Valuing women's spaces and communities: refugee integration in hostile environments

Amanda J. Lubit

Published online: 17 Dec 2024.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

Article views: 95

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

Citing articles: 1 View citing articles ↗

ETHNIC
AND
RACIAL
STUDIES

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Valuing women's spaces and communities: refugee integration in hostile environments

Amanda J. Lubit ⓘ *

School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, UK

ABSTRACT
This article contributes to efforts to decolonise refugee integration by foregrounding the experiences of women refugees, a population often overlooked and excluded. These stories make visible local power asymmetries and argue for the need to alter how policy and institutions interact with and envision displaced populations. Specifically, it argues to dismantle exclusionary power imbalances, critiquing sectarian structures that disempower and target refugee women. This requires integration strategies to become adaptable to specific contexts. The post-conflict context of Northern Ireland is an interesting place to consider these issues as the nation and national identity are themselves contested concepts, making traditional approaches to integration unsuitable. Any new approach to integration, should prioritise multi-directional exchanges, recognise refugee agency and allow for multiple forms of belonging. A need exists to recognise the important role relationships among migrants play in establishing the stability and security needed to integrate into society.

Introduction

Many displaced women in Northern Ireland feel they will never fully belong regardless of any actions they take to integrate. In a conversation about home and belonging, Salma shared personal feelings of frustration and pain due to her status as a perpetual "other". Salma fled Somalia twelve years ago in her early twenties, settled in London as a single woman, and waited years for refugee status. Five years later, she met the man who would become her husband (who has yet to be granted refugee status) and moved to Belfast where they married and had children. After thirteen years living in the UK and acquiring full citizenship, Salma considers Belfast to be her home, yet she struggles with local assumptions that she remains a perpetual newcomer. Speaking her frustration, she asked:

> "if I say I'm here 5, 6, 7 years, will they still consider me as a new person? … I would love people to think that I'm not new, that I'm here to stay. I call home Belfast. I'm contributing to Northern

CONTACT Amanda J. Lubit ✉ alubit01@qub.ac.uk, 🔗 https://www.linkedin.com/in/amandalubit/
*Present addresses: Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, Germany; School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland

> Ireland society and I'm no different from others regardless of where I was born, raised. But that's not … the feeling I get, or the body languages I see in the street. I'm always that visitor."

Despite calling Belfast home and having other markers that many identify with integration and belonging to a society (a family, a house, a job, and a social network), nothing she does makes Salma feel accepted. Walking down the street, "I looked like a complete stranger. I looked at my surroundings, and oh that would be the reason: I'm the only one with a scarf, dark skin, and dressed differently." The body language and "looks" of people on the street act as daily reminders that she is different and unwelcome.

These statements call attention to the interrelated concepts of *belonging* and *integration.* Building upon the work of Yuval-Davis (2006), Antonsich (2010, 645) identified two analytical perspectives: "belonging as a personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness) and belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion / exclusion (politics of belonging)." Using this framework, Salma's comments about feeling at home in Belfast refer to her sense of place-belongingness. These feelings are in conflict with her treatment as a perpetual outsider on the basis of her race and gender. Integration, as a concept and policy, plays a role in imposing non-belonging upon migrants. As Korteweg (2017, 432) argues, "integration discourses produce immigrants as particular racialized and gendered subjects … [where the] resulting racialized gendered population becomes the subject of abjection onto whom generalized social problems are projected." This is achieved by creating identifiable boundaries between "us" and "them" on the basis of racial, ethnic, religious, class and gender characteristics. It also homogenises these groups as "immigrants", obscuring all differences and marking them as newly arrived and not yet integrated (Ghorashi and Vieten 2012; Korteweg 2017; Yuval-Davis 2006).

At the time of my research (2019–2020), most displaced women in Belfast were Muslim, African or both, making them a visible minority due to their skin colour and Islamic clothing. Other research has demonstrated that "specific groups, largely Muslims, and black and brown individuals, are represented as not belonging to Western societies, and therefore have increasingly become targets of 'integration'" (Scuzzarello and Moroşanu 2023, 2992). The same is true in sectarian Northern Ireland where these characteristics marked my participants as foreign and dangerous "others" frequently targeted with harassment and violence (Alimahomed-Wilson 2017). Under such complex and difficult circumstances, I argue for the decolonisation and contextualisation of integration policies and practices. It is inappropriate to expect displaced women to integrate according to currently accepted criteria that emphasise relationships with the local population and discourage those with other migrants.

In line with the overarching theme of the special issue (Murphy and Vieten 2025), this article approaches decolonisation not as a metaphor but as a process requiring material changes to existing asymmetrical power structures (Tuck and Yang 2012). Along with other contributions this article argues for changes to existing refugee integration infrastructures and processes. Rather than suggest a complete dismantling of the asylum system and integration policies, I instead propose reconceptualization in response to real lived experiences (Kutor, Arku, and Bandauko 2023; Spencer and Charsley 2021). Western conceptions of asylum and refuge "construct refugees as colonial subjects and re-colonizes them … den[ying] responsibility for production of refugees … and defin

[ing] for the recipient what the nature and conditions of 'protection' will be" (Arat-Koç 2020, 379). To decolonise refugee integration requires recognition of displacement's root causes, associated experiences of loss, injustices inherent in the production of refugees, and the agency of refugees (Arat-Koç 2020; Nasser-Eddin and Abu-Assab 2020). To achieve this, I employ Nasser-Eddin and Abu-Assab's (2020, 193) "intersectional feminist and decolonial perspective" that places the voices of the displaced within the context of "systems of oppression that make our struggles much more unified."

This article foregrounds individual experiences of the often-overlooked woman refugee to make visible ongoing power asymmetries and argue for alterations to how we interact with and envision displaced populations. I contribute to ongoing efforts to decolonise refugee integration in two ways. First, I argue for the need to tailor integration strategies to their contexts. I do so by demonstrating the particularities of Northern Ireland, a post-conflict context where no unified vision of the nation or an ideal national identity exists, thus requiring a different way of defining integration. Second, I argue against a one-size-fits-all approach to integration and for a collaborative re-imagining that acknowledges the agency of refugees and corrects existing racial and gendered inequities. In particular, minority communities and spaces must be seen not as ghettoising, but as valuable contributions towards refugee integration and belonging.

