a knife, but luckily, Sweeney appears, calms him down and sends the hoodie away.

Unexpectedly, Mr Kelo comes back to England and meets the Fitzgeralds. Mr Kelo and Alem want to obtain asylum, which is difficult because officially there is no war to hide from. Together they practice for the court again with the Fitzgeralds. Mustapha and Ruth decide to start a campaign for Alem and Mr Kelo that would include leaflets and a concert. Mr Kelo disagrees with that because he believes there are spies everywhere so he does not want to draw attention. Later, according to their plan, there is a demonstration for them; Mustapha, Ruth and then Alem himself talk to the microphone about his case. At the same time, some man, probably a spy, stabs Mr Kelo.

What I read and will examine is Lemn Sissay's adaptation (2013) for the stage based on Zephaniah's novel. Lemn Sissay is a friend of Zephaniah. The story is similar to Sissay's own fate since his parents were also Ethiopian-Eritrean. They left him as a child so he grew up in a foster family in the county of Lancashire.

Refugee Boy is a crucial work concerning racism and ethnicity since asylum seekers and refugees are often discussed topics nowadays and as Zephaniah said: "Racism against asylum seekers is the new racism, and what I think is really sad is that a lot of black people are getting on board with it."⁵⁹ He also said that black people complained that refugees were taking their jobs although people had said the same about them not so long before. Zephaniah wrote the novel after listening to refugees' horrific stories, so it is based on real lives. He wanted to create a book with which would refugees identify and which would open the eyes of Britons.

The racism in the play is clearly depicted in Sweeney's behaviour. He compensates his own misfortune on both Alem and Mustapha. He mocks them all the time. In one scene, for instance, he makes Alem say the sentence "I am a Refugee Boy." louder and louder and threatens him with a knife in his hand.⁶⁰ The book shows that many refugees must go through a lot, their lives are not easy and racism makes it even worse. It points out the sad facts that some refugees commit suicide to end their misery, some are even killed and some are left alone in a foreign country without anybody.

The scene with the hooded man reminds me strongly of Stephen Lawrence's case for several reasons: Alem stands on a bus stop, also in East London, he does not do there anything wrong and he definitely does not do anything to provoke the hoodie. Moreover, the man starts annoying Alem without any logical reason and there is the same weapon — a knife, although in Alem's hand.

The sad story of this novel explains that people should not treat the refugees in a bad way, because perhaps the majority of them arrived in Britain (or any other country) since they had to escape from their home country.

⁵⁹ Socialist Review, "Benjamin Zephaniah: Rage of Empire"

⁶⁰ Lemn Sissay, *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 13.

Moreover, many of those might have gone through some distressing events and again (as the blacks in *Face*) they might be good people.

3.4 Gangsta Rap

Ray (15) is expelled from school for his rude behaviour. His best friends Prem and Tyrone were also expelled a short time before him. The common hobby of the three boys is listening to rap music and creating it too. They gather in a shop Flip Disc owned by a big Jamaican man nicknamed Marga Man who is a friend and something like a father to them.

Ray, Prem and Tyrone visit, with their mothers, their head teacher who offers them attending a special school Positivity Centre, where they would learn through their hobby — rapping. The Positivity Centre arranges for them working in a music studio owned by a friend of Marga Man. They start to create raps and record them. Marga Man becomes their manager. They find a producer that belongs to Duncan R. Sinclair. They called themselves Positive Negatives. Their music becomes popular; they are celebrities. They have the first concert at Rex, which is a big success, but after the concert a bunch of hooded men attack them and one fan is stabbed. There is another rap band Western Alliance⁶¹ (WA) from West London (Positive Negatives are from East London) whose leader is Dragon. It seems that there is a war between gangs from East and West caused by rivalry between the bands.

Ray meets Yinka and falls in love with her, she is a great inspiration to him. Ray moves to his own place after an incident with the father. After one of the concerts, two men on motorbikes attack them with guns; Yinka dies on the spot. Ray and all the other receive calls from a man called The Messenger. Ray buys a gun to defend himself. During another concert, a member of WA is arrested with a gun. Their next concert is in West London. After the concert, the members of WA manage to get to the backstage to start a fight, but after a little struggle bouncers make them violently go away.

The Messenger calls Ray and arranges a meeting at night with Dragon from WA. Dragon beats him up, but Prem with Tyrone save him. Ray is just about to shoot Dragon when they find out that the members of WA receive the same calls from The Messenger. The two bands meet to make peace and find out the truth. They go to the police station. The police find out that the number of The Messenger belongs to Duncan — the producer of Positive Negatives as well as WA. He created a war between them to raise profits. Both bands visit him together and Duncan is arrested for his deeds. At the end, both bands plan to do a concert together.

