

# In it together: Asylum, multiculturalism and grassroots integration in twenty-first century Britain

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This paper examines the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in relation to wider debates around multiculturalism and integration in recent years. In doing so, it begins with an examination of the racialised and exclusionary discourses, marked by and productive of specific ideologies around 'race' and nation, which have shaped these debates. It is argued that current debates which focus on the integration of migrants and minorities into British society should be seen in the context of Britain's longstanding fixation with managing race relations as part of its colonial and imperial legacy. Drawing upon ethnographic research conducted in the North of England, the article explores the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in relation to these discourses. It is hoped that the research demonstrates the ways in which some asylum seekers, in spite of media hostility and state coercion, have developed strong social links and bonds within the host society and have often become much loved members of the communities in which they live – evidence, perhaps, of an organic, grassroots form of integration and multiculturalism which, far from being a threat to so-called British values as the media suggest, is a longstanding but largely hidden feature of British history (Fryer 1984; Fekete *et al.* 2010).

*Key words:* asylum; integration; multiculturalism; community cohesion; racism.