In the remainder of this paper, I follow my methodology with a more detailed discussion of Northern Ireland's history of conflict and migration to demonstrate the challenges to current conceptions of integration. I next layout the theoretical framework for the paper with a discussion of integration, belonging and gender. Finally, I present three ethnographic sections where I share personal narratives of women refugees. I begin with Akifa's story of neighbourhood hate and violence to illustrate the power dynamics that reinforce and enable sectarian asymmetries, excluding and disempowering minorities. I follow that with two examples of women's agency. Displaced women assert themselves as integrated members of this divided society by creating their own communities and spaces of belonging in ethnic minority associations and a women-only group. Taken together, these ethnographic sections demonstrate the importance of creating more inclusive and realistic integration policies.

Methodology

This paper draws upon data collected through fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Conducted between 2019 and 2020, this research examined the effects of visibility and movement on migrant Muslim women's experiences of placemaking (Lubit 2023, 2025).[1] I focused upon the lived experiences of Muslim women (international students, labour migrants and asylum seekers/refugees) who varied in terms of age, nationality, language, socioeconomic status, and legal status. My methodology included multi-site in-person and digital participant observation of women's groups at the local mosque, a displaced women's group (later discussed as Sadiqa), and a wide range of Islamic, migrant and refugee events organised by community and public policy organisations. I also attended multiple public and semi-public events taking place throughout the year as part of an independent judicial review of Northern Ireland's hate crime legislation (Marrinan 2020). I complemented my observations and informal conversations with twenty-two semi-structured and open-ended interviews with sixteen Muslim women (eight were displaced women), and twelve semi-structured interviews with ten community organisations.

This paper primarily arises out of data collected through time spent volunteering with Sadiqa Women's Space, an organisation created by and for women refugees and asylum seekers. This includes a focus group conducted by a local advocacy group to discuss local experiences of hate and violence. Nearly one-hundred and fifty women of various nationalities belong to Sadiqa, participating digitally (through a WhatsApp group) and in person. Although the specific details of each woman's story are individual to her, many displaced women I interacted with had similar experiences (e.g. with gendered asylum structures, transnational families, place-making, motherhood) to those that I share here. To protect women's identities, pseudonymization was used. When concerns arose about identifiable details, I made decisions to either omit or alter them to maintain the overall themes of a story while minimising risk to the individual.

Northern Ireland context

Sectarianism

Northern Ireland presents an interesting context within which to critically examine the concept of integration due to a history and present defined by ethno-national contestation of space, politics and identity. Beginning in 1880, two communities struggled over the question of self-determination. Nationalists demanded a devolved Irish government with control over local issues while unionists, concentrated in the northeast region of Ireland, opposed any separation from Britain. Tensions further escalated in 1913 when the British government passed the Home Rule Act. Paramilitary groups formed on both sides – the nationalist Irish Volunteers and the unionist Ulster Volunteer Force (Ferriter 2010; O'Leary 2012). When World War I began in 1914, Home Rule was suspended but tensions continued, leading to the 1916 Easter Rising and subsequent Anglo-Irish War which raged between the Irish Volunteers and British Army from 1919–1921. In 1920 the British government passed the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 in an effort to end the conflict. It divided the island into two separate areas on the basis of community identity. This political partition of Ireland led to the creation of two separate entities: Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State (Ferriter 2010; O'Leary 2012).

Following partition, the Protestant majority maintained political dominance in Northern Ireland throughout the following decades, while the Catholic minority experienced extensive discrimination and lack of opportunity. Over time, this led to the Troubles (1969–1998), three decades of sectarian warfare that resulted in extensive violence and segregation. The British responded with their military, adding a third party to the conflict. A ceasefire was declared in 1994 followed by the 1998 Belfast Agreement which established peace and a framework for the current consociational government of Northern Ireland (Ferriter 2010; O'Leary 2012).

Despite the peace agreement, the two ethno-national communities continue to have vastly different visions for their nation. Although commonly referred to on the basis of religious identification, community identity goes beyond religion and includes political subjectivities. The terms *Protestant, loyalist* and *unionist* commonly refer to individuals who support a constitutional union between Northern Ireland the United Kingdom; while *Catholic*, *republican* and *nationalist* refer to individuals who support a unified politically independent Ireland. Although these terms help people to speak about different

groups and identities, society is more complicated than these binaries suggest. For example, many individuals in Northern Ireland consider themselves to be both Irish and British, identify with no religion, or support neither unionist nor nationalist political parties (Coulter et al. 2021). At the same time, these individuals continue to live in a society defined by divisions established on the basis of two political and ethno-national identities.

Since 1998, segregation has expanded, demonstrating the lasting nature of sectarianism. Sectarian divisions have real impacts upon everyone living in Northern Ireland whether they were born or migrated here. They structure daily experiences in terms of where and when people feel safe, what actions they take, where they spend time, and how they engage with people and places around them (Jarman and Bell 2012). This applies not only to native communities, but also to migrants arriving at Northern Ireland, often unaware of these social divisions and the ways they structure life.

Migration and race relations

Following the 1998 Agreement, Northern Ireland experienced increasing levels of in-migration and with new arrivals, issues of race and racism have emerged. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the region has welcomed growing numbers of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. According to the 2021 census, the ethnic minority population had nearly doubled at 3.4per cent, up from 1.8per cent in 2011 (NISRA 2022). Although the proportion of minorities remains small, their growing numbers have highlighted unresolved issues as they correspond with racially motivated crime and violence. Immigration policies remain under the jurisdiction of the national UK government and its "hostile environment" strategy. First appearing in 2012, this trategy seeks to discourage immigration through conditions of forced poverty and destitution, substandard housing and homelessness, inadequate healthcare, detention, and threat of deportation (Canning 2017; Chantler 2012; Murphy and Vieten 2017).

Academics and policymakers have viewed Northern Ireland as "a place apart … a part of the world that is so peculiarly unique as to defy conventional analysis" on issues of race and racism (Gilligan 2017, 4). Due to a focus upon sectarian issues, Northern Ireland remained exempt from the 1965 Race Relations Act which prohibited "discrimination on the ground of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins" in England, Scotland, and Wales. This contributed to the insufficient and ineffective anti-racism policies and practices in place today. Additionally, Northern Ireland remains the only UK region with no official refugee integration strategy[2] (Murphy and Vieten 2017; Vieten and Murphy 2023). In the absence of a refugee integration strategy, Northern Ireland lacks refugee-specific policies, processes, and structures to promote integration. Practically, this means no funding or institutional support for needed services like childcare, which dramatically limits women's mobility (Murphy and Vieten 2017; Vieten and Murphy 2023). The lack of a strategy proves particularly problematic in a divided society where integration requires inclusive, tailored implementation strategies. UK-wide asylum policies apply to Northern Ireland, but the local post-conflict context shapes the ways these policies are experienced.