Once again, the story of the book is set in East London, many times the characters visit the exact places where Martin from *Face* wandered with his friends; and once again, the book is very rich in a variety of ethnicity. The three

⁶¹ Henceforth referred to as WA.

main characters are coloured. Prem has Indian origin, Tyrone and Ray's origin is set in the Caribbean, Marga Man is Jamaican, Yinka Nigerian, Prem's girlfriend is described as "(...) a pretty, dark-skinned Hindu girl"⁶², Tyrone's girlfriend Sam is of Asian origin and throughout the book, the reader meets a lot of minor characters of various origins, such as a Japanese reporter at a press conference. Therefore, Zephaniah offers a truly multicultural society with all its pros and cons.

We can see multiculturalism in the setting similar to the one in *Face*. Apart from the characters and among other things, Zephaniah writes about various types of restaurant (Thai, Nigerian, Calabash Caribbean takeaway) or Indian culture in the discussion at school with the head teacher and parents. Prem's mother is discontent because Prem does not take any interest in Indian culture. She always wished he would sing Hindi songs and maybe once he would become a Bollywood film star. "(...) but no, Prem doesn't like Hindi films, Prem doesn't like his own culture, he want to do that shouting rapping thing to that Jamaican Music."⁶³

As the head teacher explains to her and to the rest of them, rap is not Jamaican music, it is American, which leads me to the fact that the central theme of the book is music as the title suggests. The novel offers a few short lyrics of the boys' rapping. Gangsta rap is a type of rap whose lyrics deal with gangsters' themes. "Mirroring the culture of 'gangsta rap,' some of the dialogue is misogynist (girls are referred to as 'bitches'), stereotyped (Marga Man speaks a combination of mainstream and pidgin English), and raw."⁶⁴ As this sentence of a review says, the boys, trying to live a proper gangsta life, label girls with the word bitches. In their struggle to pick up some of the girls they do various things and Zephaniah makes fun of it, which may mean he is against a gangster lifestyle, or — more likely — he tries to learn young people behave properly. "They teased, questioned or simply made noises without let-up, never stopping to consider why none of the girls had come rushing over to throw themselves at their feet."⁶⁵ In general, teenagers like using swear words whenever adults are not around. To depict the story more realistically Zephaniah uses quite a lot of dirty words, especially when the two bands confront each other.

Benjamin Zephaniah is known as a rebel who says what he thinks regardless of how controversial or rough the topic is. In other words, he does not fear to tell the truth. It must be clear by now from the poem analysed above and not only from it. He does it in his novels as well though they are aimed at teenagers. In one interview, however, he confessed: "And it's interesting that I'm supposed to be writing these things for teenagers, and teenagers read them, but deep down I'm writing these for adults. Really they're books for adults."⁶⁶ As I

⁶² Benjamin Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), 231.

⁶³ Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap*, 81.

⁶⁴ Jack Forman, "ZEPHANIAH", *School Library Journal* Vol. 51, Issue 2 (February 2005): 144.

⁶⁵ Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap*, 58.

⁶⁶ Socialist Review, "Benjamin Zephaniah: Rage of Empire"

showed and will show, the books depict the gang fights, crimes, drugs, murders, deaths etc.

Gangsta Rap shows also a relationship that is not so usual. It is between Tyrone who is only 16 and a member of the staff of the Positivity Centre — an Asian woman Sam. Not only do they date, but they also conceive a baby and than Zephaniah surprises the reader once more, when Sam has a miscarriage while shopping.

While walking alone at night, Ray meets prostitutes, even almost childish one, who must have encountered violence. “The second was a black girl, she looked barely fifteen. (...) Ray looked down as he walked and saw that her legs had long scars on them as if she had been slashed with a sharp instrument. ‘Do you want it, Mister?’”⁶⁷ Earlier in the story, before the three boys start attending Positivity Centre, Ray runs away from home and when he is alone, at night on a street, he himself is offered to become a male prostitute by a stranger who also offers him doing some illegal practices. “‘Doing what?’ Ray replied. ‘That all depends how far you wanna go, youth man. (...) I can get you some modelling work, you know what I’m saying?’”⁶⁸

The police come across several times in the story. Ray returns to his home from his short homeless life because he is caught by the police in a small fight that he gets into with Tyron and Prem. As described above they tried to pick up some girls in a park and when one of them pushed Ray, he did the same and called her a bitch. As revenge, her friends came and beat up the boys. “Their attackers were older than them, a mixture of Asian and black guys. They had come for revenge, and they had the element of surprise.”⁶⁹ Then a fight is described vividly ending with a little of blood. From this moment, the police know them by their names. “On Thursday night as they walked home from Flip Discs they were stopped and searched and on Saturday in the shopping centre they were stopped and questioned, and on both occasions the police called them by their names.”⁷⁰ I find the searching and questioning racist. If one gets involved in a fight once it does not mean he/she will do other illegal practices.

The characters are aware of racism in Britain including the institutional type. For instance, they know that some places just are not designated for them. When they are in a luxurious hall, as celebrities, they discuss it briefly. “‘Just think, if we’d walked in this place last year, we would have been kicked out.’ ‘You mean arrested,’ Tyrone said. ‘Or given a cleaning job,’ Prem added.”⁷¹

Later, after the murder of Yinka, Ray accuses the police of institutional racism by saying to the police officers:

⁶⁷ Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap*, 303.

⁶⁸ Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap*, 43.

⁶⁹ Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap*, 62.

⁷⁰ Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap*, 84.

⁷¹ Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap*, 159.

'You lot are rubbish,' shouted Ray. 'You know that, don't ya? You're rubbish, and I can see that you don't care. We will never get justice if you have your way, never. As far as you're concerned we're just black people killing each other. This is just another black on black statistic for you, ain't it, and all you're doing now is just going through the motions. This is just a job for you, but this is our lives. My girlfriend has been killed, we could have all been killed, and to you we're just paperwork.'

The police officer denies it and Ray continues. "'Yeah, but it's a dead black woman,' said Ray. 'And you got better things to do, haven't you?'"⁷² Ray's sentence "As far as you're concerned we're just black people killing each other." reminds me of Zephaniah's reflection on racism against asylum seekers. Zephaniah highlighted an article in which people were supposed to say what they thought about asylum seekers and the reporters asked deliberately Asians and blacks to show that it is not just whites that are against them. "It really is easy to be racist when you've got black people doing the racism for you, when you've got some Uncle Toms, if you like."⁷³

It seems that Ray knows something about cases like Stephen Lawrence. There is no evidence of institutional racism in the book but it is worth mentioning that it turns out that the motorbike from which a killer of Yinka shot was stolen from the police station. What a coincidence — the owner was a police officer and the thief cannot be identified from the footage of the CCTV camera because of his/her helmet.

Children of ethnic minorities often face exclusion at school. There is an article in the book from the newspaper "The Sunday Educational Supplement". I find it funny that the article is an imitation of The Times Educational Supplement. It is a newspaper dealing with an education that is being published for teachers in the UK.⁷⁴ This article serves as an introduction to the chapter in which the boys enters Positivity Centre for the first time. Again, it looks like Zephaniah tries to educate his readers about issues such as exclusion that minorities have to face oftentimes; and gives a reader a solution.

Yinka was not the only character that died; apart from her, a teenage boy from the west part of London (unknown to the reader) was killed by somebody from the east side. Although it may look far-fetched in reality, wars between gangs (usually shaped by origin) are really happening in London. It is a grand issue.⁷⁵

⁷² Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap*, 251 – 252.

⁷³ Socialist Review, "Benjamin Zephaniah: Rage of Empire"

⁷⁴ "the Times Educational Supplement," Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/the-times-educational-supplement>.

⁷⁵ "Streets of fear: how London death toll reached 100," The Guardian, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/aug/26/death-toll-london-reaches-100-knife-crime-gang-violence>.

Zephaniah's novels are interconnected by several details. Firstly, of course, it is the setting of *Face*, *Refugee Boy* and *Gangsta Rap*. They all take place in East London and, for example, they visit the same Green Street.

The strongest connection is between *Refugee Boy* and *Gangsta Rap*. The fan, nicknamed Fingers, that was stabbed at Positive Negatives' first concert becomes their friend and receives free VIP entrances to their concerts as a means of compensation for his wound. He is allowed to bring one more person and he takes his friend Alem. Therefore, Alem and Ray meet at the after-party of a concert. He tells Ray: "You should go to Africa, I'm from there, Africa needs you. And I want to thank you for that rap you done called "Refugee Me". That tune is intelligent, yes, that tune means a lot to me. I brought you a present."⁷⁶ He gives Ray a small book titled *Wise Words of Africa*. Only after the next concert does Ray learn from Fingers that his name is Alem and as a means of his thanks for the book, Ray sends Alem a signed CD. Another small connection is the fact that Jackson from Zephaniah's novel *Teacher's Dead* listens to the band Positive Negatives.

Concerning the perception of identity and belonging discussed above, Zephaniah belongs definitely to the second generation as a British-born author writing about young Britons, but *Refugee Boy* violates it a little since Alem, apparently, is a refugee and he does not feel a need to be in Britain. All he desires is being with his parents regardless of a place. Going back to the topic at the beginning of chapter 2, the eleventh chapter of *Gangsta Rap* is a short review of Positive Negative's music. It starts with "It may be British, but this has to be the hip-hop album of the year."⁷⁷ The sentence confirms the statement that creations of minorities in Britain are nowadays a part of cultural diversity, hence considered British. Contrary to the old perception, which would see their music as foreign or Caribbean-Indian.