Political attention to the region's race relations has developed slowly, with politicians instead prioritising sectarian issues and routinely denying Northern Ireland's problem

with racism (Fanning and Michael 2018; Gilligan 2017; Hainsworth 1998). The 1997 Race Relations Order became Northern Ireland's first legislation to address racial discrimination, prohibiting "less favourable treatment on the grounds of colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origins". Its creation began the process of creating protections for individuals who fall outside of the two dominant communities (Fanning and Michael 2018; Hainsworth 1998). The Northern Ireland Act of 1998 added recognition and protections for "different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation." These two pieces of legislation form the foundation for race relations policy in Northern Ireland today. Despite this, Northern Ireland remains a place where anti-racist policies exist alongside racist government practices. Although many contexts struggle with similar contradictions, Northern Ireland differs due to historical and present relationships with sectarianism (Gilligan 2017; Vieten and Murphy 2019). While discourses on diversity have emerged and become more prominent, there remain significant challenges to implementation of race relations policies at the institutional level.

Fear, racism, and racist violence have grown in Northern Ireland since the early 2000s. Most recently, in August 2024 the region experienced an intense period of sectarian-backed anti-immigration protests and violence largely targeting Muslim populations (Barry 2024). Despite decades of criticism for unchecked racism, the state has largely ignored, tolerated, and rationalised racist violence, failing to implement effective legislation or strategies. While politicians, the criminal justice system, and police service all state their commitment to deal with "hate crime", they have taken few meaningful actions to achieve it (Fanning and Michael 2018; McVeigh 2017). The 2004 Criminal Justice Order remains Northern Ireland's only legislation relating to hate crime, and it has proven inadequate with the criminal justice system failing to prosecute more than a handful of cases in twenty years (Marrinan 2020; McVeigh 2017). Despite several calls for action to address the unchecked problem of hate, no significant changes have occurred. Hate crime figures remain high, having a devastating impact upon the lives of migrants and minorities.

This overview of the region's history and present realities establishes the necessary background for understanding the following narratives, and highlights context-specific challenges to implementing traditional integration policies. In a context where the nation and national identity are contested, how can current imaginings of migrant integration ever be achieved? As I will demonstrate, in order to decolonise integration, drastic changes are needed to dismantle the power imbalances that exclude migrants. In Northern Ireland, this necessitates a new definition for integration that prioritises collaboration and recognises the presence of multiple identities in society.

Theoretical framework

Integration

Migrant *integration* is a complex, multidimensional concept with no universally accepted definition (Kutor, Arku, and Bandauko 2023). The term is commonly used to refer both to the *process* that migrants are expected to complete and the *policies* which dictate and judge actions they must take to integrate. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2002, 4) defined refugee integration as:

> *dynamic and two-way … long term … [and] multi-dimensional*: it relates both to the conditions for and actual participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of durable asylum as well as to refugees' own perception of acceptance by and membership in the host society.

As Favell (2022, 2) explains, the term is used simultaneously "to signal the necessary adaptation of diverse cultures to dominant western norms *and* as an idealized image of intercultural dialogue that will be transformative on both sides." Rather than acting as a pathway towards inclusion as implied, integration has instead promoted specific understandings of societies, migrants, and minorities that reproduce asymmetrical, colonial power imbalances (Favell 2019; Ghorashi and Vieten 2012; Yuval-Davis 2006).

For this reason, the concept of integration has been widely debated and criticised as exclusionary and unjust, guilty of reinforcing existing colonial inequities (Favell 2019; Favell 2022; Gilmartin and Dagg 2023; Kutor, Arku, and Bandauko 2023; Murphy and Vieten 2025; Schinkel 2018; Spencer and Charsley 2021). Spencer and Charsley (2021) grouped recent critiques into five categories. First, integration is "bound up with ideologies of nationalisms and constructions of belonging and inclusion" that establish norms against which migrants are judged (Spencer and Charsley 2021, 3). Second, it idealises society as stable and homogenous rather than acknowledging actual diversity and divisions. Third, it objectifies the "other", emphasising their difference and non-belonging, with migrants "problematized as in 'need of integration'" (Spencer and Charsley 2021, 6). Fourth, it considers integration as a national issue, ignoring the presence of transnational forces and relationships. Finally, it focuses narrowly on migrants as bearing primary responsibility, ignoring the broader range of actors involved in integration processes. Within the context of this paper, I focus particularly upon normalising and homogenising national ideologies, objectification of a racialized other and the one-sided nature of integration as a problem for migrants to remedy.

As Schinkel (2018, 6) explains, in practice integration policies prioritise "not 'interethnic contacts,' but contacts *of* members of 'ethnic minorities' *with* members of the neutral category." Therefore, native-born members of a society are exempt from requirements to build relationships with other ethnic groups, with a different set of rules and expectations placed upon immigrants. This poses an inherent contradiction where immigrants are expected to form contacts with a local majority population that has little interest in those relationships, yet discouraged from forming relationships with their own and other ethnic minorities. This raises the question of who comprises the majority in any given society. This is an especially complex question in Northern Ireland, where Protestant and Catholic communities remain in conflict over how to define the nation and its people. The concept of a dominant majority is an artificial construct that makes invisible the heterogeneity of society and typically privileges whiteness (Ahmed 2000; Anderson 1991; Favell 2022). This racialisation of the nation labels "us" as white and "them" as non-white, making race a key component of existing integration paradigms.

Belonging

Questions about integration, diversity and identity naturally lead into discussions of *belonging* and the *politics of belonging* (Anthias 2018; Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis

2006). Similar to integration, concepts of belonging are multidimensional and highly contested. Belonging can develop on the basis of shared "values, culture, language, ethnicity, nationhood … bonds, friendships and community" (Anthias 2018, 6). It is about creating boundaries around who is accepted into a particular group or space, and who is not. Therefore, an examination of belonging involves questions "about 'to what' and 'with whom' you are a member, where and by whom you are accepted and you feel attached to, rather than who you are" (Anthias 2018, 7). Within Northern Ireland, the most relevant questions relate to how belonging is conceived in relation to the nation and national identity.