The main message of the novel leads us back to the poem "What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us" in which Zephaniah encourages everyone to love more and thus be kinder and more honest to one another. Whit kinder behaviour there would not be so many misunderstandings that can lead to violence or to something even worse, as the book pinpoints. To be particular, if the two bands discussed the threat-calls when they first occurred, there would not be the "war" at all. Consequently, one might say that assumptions without evidence lead too often to harmful impacts (each band assumed the threats were coming from the other one).

⁷⁶ Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap*, 280.

⁷⁷ Zephaniah, *Gangsta Rap*, 148.

Conclusion

The first chapter discussed racism in Britain, mostly from political view. Although the immigration did not start with World War II, it was a starting point. People from the former colonies started to move to Britain which immediately launched fears of the British population. Therefore, several acts came into force that put more and more restrictions on the incomers. Some politicians decided to defend Britain by being against immigrants, hence being racist. The best-known one is Enoch Powell who even wanted to send the immigrants back to their countries. Racist behaviour of politicians, the police and common people resulted in many riots, most importantly the ones in 1980, 1981, 1985 and 2001. Even though it is often believed that the black population commit more crimes than whites do, the statistics show it is not true. As a means of suppressing racism, several acts on race relations were created. A big step in creating anti-racist nation was electing four MPs of various origin in 1987; their number even increased in the next elections. There was a sort of fight between racist and anti-racist political groups such as Rock Against Racism, Anti-Nazi League and their opponent the National Front.

The other part of the first chapter started with defining Black British Writing and a basic division of the black authors. It continued by examination of four different approaches to the notions of identity and belonging. The first one can be found in the stories of characters who decided to migrate to Britain as their "Mother Country" and were immensely disappointed by the racism they found there. The second approach goes back to history to remind us that things used to be even worse for blacks in the past. The third approach depicts the lives of blacks in Britain near the end of the 20th century and the fourth one highlights the impact of racism on the sensing of identity and belonging. The last paragraphs of the chapter discussed mix-origin characters for whom it is very difficult to find a place or people that they would identify with.

The second chapter started by stating that books by black writers are no more considered as foreign but as a part of culturally diverse British culture. Then, I dealt with changes in the perception of identity and belonging in works of the second generation and how their imagery changed. The following paragraphs focused on black British poets and demonstrated that racism has its place even in poetry since anthologies do not contain many black poets. There are however some specialised anthologies dedicated to them. It is then explained that works of black British authors are not so easy to come by. The last part of chapter two offered Zephaniah's biography. Zephaniah has been a poet since his early childhood; his dream to earn a living from poetry came true when he was twenty. He is a musician, the patron of many beneficent organizations; he wrote several novels for teenagers, a few other books, several poetry collections and among other activities appeared many times on TV.

Chapter 3 seeks ethnic and racial aspects in selected works by Benjamin Zephaniah and analyses them. The first discussed work was the poem "What

Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us” that Zephaniah wrote as his angry reaction to the murder of a youth by a white group of racists. In the case, police turned out to be institutionally racist which is exactly what Zephaniah points out in the poem. As an introduction to the poem, the description of the whole case is given, and a few similar cases are added in its analysis. Zephaniah uses irony, accusations and appeals.

My main aim concerning the novels was to prove that they are truly multicultural and that Zephaniah educates his readers through his directness about issues such as racism and discrimination. He conveys to the readers wise messages and tries to, not forcibly, change them — their perception of racism, for instance. By directness, I mean the realistic, often shocking events such as the total destruction of Martin’s face in the novel *Face* and the consequent discrimination he has to encounter; the deaths, the kidnapping and threats in *Refugee Boy*; the deaths, stabbing, fights and threatening calls in *Gangsta Rap*. The first target, multiculturalism, was easily traceable in descriptions of streets and in variety of origin of the characters in each discussed novel.

I believe the main message of *Face* was demonstrating that one should not discriminate others for any reason because she/he might become the discriminated one and that a person who looks the least appealing might be the kindest one since the novel’s protagonist realises how superficial his friends are and the people whom he tended to discriminate are fine.

Refugee Boy teaches the unaware readers that refugees, who are often disliked by the “original” population, might be in fact warm-hearted people who had no other choice than fleeing from their country to the new one; and that they quite possibly experienced something horrible so we should not treat them badly.

Finally, *Gangsta Rap* gives a not-so-clear lesson that if people were kinder and more straightforward towards each other they would avoid a lot of misunderstanding, violence and even wars! Similarly, in the poem “What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us”, Zephaniah appeals to us to love one another more. The reader can also learn that people of ethnic minorities are often excluded and what can be done about that.

As was visible mainly in the multicultural setting of London and various ethnicity of characters of the novels, Zephaniah belongs to the second generation of black writers — the foreign characters do not even mention the countries of their origin, although *Refugee Boy* violates this rule. His novels are not afraid of depicting taboo subjects in a straightforward way to educate the readers and draw their attention to issues of society.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá rasovými a etnickými aspekty ve vybraných dílech Benjamina Zephaniaha. Dělí se na tři kapitoly; v první z nich je čtenáři nastíněna problematika rasismu (úzce spjatého s imigrací) v Británii od druhé světové války, a to především z politického pohledu. Po druhé světové válce se britské impérium začalo rozpadat a docházela k dekolonizaci. Následkem toho začalo čím dál více lidí migrovat z bývalých kolonií do Velké Británie. Velkou pozornost upoutalo příplutí lodi Empire Windrush k britskému břehu, která přivezla 417 obyvatel Jamajky. Tato loď nebyla ani zdaleka poslední, která přivážela obyvatele bývalých kolonií. Není proto překvapením, že v 50. letech začala v politických kruzích horlivá debata na téma imigranti jako důsledek strachu z možných problémů. V roce 1958 k prvnímu většímu problému i došlo. Jednalo se o demonstrace v Londýně a Nottinghamu, které však započali běloši svými útoky na přistěhovalce. První krok ze strany vlády omezující příliv imigrantů byl zákon Commonwealth Immigration Act v roce 1962, který jednoduše zamezil volný pohyb osob mezi státy Commonwealthu — tj. Společenství národů.

Zřejmě nejznámějším politikem spojovaným s rasismem je Enoch Powell, který, mimo jiné, navrhoval deportaci imigrantů zpět do jejich původních zemí. S přibývajícímí zákony omezující imigranty na sebe nedaly nepokoje dlouho čekat. Významné násilné konfrontace mezi imigranty a policií se objevily v letech 1980 (Bristol) a 1981 (London, Liverpool). Další, podobné nepokoje nastaly v roce 1985 a 2001. V případech, kdy policie diskriminuje menšiny a dopouští se rasismu, mluvíme o tzv. institucionálním rasismu. Je to rasismus, proti kterému zможou přistěhovalci máloco, když se nemají na koho obrátit pro pomoc. Nejdůležitější událostí spojenou s tímto tématem je vražda Stephena Lawrence, o které bude řeč později.

I když se často říká, že černoši páchají mnohem více trestných činů, statistiky to nepotvrzují. Krom zákonů omezujících příjezd menšin do Británie začaly vycházet i zákony, jež se snažily eliminovat rasismus a začlenit přistěhovalce do společnosti. Některé z těchto zákonů si kladly za cíl odstranit diskriminaci v zaměstnání, pomoci vzdělat o rasismu obyvatelstvo a dokonce vzniklo několik státem spravovaných institucí pro boj proti rasismu. Mimo ně vzniklo a zaniklo také několik politických skupin, ať už rasistických či anti-rasistických. Velkým krokem pro Británii bylo zvolení prvních černých členů parlamentu v roce 1987 a to hned čtyř.

Druhá část první kapitoly pojednává o černošské britské literatuře. Velký rozdíl panuje mezi první a druhou generací těchto autorů. Jako první generace se označují ti, kteří se do Británie přistěhovali v průběhu jejich života, kdežto autoři druhé generace se již v Británii narodili. Významný rozdíl můžeme vysledovat v jejich přístupu k identitě a sounáležitosti. K těmto konceptům byly popsány celkem čtyři přístupy. První z nich je vyobrazen v příběhu lidí, kteří přijedou z cizí země do Británie, kde daná osoba čelí silnému rasismu. Druhý přístup si klade za cíl zdůraznit důležitost historie vzhledem k identitě, což jsem demonstroval na

knize Cambridge od Caryla Phillipse, jejíž děj se odehrává v době otroctví a my můžeme pozorovat měnící se hlavní hrdinku z dobromyslné ženy na nadřazenou otrokářku. Třetí přístup ukazuje, jak se žilo přistěhovalcům v Británii ke konci 20. století a konečně čtvrtý přístup bere v úvahu dopady rasismu na výše zmíněné koncepty. Na krátkých úvodech ke dvěma knihám popisují, jak složité může být najít sebe sama, své místo ve světě, pro lidi smíšeného původu. Takoví jedinci musí přijít na to, že nepatří nikam a jsou jedineční.