To understand how migrants experience feelings of belonging and non-belonging, it is important first to look at broader politics of belonging, starting with the relationship between belonging and nationalism. Anderson's (1991) concept of the nation as an "imagined community" illustrates that a nation's members mentally construct a connection with one another and the space of the nation. This connection is an artificial construct of the modern nation-state, which conceives itself as "a space of belonging in which some bodies are recognised as out of place" (Ahmed 2000, 97). Consequently, belonging is a construct that has been normalised and fetishised by the nation. Labelling members of the nation as belonging simultaneously creates a category of non-belonging non-members (Ahmed 2000; Anthias 2018; Antonsich 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006). In modern nations this appears in migration and integration discourses, where migrants are "constructed as strangers" whose bodies are "out of place in the everyday world they inhabit and in the communities in which they come to live" (Ahmed 2000, 79). Essentially, the label of non-white strangers constrains their ability to ever belong fully.

Citizenship does not necessarily confer belonging either; in reality whether or not someone is perceived as part of the nation depends upon how the nation is imagined (Ahmed 2000; Anderson 1991; Ghorashi and Vieten 2012). One fundamental problem with applying the concept of integration to a divided society like Northern Ireland is the assumption that society contains a homogeneous majority into which immigrants must integrate. With two vastly different visions of society, sectarian divisions complicate how belonging and nation are envisioned (Brennan and Marijan 2023; Jarman and Bell 2012). This misalignment between policy and reality is not limited to divided societies since no society is homogeneous in reality (Anderson 1991; Favell 2022); however, it is increasingly problematic when no majority exists and competing identity groups contest the nation-state's identity.

These labels (majority/minority and us/them) have real consequences since nations commonly believe that "only those who 'belong' should have access to state and other social, economic and political resources" (Yuval-Davis and Vieten 2018, 118). In recent years, the UK has experienced growing racialisation linked to understandings of belonging and citizenship. The Brexit vote demonstrated that some citizens belong more than others, making visible beliefs that the state should exclude anyone without British citizenship and also "those for whom the racist imagination would prefer to deny one" (Yuval-Davis and Vieten 2018, 120). Consequently, today not only migrants but also racialised minorities are viewed as outsiders, not fully belonging, or entitled to benefits of citizenship.

Gender

Within the context of this paper, I consider the concepts of integration and belonging also from the perspective of gender. To decolonise, deconstruct and counter these narratives, in *Feminism without Borders*, Mohanty (2003, 231) argues for a feminist analytic strategy that pays attention to the lives of the most marginalised women. This approach responds to the reality that "being a woman has political consequences in the world we live in … [with] unjust and unfair effects on women depending on our economic and social marginality and/or privilege" (Mohanty 2003, 3). By considering gender in combination with the various factors that contribute to marginalisation, we can better understand the ways embedded structural sexism and racism affect lived experiences.

Looking specifically at refugee women, there is a "tendency to construct 'third-world' women as a unitary, undifferentiated, and monolithic category" (Alimahomed-Wilson 2017, 90). This creates universal representations that obscure difference and strip women of their agency, producing "colonial constructions of non-Western women". These discourses produce stereotypes of women refugees as passive, powerless victims of their gender and circumstances, lacking in agency (Ghorashi 2021; Gray and Franck 2019). With increasing securitisation of immigration, "intertwined gendered and racialized representations of vulnerability and threat … have framed images of refugees" (Gray and Franck 2019, 286).

Within the vast literature critiquing integration, few have examined "how central gendered discourses have been in the elaboration and implementation of integration policies and the creation of boundaries" (Kofman 2023, 3038). Haapajärvi's (2023) ethnography in a Finnish neighbourhood provides one salient example of how gender shapes integration. In this context, integration policies treat women differently from men, problematising them as needing alternate integration pathways other than economic participation through employment. In order to create and sustain belonging, they engage with three types of "belonging work". They practice "hominess" by creating the appearance of an ordinary Finnish home, they perform their domestic roles as wives and mothers, and they conceal markers of difference which threaten the comfort of locals (Haapajärvi's 2023, 3060). Although this approach to integration does acknowledge different circumstances for men and women, it also places an unequal burden upon immigrant women to engage in "belonging work" to prove their worth. While this ethnography was specific to Finland, many findings hold true in other contexts. Increasingly, receiving countries expect immigrants to earn citizenship and prove they have integrated into society according to established integration criteria (Ahmed 2000; de Waal 2020; Spencer and Charsley 2021). This places a heavy burden upon immigrants to prove themselves, and emphasises their difference and perpetual non-belonging. This approach to integration is highly problematic.

In Northern Ireland, it is also necessary to consider the gendered nature of local policies together with the UK's "hostile environment" approach to asylum. While pursuing refugee status, women remain stuck in a period of legal and economic indeterminacy where they depend upon local institutions for basic needs like housing, healthcare, food, and legal advice (Canning 2017; Chantler 2012). Services for refugees operate within a local "patriarchal frame policing female bodies according to the normative assumptions of the two intra-Christian ethno-national communities" (Vieten and Murphy 2019, 178). While this

framework sets different expectations for men and women, it also promotes a gender blindness that disregards women's specific needs and experiences. This results in institutions denying displaced women the recognition and assistance they require (Vieten and Murphy 2019). Consequently, although displaced women across the UK experience precarity due to their legal status and gender, in Northern Ireland that vulnerability is altered and heightened by sectarianism and local gender dynamics. Consequently, I argue for integration criteria that acknowledge how local gender and conflict dynamics impact upon available integration pathways.

"We are not safe over here": living with hostile neighbours

This section will highlight these gender and conflict dynamics in the city of Belfast, illustrating how they feed into dysfunctional power dynamics that disempower, exclude and victimise refugee women. Displaced women often have little meaningful interaction with locals outside of their neighbourhood, with many interactions being overtly hostile, especially in social housing (Lubit 2023, 2025). Subjected to repeated harassment, several women chose to respond with smiles and overt acts of kindness in an effort to appease hostile neighbours. Despite financial limitations, women repeatedly brought neighbours flowers, baked goods, or other small gifts. They engaged in acts of kindness not out of affection or attachment but out of fear and necessity, as a way to gain security.