Druhá kapitola navazuje vysvětlením, že v 90. letech vzrostl zájem o černošskou literaturu a že tato díla již nejsou považována za něco cizího, ale jako součást pestré kultury Británie. Taková díla se konečně přesunula z pomyslného okraje literatury do jejího středu. V novějších románech došlo ke změně ve vnímání totožnosti a sounáležitosti. Postavy takových knih již nepovažují zemi svých předků za svůj vysněný domov, tedy místo, kam patří, ale jejich domovem se pro ně se stala Británie. Ke změnám došlo také ve vyjadřování černošských autorů. Zatímco spisovatelé první generace užívali pestrý jazyk zahrnující tropické ovoce, spoustu barev apod., novější autoři používají jen to, co znají, tedy to, co je obklopuje v Británii.

Dále se druhá kapitola pouští do tématu černošských básníků, mezi něž Zephaniah rozhodně patří. Dělí se do dvou skupin. První z nich, urban griots, považují Británii za poměštěnou vesnici plnou menšin, kterou ovlivňují vnější propojení. Druhá skupina, do které se řadí i Zephaniah nese název trickster figures nebo také Cave Canem. Ti na britskou kulturu pohlíží jakoby zvenčí a kritizují ji. Další odstavce analyzují rasismus v britské poezii. Černošská poezie je považována za jaksi okrajovou než ta psaná bělochy. Ani novější antologie neobsahují mnoho černošských spisovatelů, i když se dopodrobna věnují černošské literatuře jako celku od jejího zrození. Naštěstí již vyšlo několik antologií soustřeďujících se jen na černošské spisovatele. Díla diskutovaných autorů údajně není tak snadné sehnat. Dokonce i specializované prodejny prodávají více afro-amerických autorů než těch britských. Často se díla britských černošských autorů chybně nachází v sekci literatura Společenství národů.

Poslední částí druhé kapitoly je stručný životopis Benjamin Zephaniaha, který se narodil 15. dubna roku 1958 v Birminghamu. Jeho rodiče však pochází z Karibských ostrovů. I když Zephaniah ukončil svá studia již ve 13, je to dyslektik a párkrát měl i drobné problémy se zákonem, jeho vášeň pro poezii ho proslavila. Ve svých básních používá s oblibou humor, absurdno, parodování, ale i přímou kritiku — to vše k popisu problémů moderní společnosti. Ve dvaceti se začal v Londýně básněmi živit a o dva roky později vydal i svou první sbírku *Pen Rhythm*. Doposud vydal sbírek hned několik, některé se zaměřují na děti, některé na veganství a kupříkladu *Too Black, Too Strong* útočí na rasismus.

Kromě toho vydal pět románů pro adolescenty, tvoří vlastní hudbu, stal se patronem mnoha dobročinných organizací, obdržel téměř dvacet doktorátů, uváděl mnoho televizních show, umístil se v žebříčku padesáti nejlepších poválečných spisovatelů a Britové ho zvolili jako třetího nejlepšího básníka všech

dob. Na protest odmítl stát se nositelem Řádu britského impéria, jelikož jej považuje za symbol otroctví a léta utrpení.

Třetí kapitola rozebírá vybraná díla Zephaniaha a začíná básní „What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us“ (Co nás naučil Stephen Lawrence). Kapitola nabízí na úvod přehled celého případu, který zůstane nejspíše navždy klíčovým symbolem rasismu. Stephenu Lawrencovi bylo 18, když 22. dubna 1993 stál s kamarádem Duwaynem na autobusové zastávce ve východním Londýně. Aniž by cokoliv udělal, tak se na něho vrhla skupinka pěti bělochů a ubodali ho k smrti. I když někdo anonymně udal jména všech pěti vrahů a Duwayne s jistotou označil dva z nich na policejní stanici, tak byli podezřelí propuštěni pro nedostatek důkazů. V dlouhé historii tohoto otřesného případu došlo k mnoha pokusům k trestnímu stíhání pěti viníků, ale za Stephenovu vraždu byli zbaveni svobody pouze dva z nich teprve po 19 letech díky novým technologiím, které odhalily stopy Stephenova DNA na jejich oděvech. Ještě loni nebyl případ zcela uzavřen a možná ani nikdy nebude. Okolo případu vyvstává mnoho otázek a policie, především ta původní, která případ vyšetřovala, se dopustila institucionálního rasismu. Paul Condon, vrchní komisař policie, se veřejně omluvil za chyby ve vyšetřování, institucionální rasismus však nepřiznal.

Báseň se pouští bez okolků do vrahů hned první větou „My víme, kdo jsou ti vrazi.“ Zephaniah v básni říká, že ti vrazi se prochází na svobodě, místo aby byli ve vězení, a ještě jsou chráněni zákonem. Sarkasticky pak naznačuje, že černoši by si neměli být tak jistí, že se dostanou v pořádku domů cestou autobusem. Dále se táže, proč by měli černoši platit za policii, která je neschopná jim pomoci a může být dokonce proti nim. Upozorňuje na to, že vraždám černochoů mnohdy chybí vrazi a že stačí mít vysoce postavené kamarády a nic se dotýcnému nemůže stát. Mimo to apeluje na pana Condona, aby vkročil do kruté reality a jednal s černochoy jako sobě rovnými.

V jednom rozhovoru z roku 2004 Zephaniah uvedl, že rasismus se v mnoha ohledech nezměnil, že skinheadi jsou stále mezi námi, akorát mají dlouhé vlasy a nosí obleky. Údajně je i mučení v některých případech legální. Závěr této podkapitoly shrnuje v několika větách podobné případy: Ricky Reel, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, Joy Gardner, Roger Sylvester, Rashan Charles a bratranec Zephaniaha — Michael Powell, který za záhadných okolností zemřel na policejní stanici v Birminghamu. V některých těchto případech figuruje sama policie, v jiných skupinky bělochů.

První rozebíranou knihou je *Face* (obličej) vyprávějící příběh mladého pohledného hochy Martina, kterému leží svět u nohou, ale po jedné party s přáteli nasedne do auta šíleného řidiče, který nabourá a Martin se probouzí v nemocnici s uškvařeným, úplně znetvořeným obličejem. Jak se postupně vrací zpátky do života, tak musí čelit diskriminaci založené na jeho vzhledu. Zjišťuje, že jeho nejlepší přátelé a jeho přítelkyně s ním už nechtějí trávit moc času a naopak

si začne uvědomovat, jak býval dříve sám povrchní a že například mladé Jamajčanky, se kterými se v den nehody spřátelil, ho berou takového jaký je.

V díle lze zpozorovat spoustu etnických aspektů v popisech východního Londýna, kde se příběh odehrává, a v podobě postav cizího původu. Rasismus jako takový je v knize jen lehce zastoupen, ale jelikož je rasismus vlastně jen typem diskriminace, kniha se k tématu skvěle hodí. Rasismus lze pozorovat ve scéně, kdy se ještě před nehodou Martinova parta potká s holkami z Jamajky, které je pozvou do černošského klubu. Martinova přítelkyně má z nich původně dokonce strach a sám Martin prokazuje známky rasismu — zdráhá se do onoho klubu jít. Nakonec je to on sám, kdo je rád za každého, kdo mu projeví trochu úcty. Krásným poselstvím knihy se zdá být to, že by lidé neměli diskriminovat, protože se oni sami mohou lehce stát těmi diskriminovanými. Zdá se mi, že takovými poselstvími se Zephaniah snaží udělat ze světa lepší místo, což se mi potvrdilo v jednom rozhovoru pro *The Guardian*, kde řekl, že se snaží přinutit své čtenáře přemýšlet a pokud možno dovést k činům.

Další rozebírané dílo, *Refugee Boy* (mladý uprchlík), se zaměřuje na příběh Alema (14), který utekl s otcem před válkou v Africe do Londýna. Otec, pan Kelo, Alema opustí a Alem se tak dostane nejdříve do dětského domova, později do pěstounské rodiny. V dětském domově se skamarádí s jiným uprchlíkem Mustaphou a bělochem Sweeneyem, který je šikanuje. Jednou dokonce hrozí Alemovi nožem. Alem se dozví, že mu v Africe zemřela matka a na samém konci příběhu zemře i otec. Alemovi se vyobrazují obrazy z minulosti, kdy museli s rodiči čelit agresivním vojákům. Alem je sžírán samotou, neznámým prostředím, děsivými vzpomínkami, rasistickým chováním okolí a smutkem ze smrti matky.

Mezi etnické aspekty díla se řadí především téma uprchlíků a s ním spojený rasismus vůči uprchlíkům. Zephaniah tento rasismus označil za nový typ a mrzí ho, že i sami černoši jsou proti uprchlíkům, kteří jim berou práci, i když to byli oni sami, o kom se ještě nedávno tvrdilo to samé. Temným poselstvím tohoto díla se mi jeví to, že lidé by měli být vůči uprchlíkům laskavější, protože opustili svou zemi, poněvadž museli a neměli jinou možnost, chtěli-li přežít. Krom toho si dost možná většina z nich prošla nebo prochází nepředstavitelnými útrapami.