Akifa's experience of chronic harassment from neighbours is sadly not uncommon. She came to Belfast four years ago seeking asylum with her husband and three young children. A highly educated Muslim woman from Sudan, she spoke fluent English (having attended an English-speaking university), meaning that she did not experience the same language barrier as many refugees. In some ways she is an atypical example because of her language abilities, education, and willingness to advocate for herself; yet her story demonstrates that difficult relationships are not due to language skills, lower education, or not knowing how to get help. Like so many women that I interacted with, Akifa had attempted more to resolve her issues than could be reasonably expected of a victim of racism.

Akifa described her neighbours as "from Protestant area and they don't like newcomers. But I had no choice. Housing Executive put me over there and it's not a pleasant experience." Like other refugees who depend upon social housing, Akifa's family were forced to live where placed. Soon after moving in, the woman next door began to harass the family, demanding they leave. Akifa tried to keep her children quiet and appease her neighbour with gifts of flowers and food "to show we're not bad people", but nothing worked. The situation continued to deteriorate with the neighbour "make everyone in neighbourhood against us." One day, Akifa returned home from errands to find her yard vandalised, property destroyed, and the racial slur "monkey niggers get out" painted on their electrical box. Akifa called the police that day and several other times. Each time the police came, took her statement, and labelled the incident as hate-motivated. However, they took no meaningful action, issuing verbal reprimands of the neighbour then leaving her to continue without repercussions. These acts of hate devastated Akifa's family who had made every effort to fit in and make a home for themselves. "We here to live with dignity, not to lose it in front of our kids … We are normal people; we want to live in peace … Maybe I make mistake coming to Northern Ireland."

The family was forced to endure daily harassment, destruction of property, and a pervasive fear for their safety.

Most significant is the connection between stories like this and larger sectarian power structures. Due to the persistent and pervasive nature of sectarianism, a constant sense of fear and intimidation is part of daily life for many in Northern Ireland society. Although technically illegal, sectarian paramilitaries control and police neighbourhoods, using fear to keep people from speaking out against the organisation or its members. In recent years paramilitary intimidation has had a particular impact upon housing, with nearly six-hundred families forced out of homes yearly (Harvey et al. 2018). In these cases, the Housing Executive rehomed "individuals deemed to be at risk of death or serious injury if they returned to their homes" (McCaffery 2015 as cited in Harvey et al. 2018). Paramilitary power is both normalised and accepted by Northern Ireland's institutions. This became evident when I heard several stories of migrants calling police to report an incident, only to be instructed to contact the local paramilitary and have them address it directly. At a recent government hearing on racist violence, Beverly Simpon (representing a migrant forum) testified to this pattern, stating that "community members report being advised by the PSNI to consult, negotiate or listen to community leaders with a link to paramilitary organisations. This is not acceptable in any democratic, peaceful society" (Rosato 2024). Additionally, members of the police and Housing Executive routinely discourage women like Akifa from making formal complaints, encouraging them to remain silent in order to avoid paramilitary retaliation.

Akifa's experiences make visible institutional racism and sectarianism that shape refugee lives in Northern Ireland. It is essential to dismantle these power imbalances, which exclude and revictimize, in order to decolonise approaches to integration. This narrative also calls attention to the reality of refugee interactions with local populations which are often hostile and violent, rather than welcoming and accepting. This occurs due to a combination of factors such as housing location, race, socioeconomic status, legal rights, knowledge of their environment and the willingness of locals to engage (Mas Giralt 2015; Sorgen 2015). For many, "a sense of belonging is grounded and embodied in space and place … [with] everyday neighbourhood places as sites where … (non-)belonging emerges through social (non-)encounters and (non-)interaction with others" (Huizinga and van Hoven 2019, 309). Under these circumstances, displaced women look elsewhere, often developing relationships with other migrants who share their religion, legal status, or ethno-national identity. In Northern Ireland, where hostility to outsiders is prevalent, displaced women often gravitate towards others similarly viewed as outsiders. The following two sections delve into the relationships migrants form with one another to demonstrate their value in achieving the stability, security and senses of place and belonging that are essential to integration.

"How we can keep our culture. How we can integrate as well": ethnic minority associations

I found that powerful feelings of solidarity between individuals with similar ethnolinguistic backgrounds can facilitate a sense of place and belonging. My participants explained that ethnic minority associations (EMA) allowed them to connect with people who accept and understand their language, rituals, clothing, religion and behaviour; this acceptance

provides them with a place in Belfast where they can maintain their identity yet still belong. I witnessed this with a variety of identities including, but not limited to, the Muslim religious identity, the ethnolinguistic Arab identity, and various ethnonational identities (e.g. Somali, Sudanese). Through connection to one another in a communal meeting place, individuals gain not only acceptance but also support, knowledge and resources that enable them to adapt to life in Belfast easier and more thoroughly than could be achieved alone (Lubit 2022, 2025; Mas Giralt 2015).

The importance of these associations in the lives of refugees becomes evident through Fiza's experiences with the Sudanese Centre. Catering to around five-hundred Sudanese in the city, the centre provided a shared place for anyone of Sudanese descent to socialise, celebrate holidays, seek assistance, and take classes. Fiza lived in a distant area of West Belfast far from the Sudanese Centre, yet she prioritised attendance at religious celebrations, national holidays, and other events so that her four children maintained a connection to their origins. The children also attended Arabic and Sudanese classes to ensure they "understand what is going on in our country, and just pick up the language." Every weekend, Fiza and her children journeyed from her home to the Community Centre for four hours of class. This time also benefited Fiza, as her only opportunity to regularly engage with other community members.

Fiza lived in Belfast separate from her husband who remained in Sudan. Many displaced women live as single mothers with few opportunities to leave their home and interact with others, demonstrating one significant impact of gender on opportunities for integration. With sole responsibility for her children and no family around for support, Fiza spent most of her time managing her children's school and activities. At the Sudanese Centre on Saturdays, she joined other mothers sitting together socialising while waiting for their children. Fiza's experience calls attention not only to the social aspects of these organisations but also to their intergenerational importance, helping parents teach their children about their origins. Many women participated in the activities and celebrations these associations operate throughout the year as a way to ensure their identity and history remained a part of their children's lives despite being raised far from their country-of-origin. These experiences generated feelings of familiarity and belonging, which were often difficult to experience elsewhere in Belfast. Decolonised approaches to integration should value and protect these connections to the past and other identities, rather than expecting migrants to disavow them and assimilate.

In addition to these emotional benefits, EMAs also provided more material benefits such as assistance with finding places to shop and buy groceries, translation services, and language classes for adults and children. They also help complaints to police, organise groups discussions on issues of racism and hate, and lobby local institutions for greater support. These actions are all evidence of attempts to integrate and become part of Belfast society. EMA's also provide membership to WhatsApp groups where organisers regularly post useful information and notification of events. This technology also provided a platform for conversations between members, especially as a vehicle for EMAs and members to care for one another during significant moments (e.g. weddings, births, illness, or death). Fiza explained that "if someone is dead or someone has a wedding or celebration … They plan everything with him. They provide for him the place. They even collect for him some money." Back in Sudan, family and neighbours would provide this support during the good and bad moments in life, but in Belfast most

individuals live without extended family, with other members of their ethnic minority group filling in for these roles.

As newcomers and minorities in Belfast, members desire a familiar and comfortable place to belong. These associations care for their members by meeting these needs, facilitating emplacement and belonging. While some interpret relationships between migrants as ghettoising and a failure to integrate, I instead argue that the creation of ethnic minority communities facilitates integration and belonging, especially in hostile environments (Mas Giralt 2015; Pozzo and Ghorashi 2022). Pozzo and Ghorashi (2022) made a similar observation in the Netherlands where participation in refugee centres created feelings of connection that provided the foundation for engagement with broader society. In these safe spaces, new migrants create support networks and access resources that help them begin to make a place for themselves. These activities should be recognised as acts of integration since they involve the creation of social ties and efforts to engage with the structures and institutions that makeup society.

"The Sadiqa group, it's my family now": creating spaces of integration

Continuing this argument, I next examine *Sadiqa Women's Space,* created by and for women refugees and asylum seekers in Belfast. Displaced individuals often feel excluded from public and semi-public places; this is especially true for women. Several years ago, displaced women in Belfast decided to create their own space because the existing organisations and spaces for refugees were male dominated. Akifa explained that "we couldn't socialize over there. It's a very small building and it's full of men, crowded and we are very shy. You won't be yourself." Frustrated with the lack of accessible places to meet, bring their children, and socialise, this group created "a more permanent space for the women, with childcare" where they could help other displaced women deal with the pressures and difficulties of life in asylum. *Sadiqa's* stated aim was:

> to create a space where women can come together, share knowledge, assist each other with accessing services, employment, and education, have child-free time, attend training and information sessions, and show solidarity to others through shared struggle. We also want to create a place where women are free to laugh and enjoy time together.

The women organised themselves, renting a building from a community group two mornings a week and creating a place to come together, socialise, celebrate, and engage in activities (e.g. sewing, driving, English language, yoga and Zumba classes).

Women's identities as mothers were highly significant to this group and helped to shape its activities, with childcare provided weekly and ample space provided for baby buggies and pushchairs. Over its first year in existence, *Sadiqa* evolved from a small group of fifteen, to a thriving group of over one hundred displaced women. The group consisted of approximately sixty-percent Sudanese and twenty-percent Nigerian and Zimbabwean women, with the remaining twenty percent from countries like Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Somalia. Despite different languages and ethno-national backgrounds, these women came together on the basis of their shared experiences of displacement.

Iman's narrative demonstrates the significance of this group in helping women to cope with the everyday challenges of asylum. Before the war, she was a hairdresser with her

own salon in Syria; displaced by the conflict, she first settled in a Greek refugee camp where she met her future husband and father of her child, Jamal. A year before we met, Iman received refugee status under the UK's *Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme[3],* but her husband did not. Consequently, when granted refugee status and the right to resettlement she became a single mother separated from her husband who remained at the camp for several years, awaiting family reunification.

The UK's hostile immigration policies engage a variety of spatial and temporal techniques to discipline the bodies of refugees and severely restrict their daily movements (Canning 2017; Chantler 2012). Until legal status is determined, or family reunification granted, women like Iman remain stuck in time and place, waiting for essential rights and freedoms. The government denies these women a future, forcing them to live for extended periods of time in an uncertain present (Hage 2009; Lubit 2022; Ramsay 2017). Ramsay (2017, 530) describes this as a "slow suffocation" of women's anticipated futures where "constraints on ordinary existence serve to make particular ways of living increasingly difficult to endure." Women remain stuck in a present struggling to survive and looking forward to a future that remains uncertain.

Soon after her arrival in Belfast, Iman became intimately familiar with this struggle, which highlights some of the contradictions and colonial structures inherent in asylum (Mayblin 2017). As Arat-Koç (2020, 373) explained, refugee protection is framed "in a charity framework, one that enables not only an evasion of accountability regarding the conditions for refugee production, but also the expectation of gratitude from refugees." In line with this narrative, at the time of this research the UK provided refugees with weekly support payment of £39.60 to cover the cost of food and toiletries. Arriving with very few belongings and prohibited from working to earn money, women like Iman were forcibly dependent upon charity organisations to provide many basic needs, like formula, diapers, and clothing.

As a single mother with no support system, Iman never got a break from motherhood. She had no time to do anything besides cook, clean, and care for Jamal. This was particularly problematic as Iman knew no English when she arrived and had no way to attend classes. Without childcare, which would have been provided by families and friends in Syria, Iman lacked mobility and independence. She desperately needed a support network for social support and childcare. Despite these limitations, or perhaps because of them, Iman and Jamal became regulars at *Sadiqa*. While attending *Sadiqa* required time and energy, it provided a wide array of practical and emotional benefits that made it worthwhile. Many of the regulars at *Sadiqa* looked after Iman in different ways. Those who were able, spoke to her in Arabic, and some informally taught her basic English as they ate, cooked, or cleaned together. Even non-Arabic speakers, limited in their ability to communicate with her, helped because they saw her every week and understood what she was going through. With few other contacts, the women of *Sadiqa* became her lifeline. They offered friendship and a needed break from constant mothering, plus practical advice on navigating her position as a refugee in Belfast.

As a Morocaan refugee, Ayat, explained "when I go to *Sadiqa*, I don't feel alone. No isolate … I don't have anyone in this country, but the *Sadiqa* group, it's my family now." On a normal day, the women sit, eat, talk, and laugh together at *Sadiqa*. They cook for each other, watch each other's children, teach each other, and discuss both good and bad occurrences in their lives. For them "the people, the activity … the way

we relate to each other" was what made *Sadiqa* so important. Displaced women commonly find themselves profoundly isolated upon arrival due not only to the conditions of asylum but also to their gender, race, and religion. These realities make it impossible for women to meet traditional integration criteria, yet they do want to make a home for themselves and find a sense of belonging. Without opportunities to do so within their neighbourhoods, they created their own community in *Sadiqa*. Like EMAs, *Sadiqa* provided a safe space where women can develop meaningful social relations and learn how to access and participate in society. Consequently, it is essential that integration criteria catch up to the lived realities of life in asylum and recognise participation in these communities as evidence of integration.