Poslední probírané dílo *Gangsta Rap* (gangsterský rap) se věnuje trojici mladíků (Ray, Prem a Tyrone), kteří byli vyloučeni ze školy. Rádi rapují a tak jim jejich bývalý ředitel navrhne chodit do speciální školy zaměřené na inkluzi dětí etnických menšin (Prem je indického původu, Ray a Tyrone karibského), kde se budou moci učit skrze rapování. Díky nové škole založí kapelu, začnou nahrávat skladby, brzy se uchytí a stanou se slavnými. Hned první koncert je velkým úspěchem krom toho, že jednoho fanouška někdo bodne. Celá trojice žije ve východním Londýně a když se v západním Londýně objeví obdobná kapela, tak vše nasvědčuje tomu, že rivalita mezi fanoušky nastartovala jakousi válku mezi oběma částmi Londýna. Po jednom z jejich dalších koncertů zemře Rayova

přítelkyně Yinka, a tak se Ray rozhodne pořídit si na obranu pistoli. Všem třem raperům volá člověk nazývající se The Messenger (posel/kurýr) a vyhrožuje jim. Ti si myslí, že je to někdo z konkurující kapely – Western Alliance⁷⁸ (WA). V jednom z těchto telefonátů si Ray domluví schůzku s frontmanem WA — Dragonem. Vyzbrojen pistolí se dostaví na místo setkání a zrovna když se chystá Dragona zastřelit, tak zjistí, že i členům WA volá stejný člověk. Nakonec zjistí, že The Messenger není nikdo jiný než vlastník nahrávacích studií obou kapel, který chtěl vyprovokovanou válkou navýšit své tržby.

Tento román nabízí nejpestřejší ukázkou etnických aspektů. Nejen že jsou všichni tři hoši cizího původu, jejich přítelkyně mají také nebritské kořeny a stejně mnoho dalších postav. Místní zasazení je stejné jako v *Face* a *Refugee Boy* a Alem z předchozího díla se v *Gangsta Rap* dokonce v jedné scéně objeví. V příběhu se objeví několikrát policie, poprvé když tři přátelé vyvolají rvačku se skupinkou černochoů a Asiatů a policie je pochyťá. Od té doby je znají policisté jménem a namátkově je prohledávají a vyslychají, což mi přijde dost rasistické, protože jedna rvačka ještě nemusí znamenat, že dotyčný člověk je kriminálník. Když jsou na policejní stanici po zavraždění Yinky, Ray nařkne přítomné policisty z institucionálního rasismu a začne jim i lehce nadávat. Začne na ně křičet, že se k němu s takovou spravedlností nedostane, že pro polici jsou to jenom černoši vraždící jeden druhého, jen další číslo ve statistice, že pro ně to je jen trocha papírování zatímco černoši přichází o životy. Nakonec svůj výbuch hněvu zakončí vyřčením „Jó, ale je to mrtvá černoška a vy máte lepší věci na práci, že?“

Když Ray říká, že jsou pro policisty jenom černoši vraždící jeden druhého, tak mi tím připomíná rozhovor se Zephaniahem, ve kterém se rozhovořoval nad jedním článkem, ve kterém se reportéři ptali schválně jen menšinového obyvatelstva, co si myslí o uprchlících, aby světu ukázali, že to nejsou jen běloši, kdo jsou rasisté. Zephaniah to vystihl větou „Je opravdu lehké být rasistou, když máte černochoy, co konají rasismus za vás (...).“ I když text neposkytuje stopy institucionálního rasismu, za zmínku stojí to, že motorka, ze které na Yinku někdo vystřelil, byla ukradena z policejní stanice a jaká náhoda, že jejím majitelem je policista a zloděj nemůže být identifikován kvůli helmě.

Je obdivuhodné, že Zephaniah dokáže každou svou knihu své čtenáře vzdělat. V *Gagsta Rap* se čtenář dozví něco o rapu, reggae, ale co je důležitější — o inkluzi a o válkách mezi gangy, které se někdy v Londýně skutečně dějí. Hlavním ponaučením z knihy je však to, že kdyby byli lidé k sobě upřímnější, vyhnuli by se mnoha omylům a potyčkám. Kdyby se obě kapely rozhodly řešit The Messengera okamžitě, nemusel by nikdo zemřít, a tak román poukazuje i na škodlivost vytváření domněnek.

⁷⁸ V dalším textu pod zkratkou WA.

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Anotace

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Abstrakt:	Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vývojem rasismu v Británii a zkoumá poválečné černošské autory. Dále analyzuje díla Benjamina Zephaniaha — nejdříve báseň o vraždě Stephena Lawrence, dále pak tři jeho romány. Práce zkoumá etnické a rasové aspekty ve zmíněných dílech a ukazuje, jak tato díla přímočaře vzdělávají čtenáře o problémech moderní společnosti.

Annotation

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Title of Thesis: Racial and Ethnic Aspects in the Work by Benjamin Zephaniah

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Abstract: The thesis deals with development of racism in Britain and examines post-war Black British Writers. It analyses several works of Benjamin Zephaniah — firstly the poem about the murder of Stephen Lawrence, secondly the three novels of his. This work focuses on racial and ethnic aspects of the discussed works and tries to point out how they educate their readers about issues of a modern society in a straightforward way.