Conclusion

Thrown into the divided sectarian landscape of Northern Ireland, displaced women commonly encounter hostility and othering when interacting with locals, impeding their ability to integrate. The narratives of Salma and Akifa demonstrate the significant shortcomings of integration as a concept and policy, by expecting migrants to take responsibility for developing meaningful relationships with unwilling and often hostile locals (Ghorashi and Vieten 2012; Gilmartin and Dagg 2023; Scuzzarello and Moroşanu 2023). As a racialised and gendered concept, integration reproduces colonial power imbalances and creates a specific understanding of belonging that constructs "us" as white and "them" as non-white (Favell 2019; Korteweg 2017; Schinkel 2018; Yuval-Davis 2006; Yuval-Davis and Vieten 2018). Consequently, migrants and minorities exist as perpetual outsiders.

A need exists to decolonise how integration is understood and implemented. To achieve this, I argue first for an end to the one-size-fits-all approach to integration and instead propose that integration policies be tailored to specificities of individual contexts. Without a common understanding of the nation and national identity, the sectarian, post-conflict context of Northern Ireland serves as an interesting place to explore questions of integration. Under these circumstances, existing approaches to integration fail, demonstrating the need for new approaches. To achieve that, I argue for a collaborative re-imagining of integration that foregrounds the experiences of refugees and corrects racialized and gendered inequities. In particular, a need exists to acknowledge the role of minority-led communities and spaces (like EMAs and *Sadiqa*) in supporting their members' integration. Through participation in ethnic minority associations and women's refugee groups, my participants found ways to counteract daily reminders of their status as outsiders. By creating their own communities of solidarity, these women gained a sense of acceptance along with social support, knowledge and resources that facilitated their adaptation to life in Northern Ireland. Decolonising approaches to refugee integration requires us to acknowledge refugee agency, recognising that participation in these spaces are indicators of integration.

Notes

1. Ethical approval by full committee (first approval 11 June 2019, extension and amendment 11 January 2020 – reference number HAPP2021.15.99), the HAPP School Research Ethics Committee at Queen's University, Belfast.

2. Recent attempts to develop and implement a comprehensive refugee integration strategy have failed. Consequently, the region is currently considering a diluted version of those proposals (see introduction to special issue).
3. The UK governments Syrian VPR scheme, resettles vulnerable individuals, providing them full refugee status and access to public support upon arrival.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Amanda J. Lubit http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3368-4018

References

Ahmed, S. 2000. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge.

Alimahomed-Wilson, S. 2017. "Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women." *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 5 (1): 73–97. https://doi.org/10.5406/womgenfamcol.5.1.0073

Anderson, B. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Anthias, F. 2018. "Identity and Belonging: Conceptualizations and Reframings Through a Translocal Lens." In *Contested Belonging: Spaces, Practices, Biographies*, edited by K. Davis, H. Ghorashi, and P. Smets, 137–159. Emerald Publishing Limited.

Antonsich, M. 2010. "Searching for Belonging – An Analytical Framework." *Geography Compass* 4 (6): 644–659. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00317.x

Arat-Koç, S. 2020. "Decolonizing Refugee Studies, Standing up for Indigenous Justice: Challenges and Possibilities of a Politics of Place." *Studies in Social Justice* 14 (2): 371–390. https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v14i2.2271

Barry, J. August 14, 2024. "At the Front Line of Belfast's Week of Violence." *New Lines Magazine*. Retrieved from: https://newlinesmag.com/spotlight/at-the-front-line-of-belfasts-week-of-violence/.

Brennan, S., and B. Marijan. 2023. "Contested Spaces and Everyday Peace Politics in Northern Ireland." *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 90:97–110.

Canning, V. 2017. *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Chantler, K. 2012. "Gender, Asylum Seekers and Mental Distress: Challenges for Mental Health Social Work." *British Journal of Social Work* 42 (2): 318–334. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcr062

Coulter, C., N. Gilmartin, K. Hayward, and P. Shirlow. 2021. *Northern Ireland A Generation After Good Friday: Lost Futures and new Horizons in the 'Long Peace'*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

de Waal, T. 2020. "Conditional Belonging: Evaluating Integration Requirements from a Social Equality Perspective." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 41 (2): 231–247. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2020.1724906

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). 2002. *Position on the Integration of Refugees in Europe*. London: ECRE.

Fanning, B., and L. Michael. 2018. "Racism and Anti-Racism in the two Irelands." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41 (15): 2656–2672. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1403641

Favell, A. 2019. "Integration: Twelve Propositions After Schinkel." *Comparative Migration Studies* 7 (1): 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0125-7

Favell, A. 2022. *Integration Nation: Immigration and Colonial Power in Liberal Democracies*. Cambridge: Polity.

Ferriter, D. 2010. *The Transformation of Ireland 1900–2000*. London: Profile Books.

Ghorashi, H. 2021. "Normalising Power and Engaged Narrative Methodology: Refugee Women, the Forgotten Category in the Public Discourse." *Feminist Review* 129 (1): 48–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/01417789211041089

Ghorashi, H., and U. M. Vieten. 2012. "Female Narratives of 'New' Citizen's Belonging(s) and Identities in Europe: Case Studies from the Netherlands and Britain." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 19 (6): 725–741.

Gilligan, C. 2017. *Northern Ireland and the Crisis of Anti-Racism: Rethinking Racism and Sectarianism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Gilmartin, M., and J. Dagg. 2023. "Integration as Making Place." *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 21 (3): 276–290. https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2021.1974148

Gray, H., and A. Franck. 2019. "Refugees as/at Risk: The Gendered and Racialized Underpinnings of Securitization in British Media Narratives." *Security Dialogue* 50 (3): 275–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010619830590

Haapajärvi, L. 2023. "Pitfalls of Belonging-Work. The Dialectics of Belonging and Exclusion in Finnish Immigrant Integration Policies." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46 (14): 3058–3078. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2149274

Hage, G. 2009. "Waiting Out the Crisis: On Stuckedness and Governmentality." *Anthropological Theory* 5:463–475. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499605059232

Hainsworth, P. 1998. "Introduction: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in a Divided Society." In *Divided Society: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland*, edited by P. Hainsworth, 1–10. London: Pluto Press.

Harvey, C., A. Kramer, K. McEvoy, A. Bryson, R. O'Connell, B. Gormally, D. Holder, F. O'Hagan, E. Patterson-Bennett, and G. McKeown. 2018. *BrexitLawNI Policy Report: Brexit, Xenophobia and Racism in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: BrexitLawNI. Retrieved from: https://brexitlawni.org/assets/uploads/Brexit-Xenophobia-and-Racism-in-Northern-Ireland.pdf.

Huizinga, R. P., and B. van Hoven. 2019. "Everyday Geographies of Belonging: Syrian Refugee Experiences in the Northern Netherlands." *Geoforum; Journal of Physical, Human, and Regional Geosciences* 96:309–317. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.09.002

Jarman, N., and J. Bell. 2012. "Routine Divisions: Segregation and Daily Life in Northern Ireland." In *Everyday Life After the Irish Conflict: The Impact of Devolution and Cross-Border Cooperation*, edited by C. McGrattan, and E. Meehan, 39–53. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Kofman, E. 2023. "Integration Discourses, the Purification of Gender and Interventions in Family Migrations." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46 (14): 3037–3057. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2166791

Korteweg, A. 2017. "The Failures of 'Immigrant Integration': The Gendered Racialized Production of Non-Belonging." *Migration Studies* 5 (3): 428–444. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnx025

Kutor, S. K., G. Arku, and E. Bandauko. 2023. "Intead of 'Writing Against' and Discarding 'Immigrants' Integration, Why Not Reconceptualise Integration as a Wicked Concept?" *Comparative Migration Studies* 11:9. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-023-00334-3

Lubit, A. J. 2022. "A Mother's Experience of Asylum: Conflicting Temporalities, Belonging, and Evolving Care Relations." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 43 (4): 464–479. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2022.2086226

Lubit, A. J. 2023. "'I Would Love People to Realise That I Call This My Home': Migrant Muslim Women's Everyday Visibility, Movement and Placemaking Strategies in Northern Ireland." Doctoral dissertation, Queen's University Belfast. https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/i-would-love-people-to-realise-that-i-call-this-my-home.

Lubit, A. J. 2025. *Life as a Migrant Muslim Woman in Sectarian Northern Ireland: An Exploration of Gender, Visibility, Movement and Placemaking*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Marrinan, D. 2020. *Hate Crime Legislation in Northern Ireland, an Independent Review: Consultation Paper*. Belfast: Hate Crime Review NI. https://www.hatecrimereviewni.org.uk/key-documents.

Mas Giralt, R. 2015. "Socio-cultural Invisibility and Belonging: Latin American Migrants in the North of England." *Emotion, Space and Society* 15:3–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2015.03.002

Mayblin, L. 2017. *Asylum After Empire: Colonial Legacies in the Politics of Asylum Seeking*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

McVeigh, R. 2017. "Hate and the State: Northern Ireland, Sectarian Violence and 'Perpetrator-Less Crime'." In *Critical Perspectives on Hate Crime: Contributions from the Island of Ireland*, edited by A. Haynes, J. Schweppe, and S. Taylor, 393–418. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mohanty, C. 2003. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Murphy, F., and U. M. Vieten. 2017. "Asylum Seekers and Refugees' Experiences of Life in Northern Ireland." Retrieved from: https://www.qub.ac.uk/home/media/Media,784971,en.pdf.

Murphy, F., and U. M. Vieten. 2025. "Decolonising Refugee Integration Paradigms: Visions for a New Politics of Inclusion and Participation in Europe and Beyond." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2024.2438284

Nasser-Eddin, N., and N. Abu-Assab. 2020. "Decolonial Approaches to Refugee Migration." *Migration and Society: Advances in Research* 3:190–202. https://doi.org/10.3167/arms.2020.030115

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). 2022. *Main Statistics for Northern Ireland: Ethnic Group*. Retrieved from: https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-1-statistical-bulletin-ethnic-group.pdf.

O'Leary, B. 2012. "Partition." In *A Companion to Border Studies*, edited by T. M. Wilson, and H. Donnan, 29–47. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Pozzo, M., and H. Ghorashi. 2022. "How Liminality Enhances Conviviality Through Multilingual Co-Creations: Young Refugees in the Netherlands." *Current Sociology* 70 (5): 682–702. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120932933

Ramsay, G. 2017. "Incommensurable Futures and Displaced Lives: Sovereignty as Control Over Time." *Public Culture* 29 (3): 515–538. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-3869584

Rosato, E. September 18, 2024. Failures to Address Racism in NI, Committee Hears. *BBC*. Retrieved from: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2kd30vepwo.

Schinkel, W. 2018. "Against 'Immigrant Integration': For an end to Neocolonial Knowledge Production." *Comparative Migration Studies* 6 (1): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-018-0095-1

Scuzzarello, S., and L. Moroşanu. 2023. "Integration and Intersectionality: Boundaries and Belonging "From Above" and "From Below"." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46 (14): 2991–3013. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2182649

Sorgen, A. 2015. "Integration Through Participation: The Effects of Participating in an English Conversation Club on Refugee and Asylum Seeker Integration." *Applied Linguistics Review* 6 (2): 241–260. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2015-0012

Spencer, S., and K. Charsley. 2021. "Reframing 'Integration': Acknowledging and Addressing Five Core Critiques." *Comparative Migration Studies* 9 (1): 18. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-021-00226-4

Tuck, E., and K. W. Yang. 2012. "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1 (1): 1–40.

Vieten, U. M., and F. Murphy. 2019. "The Imagination of the Other in a (Post-) Sectarian Society: Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the Divided City of Belfast." *Social Inclusion* 7 (2): 176–186. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v7i2.1980

Vieten, U. M., and F. Murphy. 2023. "Devout, Profane and Hard' – Chasing Integration Policy in Northern Ireland." *Space and Polity* 27 (1): 116–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2023.2260156

Yuval-Davis, N. 2006. "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging." *Patterns of Prejudice* 40 (3): 197–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220600769331

Yuval-Davis, N., and U. M. Vieten. 2018. "Citizenship, Entitlement and Autochthonic Political Projects of Belonging in the age of Brexit." In *Enfranchising Ireland? Identity, Citizenship and State*, edited by S. G. Ellis, 107–123. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy.