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# **Integration in a divided society?**

## Refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland

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# Working Paper Series

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## List of abbreviations

NASS	National Asylum Support Service
NGO	non-governmental organization
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
RAS	refugee and asylum seeker
UKBA	United Kingdom Border Agency

# 1 Introduction

*'I don't know about this integration. Where do I do this?'*

Refugee from Somalia in Belfast

When one thinks of refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, one tends to think of London and the South East of England, cities in Scotland such as Edinburgh and Glasgow, and, from time to time, part of Wales, but almost never Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>. In academic and policy articles, papers, and reports about forced migrants in the UK, Northern Ireland is at best referenced in passing and, more often, omitted entirely. While this has been historically rooted in the empirical reality that almost no refugees seek asylum in the region, changing realities mean that this omission is no longer justified.

For much of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, while Great Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland) was receiving high numbers of asylum seekers, developing immigration law, and establishing partnerships to address issues of migration, Northern Ireland was a site of sectarian violence that received almost no asylum claims. However, this is no longer the case. While the number of refugees in the region remains small when compared with other parts of the UK with most estimates of refugees with status living in Northern Ireland being in the low thousands (McNulty 2012), the proportional rise in asylum claims in recent years has been dramatic. Indeed, estimates suggest that asylum applications doubled from 2010 to 2011 (Key Informant I, April 2012). Refugee and asylum seeker (RAS) integration<sup>2</sup> is thus quickly becoming an important concern in Northern Ireland, which presents interesting challenges not encountered elsewhere in the UK.

The sectarian divide in Northern Ireland poses a particularly dramatic challenge to the assumption within integration policy and theory that host communities are socially cohesive entities for which generalizations about values and practices can be broadly applied as standards for RAS integration. Furthermore, the population of refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland presents a particular challenge to the existing integration literature because their integration is embedded in the context of a divided society, which is actively engaged in a particular form of local, intra-societal integration.

As little has been written about refugees and asylum seekers in this region, I will explore how an empirical understanding of this situation helps in rethinking assumptions of homogeneity widespread in integration theory. By engaging a modified version of intersectionality as a tool with which to conceive the complex nature of social divisions, I place the heterogeneity of

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<sup>1</sup> I will make use of the term as it retains legal and political meaning, but it is important to note that it is a contested term. Those in opposition to the union with Great Britain sometimes refer to the region instead as 'the North of Ireland.' The region is also referred to as 'Ulster.'

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of brevity, 'refugee and asylum seeker integration' will hereafter be referred to simply as 'RAS integration' so as to distinguish it from other forms of integration directed at and/or involving other populations.

host communities as the starting point for explorations of integration. Thus, I will use the particularly divisive sectarianism of Northern Ireland to elucidate broader theoretical issues of integration for refugees and asylum seekers.

## 2 Methodology

As so little has been written about refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland, I engaged in a series of interviews and two observations in order to develop an understanding of the situation in the region. This is to supplement the limited information already available. Because my research was limited in scope and by its timeframe, it was an exploratory project (Robson 2011: 59). Through my interviews and observations, which all took place in Belfast over the course of a week in April 2012, I collected non-generalizable data that can be understood as indicative, but not representative of the range of perspectives and experiences in Northern Ireland (Robson 2002: 289). The vast majority of empirical descriptions of the situation of refugees and asylum seekers found in this paper are based on my interviews with people who by virtue of their job or position in the community have knowledge of RAS integration in Northern Ireland. So as to best accommodate new lines of inquiry, I conducted these key informant interviews (Gilchrist 1992) in a semi-structured manner (Robson 2011: 272-3). I spoke with employees in governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with refugees and asylum seekers, NGOs working with migrants, and research institutions as well as with five refugees, all of whom had already received status and had been residing in Northern Ireland for at least a year. I observed two events: a workshop on integration at a conference on 'Migration and Localism' organized by the Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership and a meeting of the Belfast Friendship Club, an integration initiative in which migrants and locals are given a weekly time and space to engage with each other. These observations helped me develop a sense of the relationship between governmental agencies and NGOs and between local populations and migrants. They also supplemented my broader understanding of the Northern Ireland context first developed by living and studying in L/Derry for five months in 2010.

## 3 From assumed homogeneity to recognized heterogeneity

### **Integration literature**

Different words have, at different times been favoured in both explaining and engineering the social, political, economic, and cultural experiences of refugees and asylum seekers, and their host communities. The rigid, legal 'incorporation;' the broader and vague 'inclusion;' the impersonal, surgical 'insertion;' the top-down 'settlement;' and the burden-centric 'adaption' have all at times been used to explain the complex and evolving relationships between refugees and asylum seekers and their host communities (Castles et al. 2002). In recent years, however, the concept of 'integration' has been favoured as an appropriate middle-ground between two highly criticized concepts: assimilation and multiculturalism.

Assimilation can broadly be understood as an expectation that migrants will replace their cultural and social values with those of their new host community. As a model, assimilation proposes to break down elements of difference so as to ensure a particular, favoured, and homogenous host community thrives and to eliminate what is argued would otherwise be the basis of societal frictions. This systematic process of breaking down distinguishing differences intended to construct a cohesive society based on the host society's values, traditions, and norms places the entire responsibility to adapt on the shoulders of migrants themselves and, in so doing, implies that there is something inherently wrong about those customs and values which are different.

Assimilation was a post-Second World War global project, which later became associated with Thatcher's 1980s government in the UK. A decade later, Tony Blair's New Labour government built on these assimilationist ideas and distanced themselves from the policy of multiculturalism that the Labour Party had maintained as official policy since the 1960s by favouring community integration over multiculturalism. In so doing, Blair's government reflected a claim made more broadly that multiculturalist policies had gone too far (Yuval-Davis 2011).

While multiculturalism promises a respect for cultural diversity altogether absent from assimilation policies, it has increasingly been seen as antithetical to social cohesion and held responsible for creating those ethnic enclaves, which separate cultures (Castles et al. 2002) and has recently been linked to anti-social, criminal, and even terrorist acts (Costello 2006). With multiculturalism pronounced dead in the UK, integration gained currency. Unlike assimilation, Lopez (2000: 57) argues integration allows for expressions of cultural difference, Ager and Strang (2008) suggest it is a more complex conceptualization of responsibility in which both migrants and host communities play roles, and O'Neill (2001) explains that it allows for an engagement with the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

Following Bader's (1997) call for integration to recognize material social, political, and economic issues beyond legal and symbolic issues, integration is now widely recognized as a legal, economic, and social process, but it remains an 'individualized, contested, and contextual' term (Robinson 1998: 118). Indeed, over a decade after it was presented, Robinson's notion that integration is a 'word used by many, but understood differently by most' (1998:118) remains true and the basic questions of 'who' is integrating and into 'what' they are doing so remain unresolved (Sigona 2005). In order to account for the lack of conceptual clarity associated with integration and develop the types of models favoured in the social sciences, refugee studies scholars often articulate integration in terms of 'functional aspects' (Castles et al. 2002: 129), but the extent and manner in which cultural differences are accepted, responsibilities shared, and rights foregrounded are addressed at competing local and universal levels.

Some insist that integration must be reflective of local realities and practices while others favour standardizable norms of integration which they argue should be applied across a variety of political, social, and cultural situations. In his influential definition of integration, Kuhlman (1991) argues the former by suggesting that integration is a 'relative and culturally determined,' two-way process. For him, integration must be measured in relation to broader realities of the host community, such as by assessing if friction between refugees and hosts is

worse than between hosts themselves or if employment opportunities for refugees compare to those of the broader host population. In this conceptualization, the integration standard is set at a local level. In so doing, particular cultural, social, and economic practices of the host community are prioritized and expressed as representative of the entire host community. This comes in contrast to those who argue that international responsibilities towards refugees and asylum seekers should compel states to observe particular universal standards of integration. Jacobsen (2001), for example, argues that recognition of particular basic rights remains central to conceptualizing integration in all regions and, furthermore, argues that integration can be understood through a series of seven distinct integration-enabling rights. For him, integration universally must mean that refugees have the right to return to their countries of origin, the rights not be confined to restrictive living arrangements, including camps, or put in physical danger, and the rights to access education, health, housing, and social networks in host communities. For Banki (2004), integration can be simply understood as a relative freedom to participate in the economic and communal life of the host country while Valtonen (2004) adds that such participation must be possible without requiring a suppression of distinct ethnocultural identities and cultures.

While these two approaches are grounded in quite conflicting normative approaches, they rest on very similar assumptions about the host community. In both of these arguments, even though the level at which integration standards are set differs, a certain degree of homogeneity is assumed. Despite the overwhelming evidence that both refugee and host communities are complex groups with often conflicting social, cultural, and political practices and values, integration overwhelmingly continues to be conceived of as a process involving refugees and host communities as two homogenous, bounded entities. Whether the host is seen as an entity bound by particular universal standards or if it is seen on a more local level as being defined by particular customs and practices, neither approach questions the cohesive, bounded nature of the host and both present a particular articulation of the host as representative of the community as a whole. In this way, the debate between relativists and universalists is focused on the levels at which commonality can be established and fails to address assumptions of homogeneity or to recognize differences and divisions in host communities. It is, therefore, no surprise that when these conceptualizations of integration are operationalized, relativist and universalist ideas are reconciled in practice through the adaptation and interpretation of universal standards at the national level in policies.

By looking comparatively at these processes of operationalization in different countries, however, some scholars challenge functionalist approaches and look more critically at the role of the state. Indeed, there is an increasing recognition of the ways in which particular interpretations of national social, cultural, and political realities shape integration. Sigona argues that integration is both ‘circumstantial and contingent’ to its context (2005: 120), and Ager and Strang suggest that different approaches to nationhood, citizenship, and rights must be acknowledged in defining integration in particular normative contexts (2008: 177).

It is from this approach to integration that some have problematized assumptions of homogeneity. Sigona, for example, explains that integration ‘involves many actors, agencies, logics, and rationalities’ (2005:118) rather than two homogenous groups while Strang and Ager (2010: 601) point to the ‘danger of an implicit assumption that integration concerns the relationship between two distinct, but homogenous groups.’ However, despite acknowledging

the complexities of factors that render host communities heterogeneous and suggesting that models based on homogeneity over simplify the situation, these deconstructions of the assumption of homogeneity are only done in passing. Homogeneity is presented as a limitation or nuance rather than as a fundamental challenge to the existing two-way models.

The most significant attempts to engage homogeneity so far have come from those who critique the power relations inherent in constructing integration. In an effort to demonstrate the way integration reinforces the status quo, critics look to the way people in positions of power articulate integration policies and plans. Marston (2004) argues that integration discourse prioritizes dominant values and implies that there is something innately problematic about refugees. This positioning of refugees demonstrates societal fears that refugees and asylum seekers will import dangerous values, because the fact that their home countries produce refugees is seen as evidence of dysfunction and has marginalizing effects for refugees (McPherson 2010). In this critical approach to integration, the central contention is that integration discourses construct refugees as problems, but the critique also begs important questions about representations of the host community.

In operationalizing integration, policy makers and practitioners necessarily base their measurements of successful integration on their own values and experiences as subjects privileged by dominant discourses (Choules 2007). This critical analysis demonstrates a process of envisioned homogenization whereby social, cultural, and political elites reproduce a particular form of their community in narrowly defining the values and practices to which refugees and asylum seekers are expected to adapt. Yet, while these critiques provide important insight into the ways in which the elite benefit from existing integration models and definitions, they do not give us the tools with which to dismantle the assumptions of homogeneity that underpin those models and definitions.

In order to challenge assumptions of homogeneity, a new approach is necessary. Thus far, homogeneity has generally only been considered as a limitation in the aftermath of theoretical explorations or as a particular nuance in the preface to an argument. As a result, the models and definitions of integration that have dominated debates fail to account for the heterogeneous complexities of both refugee and asylum seeker and host community populations. Therefore, in order to conceptualize these complexities, a move beyond a mere critique of homogeneity to an engagement of heterogeneity is necessary.

### **Modified intersectionality**

In a heterogeneous society, people have different cultural practices, values, political affiliations, and faith backgrounds; they are of different genders, sexualities, ethnicities, races, classes, and ages; and they have different relationships to social, cultural, political, and economic power structures. So, in order to move from a conceptualization based on homogeneity to one based on heterogeneity, a recognition of social positioning and societal divisions is necessary. In order to accomplish this, I propose to adopt a conceptual tool developed in gender or women's studies: intersectionality.

Heralded by McCall (2005:1771) as the 'most important theoretical contribution' of women's studies, intersectionality is a theory developed by feminist thinkers that offers a way of conceptualizing factors that divide society and accounting for the 'social positioning of the

social agent' (Yuval-Davis 2011:3). The theory was developed by black feminists in the United States in response to a perceived homogenization of female experiences within feminist theory. Seeing that a certain universal conception of 'womanhood' was being articulated in binary opposition to masculinity with little regard for the differences between women, these feminists argued for a more nuanced interpretation of the female experience that recognized the influence of other social factors, most notably race and class. The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 as a way to account for the way other factors, in addition to gender, such as race, ethnicity, and class differentially situate people. In its most basic form, intersectionality is a metaphor. It is a way of understanding the complexity of multiple forms of social divisions by seeing them as intersecting roads (Yuval-Davis 2011). It reconciles a modernist idea of commonalities of experience with a more post-modern, post-structuralist recognition of the subjectivity of individuals by nesting the somewhat vague idea that 'differential situatedness [...] affects the ways they affect and are affected by different social, economic and political projects' (Yuval-Davis 2011:4) in a powerful metaphor.

In recent years, intersectionality has crossed into policy and popular culture realms. It has, for example, been used in hard form to draw attention to the ways in which victims of simultaneous gender and race discrimination are left unprotected by anti-discrimination laws that only address single forms of discrimination and in soft form by bloggers exploring their self-identity as intersections of racial, sexual, class, political, and physical characteristics (Olesky 2011). Thus, while the ambiguity of intersectionality has not been resolved, it has paradoxically accounted for the theory's widespread application (Davis 2008).

While some present intersectionality as a theory and others a methodology, I propose to utilize it as a tool with which to conceive of the heterogeneity at play in RAS integration. In order to do so and in response to the specificities of my case study, I propose to employ a modified version of the metaphor in which the traditional gender focus is replaced with a focus on sectarian divides, while maintaining gender as an intersecting factor alongside race, ethnicity, age, class, and faith.

The Northern Irish case presents a dramatic example of social division, one in which the question of 'what' refugees and asylum seekers are integrating into is particularly poignant. As a society in which the norm is for people to live in communities with people who share their cultural and religious backgrounds and to send their children to religiously-affiliated, non-mixed schools, there is no question that Northern Ireland is divided. It is important, however, to recognize that while sectarian divisions mean those who are loyalist Protestants and those who are republican<sup>3</sup> Catholics each form separate communities based on different cultural, religious, and political values and practices, these communities are themselves internally heterogeneous. Indeed, though sectarianism plays an overarching role in dividing society, other factors such as age, gender, class, race, and ethnicity also contribute to social positioning and divisions.

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<sup>3</sup> Unlike in many texts about Northern Ireland, I will not capitalize this term or the term 'loyalist,' because they are political philosophies or positions on constitutional questions and not political parties.

While the inclusion of sectarianism in an intersectional framework is not new<sup>4</sup>, applications of intersectionality to Northern Ireland have thus far retained gender as their central analytical concern. However, because the single most dramatic division shaping people's lives in this region is sectarianism, I propose to foreground sectarianism instead. This modified use of intersectionality will allow me to account for the diversity of experiences of sectarianism and the fact that people are simultaneously being shaped by other social, cultural, political, and economic factors. While intersectionality traditionally foregrounds gender divisions, even those writing within the feminist tradition recognize that in specific social locations and time periods, certain social divisions have a greater effect on people (Yuval-Davis 2011).

Thus, I will utilize this modified version of intersectionality, in which sectarianism is foregrounded, as a tool to map the players, locations, and layers of RAS integration in Northern Ireland. Underlying my analysis is the fundamental notion that people's social positions are shaped by intersecting factors of difference such as sect, gender, age, class, race, or faith, and I will articulate my two-part analysis within the powerful metaphor of intersectionality. My analysis will begin by looking at the players of integration, specifically examining the ways in which broader categories of difference are developed on top of a complex web of intersecting factors. The role of location in integration will then be explored by considering the importance of territory in creating spaces of inclusion and exclusion.

## 4 Understanding the Northern Ireland context

### **The troubles and their legacy**

In order to examine the players of integration, I will first describe the contemporary situation in Northern Ireland, which is inseparable from the decades of sectarian violence known as the 'Troubles' that defined the region from the late 1960s until 1998. In this bloody period, the threat of bomb attacks, shootings, and street disturbances, the erection of checkpoints and blockades dividing towns and cities, the presence of British and Irish security forces on the streets, and the establishment of paramilitaries on both sides of the sectarian divide defined the very social fabric of Northern Irish society. At the centre of the conflict was a constitutional battle in which republicans, who were largely Catholic, wanted a united Ireland in which Northern Ireland would become a part of the Republic of Ireland, and loyalists, who were largely Protestant, wanted Northern Ireland to retain its union with Great Britain. However, the Troubles were also more broadly about preserving each community's way of life against perceived threats from the other (Key Informant C, April 2012). Furthermore, the Troubles were the site of significant civil rights struggles and a time when the rates of social problems such as alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, and domestic violence soared (Purdie 1990; Murphy 1978). Recognizing these complexities beyond the constitutional question is particularly important in building an intersectional model for the present, because they indicate that elements of the Troubles affected people involved differently depending on the

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<sup>4</sup> Rooney's (2007) work on women in transitional Northern Ireland introduced the additional factor of sect in a triad of gender, sect, and class meant to replace the traditional triad she understood as being gender, race, and class.

way factors of differences applied to and shaped them. While there is no doubt that the republican-loyalist divide was and continues to be the root of much social tension, other factors were influential. For example, class inequalities were the basis of civil rights struggles and women and children were disproportionately affected by domestic violence and teenage pregnancy. Thus, one can understand how the intersections of sect, class, and gender affected people differently during the Troubles and deduce that these intersections have continued to have different implications in post-conflict Northern Ireland.

Much like how the emphasis on sectarianism often overshadows other social problems and struggles of the Troubles, the idea that Northern Ireland is a 'post-conflict' society often overshadows residual social issues. While this is a widely used term to refer to the period of relative non-violence following the ceasefires of the late 1990s and the peace agreement of 1998, much evidence suggests that social divisions in Northern Ireland remain deeply entrenched and, in fact, that certain divisions have since grown stronger. According to the NI Peace Monitoring Report, published in 2012, the threat of paramilitarism remains active, and sectarian divisions around schooling and housing remain strong. The number of peace walls – barriers that separate republican and loyalist communities – have more than doubled, from 22 to 48, since the peace agreement was signed, 92.5% of school children attend religiously-affiliated, non-mixed schools, and 90% of people living in community housing reside in single identity communities (Nolan 2012). Indeed, the current status quo is at best coexistence free of violence and, often, merely superficial forms of tolerance.

### **Refugees and asylum seekers situation**

Non-governmental organizations working with refugees and asylum seekers in this deeply divided region have actively constructed a narrative of asylum that cuts across the sectarian divide. Embrace NI and the Refugee Action group cite historical examples of asylum in Northern Ireland accepted by both communities such as the Huguenots fleeing persecution in the 17th century, Jews fleeing pogroms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the UK government's resettlement initiative for Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s amongst others in their publicity materials aimed at the broader Northern Irish population. While other parts of the UK have a documented history of granting refugee status since the adoption of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its accompanying 1967 protocol from which they can draw support for the idea of an existing norm in their region, Northern Ireland does not. It received almost no asylum applications during the Troubles, which constitutes the bulk of the period since the convention and protocol were adopted. In addition, to this day, Northern Ireland is not a dispersal area for asylum applicants or refugees under UK policy. By drawing on examples of asylum that predate the convention and protocol, and by pointing to the only resettlement project ever conducted in the region, NGOs rely on examples in which the population in question was granted asylum either before the current international legal definition was adopted or in situations where their refugee status had been recognized in their first country of refuge. What these examples do not represent and what is an increasing reality in Northern Ireland is that people not yet recognized as refugees are fleeing persecution and are now arriving directly in Northern Ireland in hopes of receiving status.

The process of seeking asylum differs in Northern Ireland from that in Great Britain. Despite the fact that immigration is a reserved matter – meaning the UK government retains legislative power in the matter, including asylum procedures – immigration lawyers find that

differing regional realities do shape applicants' experiences of the proceedings (Key Informant A, April 2012). Although court procedures are much as they are in Great Britain, the limited resources in Northern Ireland can affect the perceived credibility of an asylum seeker's claim. For example, qualified immigration officers are not always stationed at ports of arrival, so refugees are often unable to apply for status at their first port of entry, which in turn can raise suspicion later on in their screening and asylum interviews. Even though those who do not apply at their first port of entry can do so through the Bryson One-Stop-Service for Asylum Seekers, which forward applications to the immigration authorities at Drumkreen House, the time elapsed before filing the claim can prove to be a problem. Immigration officials conducting screening and in-depth asylum interviews often see the time elapsed as undermining the sense of urgency expected of people fleeing persecution, and this detracts from the applicant's perceived credibility. Finally, other non-governmental institutional realities also colour applicants' chances of being granted status. As there are no professionals trained to determine and testify to torture in Northern Ireland, applicants often have to rely on inexperienced physicians whose testimony is less credible. In exceptional cases, some applicants may be able to secure the funds to travel to Great Britain for appointments with experts, but these journeys may serve to aggravate the physical and emotional issues they face (Key Informant A, April 2012).

Despite the aforementioned challenges, a growing number of people are choosing to seek asylum directly in the Northern Ireland. Because Northern Ireland is not a dispersal centre, people claiming asylum in Great Britain are never sent to Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) does not compile the same level of data about Northern Ireland as it does for other parts of the UK. To complicate matters, the statistics which the UKBA does compile and make public are presented with the Scottish statistics in a way that does not always allow the two to be separated. While this presents a serious challenge to understanding the quantitative asylum reality in Northern Ireland, local NGOs have been producing statistics for a number of years based on their experiences, and the Home Office has recently released some relevant statistics. Between April 2008 and March 2009, Bryson forwarded 194 support applications to the Home Office, which included 164 single people and 30 families, of whom 146 were male and only 48 were female. The most common countries of origin of these applicants were Somalia, the People's Republic of China, Zimbabwe, and Kuwait. More recently, between April 2010 and March 2011, the Home Office received applications from 293 people of whom 91 were dependents. Of the main applicants, 137 were male and 65 were female, and the principal countries of origin were Somalia, Sudan, the People's Republic of China, Iran, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. There was, therefore, an increase by a third in the number of asylum applications between April 2008 and March 2011 and estimates from Bryson suggest that the numbers continue to rise (McNulty 2011). As of January 2012, there were 90 families, totaling 274 members, and 70 single people receiving asylum cash support and accommodation (McNulty 2012). There are also a small number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Northern Ireland, who are not accounted for in the government figures, because they are the responsibility of Social Services rather than Immigration (Key Informant F, April 2012).

While no figures are available about the percentage of applications that have been successful, the UK-wide rate of 17% being granted refugees status, 8% being granted Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave, and 75% being refused may be used as a guide (Home

Office 2011). In 2008, the Refugee Action Group estimated that approximately 2000 status refugees were living in Northern Ireland. The continued growth in asylum applications would suggest that this number has increased.

This increasing number of asylum seekers in the context of the Troubles' divisive legacy renders RAS integration in Northern Ireland a particularly interesting though understudied case. Thus, Northern Ireland, with its stark social divisions, represents a particularly strong case with which to explore the centrality of heterogeneity in RAS integration.

## 5 Mapping the players of refugee and asylum seeker integration

### **Intersecting factors of division in Northern Ireland**

In traditional two-way integration models, there are two groups of players: those who are refugees or asylum seekers and those who are members of the host community. In these binary models, distinctions are often made, within the refugee and asylum seeking population based on legal status and relative cultural and linguistic similarities to the host community and within the host community based on social and institutional roles in the community. However, this binary assumption impedes a proper re-conceptualization of the players involved in RAS integration

Clearly, these two categories are easily derived from common RAS integration definitions articulated in terms of mobility and residency rights. Their problematic nature stems from their failure to allow for the possibility of alternative divisions, and, more importantly of groups with differing mobility and residency rights sharing common experiences. Simply assuming this binary division would be inconsistent with the use of modified intersectionality. So, instead, I will begin by considering the factors of division across the entire population in order to derive applicable explanatory categories for the players, which allow us to see the continuities and discontinuities amongst refugees, asylum seekers, and hosts.

In Northern Ireland, factors of division traditionally considered in intersectional analysis, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and age exist alongside the additional factor of sect. While each factor has very real implications in both dividing people and establishing aspects of commonality, their effects are neither consistent across populations nor inherent to the people whom they affect, because their construction is deeply contextual and relational.

The social construction of difference is a late 20<sup>th</sup> century concept, which has dramatically reshaped how factors of differences are conceived. Gender, which was once conflated with sex and understood as a biologically derived differentiation of women and men that explained and justified gender expectations, is now widely accepted as processes of socialization distinct from biology. Thus, the once radical idea that 'one is not born a woman, one becomes one' (de Beauvoir 1972) is now the basis for rethinking femininity and masculinity as a range of gendered roles (Nobelius 2004). Indeed, the social construction of gender is now so

mainstream that the World Health Organization recognizes it as such in its definition (WHO, 2009).

Much like gender, race and ethnicity were also re-conceived as social constructs in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following the influential publications of Frantz Fanon (1967) and Albert Memmi (1957), important debates shifted understandings of race away from a focus on genetic differences toward a reconceptualization of race as a particular way that people speak about themselves and are spoken of. As Cornell and Hartmann explain, race is no more than 'a human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent [...for which...] neither markers nor categories are predetermined by any biological factors' (1998: 24). Ethnicity is generally thought of as subsidiary labels to race which are used to describe common 'cultural attachments, past linguistic heritage, religious affiliations, claimed kinship, or some physical traits' (1998: 19).

Unlike gender, race, and ethnicity, which are increasingly being re-conceived beyond biology and genetics, there is no doubt that age retains very significant meaning as a biological characteristic. However, as a socio-cultural and legal factor it gains different meanings in different contexts. It is clear that it has 'changed over time [...and...] varied among different cultures' (Hareven 2005: 119) and that laws and norms associated with age continue to differ across jurisdictions and cultures.

Finally, much like gender, race, ethnicity, and age, class was re-conceived as a product of context the processes of socialization and the choices people make (Thompson, 1963). While people are certainly born into particular socio-economic circumstances to which particular class meanings are attached, a person's class is a relational factor resulting from and indicative of particular social hierarchies which change over time and differ depending on contexts. Thus, each of these traditional factors, whether they be constructions based on physical, cultural, political, or economic characteristics, have differing social meanings in various relational contexts.

The additional factor of sect, central to the Northern Ireland case, is also the result of complex social processes that produce meanings. I will use the term 'sect' to refer to the factors of division which separate republicans and loyalists in Northern Ireland. While in this case religion clearly plays a role, the political and cultural components of sect are equally integral to its definition. Indeed, in Northern Ireland they are so deeply interconnected that they should not be conceived as separate elements. Republicanism is thus linked not only to Catholicism, but also to a particular sense of the need to struggle against a history of economic and social discrimination and to cultural traditions developed within republican communities over centuries. In contrast, loyalism is linked with a variety of denominations of Protestantism as well as with the cultural traditions that hold strongly to the value of sacrifice as a means of protecting the way of life of those communities. Thus, in this analysis, sect will refer to particular expressions of constitutional politics, socio-cultural heritage, and religious community. If each factor can be defined by its clusters of commonalities and its proper polarities, and thus differentiated from other factors, none are independent of each other. Neither gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, nor sect are experienced in the same way by each person they affect. Indeed, as Spelman explains, even if it were possible to separate them from each other, which it is not, all women, for example, would not experience womanhood in the

same way (1988). Instead, these factors intersect in mutually constructive ways, such that any grouping of people affected by a particular factor share particular characteristics, but are not thereby homogeneous. Using 'roads' as an intersectional metaphor, one can understand that different parts of the same road are not the same, but share certain characteristics.

Thus, in examining the way social categories are conceived and reinforced in Northern Ireland, it is important to recognize that these reductive categories are inherently heterogeneous. They are the result of processes of social differentiation whereby people make sense of the complexities of lived experiences through collective categories of identification that facilitate association and dissociation. These categories are the way people distinguish those with whom they chose to affiliate from those with whom they consciously disaffiliate themselves. These choices create the familiar and the unfamiliar, the acceptable and the unacceptable.

Categories emerge that position these factors within overarching efforts to separate those who are accepted as part of 'us' from those who are separated as 'not us.' While conceptualizations of 'us' and 'not us' do in many cases lead to dichotomous divisions, the situation in Northern Ireland is somewhat more complex. The simultaneous coexistence of sectarian divisions and of local/foreigner divisions in Northern Ireland means that, rather than a simple us/them dichotomy, I propose that there exists three categories of relevance: us, them, and other.

### **Defining difference: 'us,' 'them,' and 'other'**

In the Northern Ireland case, three overarching and sometimes overlapping categories of difference emerge in the context of the regions' complex intersections of factors of division. In this analysis, these categories are understood as 'us,' 'them,' and 'other.' Though the words 'us,' 'them,' and 'other' are used by people in Northern Ireland, neither the words themselves nor the definitions which I am attaching to them are pulled directly out of the Northern Irish lexicon. Instead, they are terms with diverse usages which I am narrowly defining so as to be able to use them to explain the conceptual categories I developed for the Northern Ireland case.

In my interpretation, 'us' is integral to sect. It refers to those who are perceived to be of the same religious denomination, who espouse the same political position on the constitutional question, and who conceive of each other as sharing a particular culture and heritage. 'Them,' on the other hand, refers to those who are perceived to practice a different form of Christianity, hold opposing views on the constitutional question, and are considered a threat to 'our' culture and heritage. 'Other' then refers to people who are understood as not being local and who have not been subsumed into either republican or loyalist communities. This last category is also commonly associated with differences in phenotypical characteristics and people for whom being in Northern Ireland is perceived as a temporary reality.

This categorization represents a conceptualization of the way those involved in RAS integration differentiate each other. Groups of people who constitute 'us' and 'them' categories will alternate depending on which local perspective is being engaged, because there is no set population and category link. For example, those who would fall under the 'us' category in a young Catholic republican male's perception of his society could easily fall under the 'them' category from the point of view of an elderly Protestant unionist woman's

perception of her society and vice versa. Furthermore, rather than being republican, loyalist, and other, which would link particular people with particular categories, the idea of the 'us,' 'them,' and 'other' categories firstly does not necessarily limit them to the historical and social meanings of those political labels, and secondly exists only in so far as they are conceived by those people involved. Thus, there is no 'them' or 'other' without an 'us' to differentiate them.

Local conceptions of community in Northern Ireland are strongly rooted in processes of celebration, memorialization, and participation, so the 'us' category is not just about a particular religion or constitutional political perspective; it mobilizes competing narratives, which these processes reinforce. Thus, being a part of a Protestant loyalist's 'us' might mean participating every July 12 in celebrations of the 1690 defeat of the Catholic King James by the Protestant King William of Orange, and memorializations of the now mythic November 1641 massacre of over one hundred English as part of an armed attack by Irish gentry in Portadown (McBride 2001: 21); similarly, being a part of a Catholic republican 'us' might mean participating in celebrations of the 1916 Easter-rising leader Patrick Pearse (27), and memorializations of the Great Famine of the 1840s and 1850s. Because these experiences in collectively developing community pride imbue contemporary traumas with the power of historical drama, they necessarily reinforce the 'us' category.

The 'them' category is then constructed in opposition to self-constructions of 'us' as another category largely rooted in local religious, political, and cultural experiences. It is based on perceptions of those seen as 'them', not on their own self-definitions. As such, those who are seen as fitting into 'us' and 'them' categories are not merely name reversals; they are qualitatively different ways of conceiving of particular groups of people by relying on the perceptions of one group to define the other. So, someone differentially perceived by members of the communal 'us' as being one of 'them' is seen as being of a different Christian denomination and holding opposing views on the constitutional question as well as being perceived as a threat to 'us.' In this way, the 'us' and 'them' categories tend to follow sectarian lines, but, by their very nature, conceptually allow for the inclusion of people who might not be considered in republican/loyalist dichotomies as either 'us' or 'them.'

The existence of the third category 'other' is then a further differentiation from the 'us' and 'them' categories. Unlike the latter two categories, which draw particularly heavily on the sectarian factors of division such as sect and faith, the idea of being 'other' is generally reserved for those who are not local and who are neither accepted as part of an 'us' nor rejected for the particular socio-political reasons those in the 'them' categories are. The ties that bind 'us' and 'them' categories, together despite their differences, such as common language, similar diets, and likely ancestry in the region that is currently Northern Ireland are generally not shared with those who are 'other.' 'Other' is thus a category made up of newer forms of socio-cultural difference whereby the people's values, traditions, or practices are understood to be different, but are not the subject of a long history of antagonistic identity building and are not, therefore, associated with the sectarian divide.

In their most extreme forms, these two different types of differentiation mean that those seen as 'them' are more likely to be the targets of sectarianism, whereas those seen as 'other' are more likely to be the targets of racism. The link between racism and sectarianism is the subject of much debate in Northern Ireland with some seeing the two as different sides of the same

coin, some arguing that sectarianism is a subset of racism, and some seeing the two as quite separate (Key Informant D, April 2012). In these debates, what is clear is that no matter how they relate to each other, there are differences between the two, which lead them to being separated in policy and practice. Statistical and anecdotal information about the two are almost always presented separately (Key Informant E, April 2012) and the traditional interpretation of a headline using the term 'racism', for example, would be to assume it is in reference to an incident against a minority ethnic person (Key Informant D, April 2012).

As a Northern Irish conflict expert explained it to me, there is a 'gap between sectarianism in Northern Ireland and racism' (Key Informant E, April 2012). While sectarian tensions are large-scale and manifested at set events such as the republican Bloody Sunday parade and the loyalist Orangemen's Day, he notes that there are no equivalent events at which racism is widely expressed. In fact, he argues, a minority ethnic festival such as Indian Mali or the Chinese New Year might attract support or participation from a diverse sectors of society and, if racist incidents were to occur, they would be widely condemned, because 'anti-racism is easier to express than anti-sectarianism.' This distinction between the two is particularly important in understanding the emergence of separate 'them' and 'other' categories as more than just ways of perceiving differences, but perhaps more importantly, as grounds on which to differentially discriminate.

### **Refugees and asylum seekers: us, them, or other?**

The mere fact that refugees and asylum seekers are not local might suggest they fall into the category 'other,' while the 'us' and 'them' divisions are made amongst local people, but the categories of refugees and asylum seekers and 'other' should not be conflated. Instead, it is necessary to look at what may make these forced migrants 'other' and in which scenarios and ways they might instead be seen as 'us' or 'them.'

Refugees and asylum seekers are united in that they have fled persecution and are in the process of seeking or have sought asylum, but they are also a diverse group of people, equally complex in the way they shape and are shaped by intersecting factors of differences. In theory, they may be of any gender, race, ethnicity, class, and age, and are likely to have different characteristics, practices, and values in common with different portions of the Northern Irish host population. Because so much of what makes 'us' and 'them' categories is a matter of perspectives and perceptions, and can be learned or adopted, there is nothing inherent to their beings that prevents them from being accepted as part of an 'us' or differentiated as part of 'them' rather than 'other.'

In practice, however, it seems that many refugees and asylum seekers are not accepted by any portion of the local population as part of their conception of 'us' and are treated differently from those within the host community who are perceived as part of a 'them' category, leaving them 'other' by default. There are two reasons that contribute to explaining this reality. First of all, most refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Northern Ireland are from the African continent, the Middle East, or the People's Republic of China and, therefore, have particular phenotypic differences when compared to the local population, such as skin colour, hair type, and distinctive facial features. These differences are immediately recognizable in face-to-face encounters and, from broader research on racism, we know are often the initial basis of differentiation (Amin 2007). Secondly, many refugees and asylum seekers are of faith

backgrounds or ethnicities not common to Northern Ireland, which can render them ‘doubly different’ as one Northern Irish person working with refugees and asylum seekers in Belfast put it. She explains that many of her neighbours and friends differentiate between those who were Protestant as opposed to Catholic or vice versa, but did not know what to do when someone had a different faith background (Key Informant D, April 2012). Indeed, as a Muslim refugee recounts, many Northern Irish people asked her whether she was a ‘Catholic Muslim’ or ‘Protestant Muslim’ when they first realized she was of a different faith (Key Informant H, April 2012), as if trying to situate her within an ‘us’ or ‘them’ category.

Since insufficient qualitative data on the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland exists to paint a complete picture of the way they become part of ‘us,’ ‘them,’ and ‘other’ categories in different people’s perceptions or how they perceive of these categories themselves, it suffices to say that particular characteristics of these populations render them more likely to be considered ‘other,’ but that a conceptualization of these categories must allow for the possibility that some might instead be seen as ‘us’ or ‘them.’

In order to shed greater light on the possibilities of these latter two categories applying to refugees and asylum seekers, it is useful to consider the experiences of other migrants in Northern Ireland. The experiences of Polish migrants, for example, shed light on the way certain migrants can be perceived in each of the three categories, depending on the perspective of those doing the categorizing. The perceptions of Polish migrants by local Northern Irish populations are largely influenced by two factors. Firstly, because they come from a largely Catholic country, many Polish immigrants are assumed to be Catholic. Secondly, because of phenotypic differences in appearance and socialized mannerisms, they are often quickly assumed to be migrants. These two assumptions work in different ways depending on who is perceiving them. If these migrants are seen as Polish first and Catholic second then they are often differentiated by both republicans and unionists as being ‘other,’ but if they are seen as Catholic first and Polish second, they may be accepted as part of an ‘us’ by republicans and grouped with local republicans as part of ‘them’ by unionists (Key Informants C, D, and I, April 2012).

While it is unlikely that Poland will produce a significant number of refugees in the coming years, this example of migrant experiences has important implications for refugees and asylum seekers, because it demonstrates that people who are not originally from Northern Ireland can be perceived as part of ‘us’ and ‘them’ categories. In this Polish example, the same intersecting factors of difference are perceived differently depending on who is perceiving them.

‘Us,’ ‘them,’ and ‘other’ are thus not the same categorizations as local republican, local loyalist, and non-local or migrant, but are instead conceptual categories that move beyond a mere recognition of the intersections of sect and legal status to account for the way people construct understandings of themselves and others based on perceptions of difference. The distinction between these two sets of categories is perhaps most clear when the question of territory is introduced, because refugees’ and asylum seekers’ experiences, changing legal statuses, and financial circumstances often affect where they live in the region. Once people have refugee status they disperse and then they are in locations where they are forced to negotiate sectarian

realities. Thus, the missing piece in understanding social positioning in the Northern Ireland context is territory.

## 6 Locating refugee and asylum seeker integration

### **Territorializing integration**

The introduction of territory into this analysis is a fitting one not only because of its necessity in understanding the Northern Irish case, but also because it contrasts the de-territorialization trend within refugee studies. As part of an emphasis on the recognition of refugees' agency and aspects of their identities which transcend particular territories, there has been a strong trend to de-territorialize conceptions of refugees. Indeed, many emphasize the aspects of refugeehood that prevail despite the territorial change inherent in experiences of migration, rather than those which are defined by territorial context (Brun 2001). For example, scholars emphasize that refugees' identities and their abilities to exercise power are not lost through displacement (Massey 1994a, b). In so doing, they challenge the temptation to define refugees by the territory in which they are located; instead, they emphasize the contradiction inherent in all forms of migration in which people are physically present in specific localities but are also simultaneously part of translocal communities 'rooted' in distant places (Olwig, 1997).

Though de-territorialization is important in conceptualizing the nuances of refugee experiences and identities, it has led scholars to de-emphasize the influence of location on refugee experiences. As Brun warns, there is a 'tendency to neglect the way many refugees and displaced persons express the experience of displacement in essentialist ways, and more generally [...] the possibilities and constraints that come from being in a particular place' (2001:15). While this was written a decade ago, recognizing that refugees and asylum seekers' experiences of integration are tempered by limitations of territory such as 'the attitudes of the host community, the policy environment in which the refugees find themselves and their livelihood opportunities' (2001:15) remains important. As Spicer (2008), whose own work highlights the importance of age, points out, there remain few studies which explore the role of 'place' in refugees' and asylum seekers' experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Literature emerging as part of a recent trend to move away from exceptionalizing refugees and asylum seekers and towards explorations of migration more broadly is useful in this regard. In an important ethnographic edited volume on cities, Schiller and Caglar (2011) avoid traditional state, ethnic group, or transnational community-based comparisons to look instead at the importance of cities as locations in which migrants have particular economic roles in processes of neoliberal restructuring. While their economic argument is not easily applied to refugee and asylum seeker populations, their acknowledgment of the interplay of factors such as class, race, gender, history, politics, and religion and the particular limitations and possibilities of place is important.

Acknowledging the influence of territory in RAS integration requires a conceptual understanding of the relationship between the players and locations of integration. Therefore, introducing the concept of territory must be more than merely superimposing a series of geographic locations on a roadmap of intersecting factors. It must involve recognizing that the

interplay of social positioning and geographic location shapes spaces of integration. People's social positions are simultaneously determining and determined by the location in which they reside. The values and narratives that dominate a particular area determine who will be included in this area; at the same time, the institutions in that area work to reinforce those values and narratives. In Northern Ireland, the way territory is linked to identity allows people to assess each other and determine what is a safe topic of conversation and what is not, by simply asking someone where they are from or where they currently live.

### **Mixed, loyalist, republican, and interface areas**

In the Northern Irish context, the territory in which refugees and asylum seekers live defines their experiences. Specifically, I argue only four types of territory exist in this region. My typology consists of mixed areas, loyalist areas, republican areas, and interface areas. Mixed areas are defined by the diversity of ethnic backgrounds of the resident population and are areas where sectarian divisions are the least visible. In loyalist and republican areas, on the other hand, the controlling sect establishes who belongs and what enforced practices of exclusion operate in the area. Finally, interface areas, where republican and loyalist areas meet, are the sites of high levels of tension. Each of these types of territory consists of different populations, reinforce specific articulations of inclusion and exclusion, and are the sites of particular forms of violence.

While pockets of diversity exist within republican and loyalist areas, there is only one truly mixed area in Northern Ireland: South East Belfast. People of diverse ethnic backgrounds live elsewhere in Northern Ireland, but this part of Belfast is particular in its diversity and in its relative isolation from broader sectarian realities. In South East Belfast, diversity reinforces itself (Key Informant E, April 2012). It is home to Queen's University, a public research university founded in 1849 that boasts more than 17,000 students and 3,000 academic and administrative staff and has long attracted academics and students from around the world (Queen's University Belfast 2012). The initial ethnic diversity associated with the university has since been reinforced by migration patterns from the EU and other countries. Ethnic restaurants and stores are common, and resources for migrants, such as language courses and social clubs, have been developed in the area (Key Informant D and H, April 2012). Because the area has such a high number of university students requiring accommodation for limited periods of time, there is a high turnover rate; making it relatively easy to find rental accommodation (Key Informant F, April 2012). Thus, with the existence of an ethnically diverse population, resources for migrants, and available accommodation, South East Belfast has become a preferred area for newcomers who, by settling there, reinforce the area's diversity. This process of reinforcement has also isolated the area from the kinds of divisions that so deeply define life for the vast majority Northern Ireland. One migrant explained to me that she was not aware of the sectarian divisions until eight months after she arrived, because she had not had the opportunity to see other parts of the city or region (Key Informant F, April 2012). Her experience was echoed by an NGO worker who had herself come to Northern Ireland as a refugee. While peace walls and murals are very visible signs of sectarianism elsewhere, she explained that their absence in South East Belfast means that some newcomers to this area remain relatively ignorant of sectarianism (Key Informant H, April 2012).

Such ignorance would not be possible elsewhere in Northern Ireland. Loyalist and republican areas in Northern Ireland are places where the community's single-sect identity is celebrated and territory is fiercely defended. Similarities in the way republican and loyalist areas are defined abound, but the differences in the particular type of community each is creating and reinforcing are stark. These single identity communities are defined by their residents and the cultural sites that exist on the territory. The vast majority of residents in these areas are of the dominant sect with certain families having resided there for generations. In some communities, residual paramilitary activity also works to enforce this segregated reality. Thus, the names of the neighbourhoods or of the major streets are associated with either loyalism or republicanism in the Northern Irish public imagination. The existence of Catholic or Protestant schools and churches in an area limits who will choose to reside there, and then has the reinforcing effect of ensuring only the particular versions of history and values of these single-identity communities are taught.

People residing in these areas demarcate their territory through visible signs like painted sidewalks, poles, and murals. The edges of sidewalks and telephone and signage poles, for example, are often painted with alternating stripes of blue, white, and red in loyalist areas and green, white, and orange in republican areas. Murals in republican areas depict images of socio-historic significance to the community, such as the Battle of the Bogside, Bloody Sunday, the hunger strikes of the 1970s, and civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Murals in loyalist areas depict paramilitary symbols and members, violent attacks committed by republican paramilitaries, and historical figures such as William of Orange and Oliver Cromwell. While new murals depicting images of peace and tolerance have, in some areas, been painted in recent years to replace some of the more violent murals of the past, and a small number of integrated schools aimed at bringing together Catholic and Protestant students do exist, the territorial division of Northern Ireland into republican and loyalist areas remains strong despite contemporary peace and reconciliation initiatives.

The last type of territory in my analysis of Northern Ireland is a direct result of these ongoing divisions. Interface areas are those where republican and loyalist areas meet. They represent 'the intersection of segregated and polarised working class residential zones, in areas with a strong link between territory and ethno-political identity' (Jarman 2004). While being a part of whichever community they border, these interface areas differ in their level of visible tension. They are so often the site of sectarian violence that they have become known as 'flashpoints' (Heatly 2004), and estimates suggest there are nearly 90 barriers that run along these divisions (BBC 2012).

### **Asylum seeker to refugee: territorial transitions**

Refugees and asylum seekers' often experience these different types of territories at different stages of their integration process in Northern Ireland. When asylum seekers first arrive in the region, they are almost always in need of accommodation. While a very small minority may either have enough money to afford to rent accommodation on their own or may know someone in Northern Ireland with whom they can stay, most apply for accommodation support. Asylum seeker accommodation is provided through the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) for those whose claims are being assessed. Though their accommodation is arranged by the NIHE, it is not Housing

Executive property. Asylum seekers are currently only housed in privately rented accommodation in South East Belfast (Key Informant B, April 2012).

If these asylum seekers are not granted refugee status or exceptional or humanitarian leave to remain, they become ineligible for housing from the NIHE and can neither apply for permanent nor homeless accommodation (Housing Advice NI 2012). If, however, they are granted refugee status or other rights to remain, they are then entitled to claim benefits in Northern Ireland, including those of the NIHE. In practice, this means that the same people who were housed in South East Belfast as asylum seekers are then considered as part of a larger pool and can then be placed anywhere in Northern Ireland where the NIHE has available housing. Since asylum seekers are not entitled to seek gainful employment, they rarely have the funds to support themselves on their own and, therefore, do largely make use of NIHE housing until they are able to support themselves in their own rented or purchased accommodation.

In practice, these policies mean that asylum seekers almost always reside in a mixed area while their claim is being processed and then, if granted residency rights, they are often forced to transition to living in loyalist, republican, or interface areas if they cannot afford to stay in South East Belfast (Key Informant I, April 2012). Understanding refugees' and asylum seekers' changing experience of territory is thus key to understanding the complexities of integration.

Experiences of transitioning from mixed areas to more divided ones vary, and the limited data on refugee experiences makes firm conclusions about their experiences impossible. My interviews of key informants and my observations of interactions at public events certainly illustrate a range of possible experiences that newcomers may have in integrating into these divided areas. They demonstrate that these territorial realities necessarily have a strong impact on how refugees are perceived of as being 'us,' 'them,' or 'other.'

Those who apply for housing through the NIHE, for example, are often placed in loyalist areas, because working-class loyalist areas have some of the cheapest housing in Northern Ireland. In some of these loyalist areas, there exists a strongly held belief that the NIHE is run by republicans whose intent in placing refugees in their neighbourhood is to push loyalists out. This conspiracy theory necessarily positions refugees as 'them' in these loyalists' perceptions (Key Informant I, April 2012).

The experiences of those who are not placed in loyalist areas, but rather choose to rent accommodation in these areas on their own, differ greatly. In one telling anecdote, a woman who had rented accommodation close to the hospital where she was employed decorated her window with a tri-colour flag of the Republic of Ireland, hoping to demonstrate to her neighbours that she wanted to become a part of their community, not realizing she was doing so in a militantly loyalist housing estate. Her neighbours then interpreted her gesture as strongly republican or 'them,' and her family became the victims of sectarian violence (Key Informant F, April 2012). In contrast, however, there are Polish communities who are well established in loyalist working class areas, and are able to act in ways that locals cannot, because they were seen as 'other.' In these cases, the Poles are, for example, allowed to go to Catholic schools and churches without facing sectarian discrimination or violence from their loyalist neighbours (Key Informant E, April 2012).

Similar examples of both inclusion and exclusion of migrants exist in republican communities. In discussing the possibility of moving to West Belfast, a group of migrants talked to me about the better social services and lower childcare costs the dominant republican political party Sinn Féin ensured for the area. Although one migrant did reference the many murals and visible signs of solidarity towards Palestinians and Basques as evidence that republican communities might be more accepting of others, the consensus in this particular group of migrants was that these forms of solidarity should not be accorded too great a significance. Instead, the stories they had each heard from their friends suggested that the limited availability jobs and accommodation were in practice much more influential and divisive than the level of solidarity expressed in republican narratives might suggest. These divisions have been all the more difficult for those living in interface areas. In July 2011, when violence broke out between those on the loyalist Corcrain Road and those on the republican Obins Drive in Portadown, immigrant families from East Timor were caught up in the violence and forced to flee (Guardian 2011).

In each of these cases, the decision to accept or reject migrants was made by the dominant sect, whether loyalist or republican, and the migrants' decisions to move to these areas came with quite varied prior understandings of the areas. Initial experiences are not always indicative of peoples' long-term experiences. An uninformed faux pas made in a migrant's early days in a community may determine their experiences in that area for years or may be forgotten or forgiven as people increasingly participate in these communities. The example of the Polish community certainly demonstrates that some migrants have been very successful in establishing themselves over a period of time, but other examples point to a rather more difficult reality: sometimes, as time passes and people become more deeply involved in their new communities, they are forced to conform to the ways of a particular sect.

In an exchange indicative of the tension between desires to live safe and peaceful lives and the way territorial realities impose sectarian divisions on people, a newly arrived immigrant man explained to a refugee woman, who had already received status and been in Northern Ireland for two years, that he intended to 'stay out' of the sectarian conflict, because it was 'not [his] war.' The woman responded by telling the man that he was 'naive' and that if he had children he would understand that people cannot opt out of sectarianism in Northern Ireland. She explained by way of example that people are forced to choose to which sect's school they want to send their children (Public Event A, 12 April 2012). Another woman, who had migrated to Northern Ireland from within the UK, echoed this comment by explaining that, having married a local Catholic man, she was expected to send her children to a Catholic school even though she was interested in sending them to an integrated, mixed school.

These experiences point to an important, albeit ironic, relationship between actions that are so often considered indicators of integration and experiences of sectarian divisions. In traditional models of integration, sending one's children to school and marrying a local spouse are considered indicators of successful integration, because they represent a strong level of engagement with local customs and people. However, in the case of Northern Ireland, these actions are deeply symbolic and can trigger strong and divisive responses from the host community. Becoming part of an 'us' group indicates a certain level of acceptance but carries with it demanding expectations.

Thus, it is the combination of mutually constructed territorial dynamics and perceptions of ‘us,’ ‘them,’ and ‘other’ that limits and defines integration. Different people necessarily have different experiences of integration depending on who they are, which community they are integrating into, and what assumptions those involved are making about each other. These experiences differ because of the variety of lived experiences, which in turn can only be understood by acknowledging the different factors at play in their lives.

## 7 Conclusion

As a fundamental challenge to assumptions of homogeneity inherent in both relativist (Kuhlman, 1991) and universalist (Banki 2004, Jacobsen 2001) integration models, this research moves beyond seeing implied homogeneity as a limitation (Sigona 2005, Strang and Ager 2010) to suggest a new approach that engages heterogeneity. By looking at the way players of integration accept and reject each other by constructing categories of difference and the way integration is located in territories of inclusion and exclusion, I have illustrated the heterogeneity of RAS integration experiences.

To this end, I have used a modified form of intersectionality as a tool with which to re-conceptualize the social and territorial interrelations that shape integration. By exploring the range of possible experiences through specific examples, I have shown how intersectionality plays out in reality. The examples presented in this paper are not only useful in building an empirical understanding of the reality in Northern Ireland, but are integral to building a theoretical understanding of integration that recognizes heterogeneity. Intersectionality goes beyond recognizing human agency; it places peoples’ varied lived experiences at the center of theoretical reflection.

Intersectionality highlights the problematic nature of the literature’s presumption of homogeneity. By starting from a recognition of heterogeneity, intersectionality underscores that people negotiate integration in different ways depending on their social position and relationship to territory. My exploration of the players and locations of integration has shown their integration experiences to differ in the different communities, because perceptions and territory shape the choices people can and do make. Factors of difference such as a refugee or asylum seekers’ gender, age, faith, class, and phenotypical characteristics, as well as the social interrelations and territorial dynamics of the context, necessarily influence their experiences of integration. I have illustrated the influence of gender and generation, when parents choose schools for their children; the influence of faith, when migrants are of the same religion as some members of the host society; and the influence class, when poor migrants are forced to find cheap rent in often volatile areas, while wealthier ones are able to choose the area in which they want to reside based on its services.

These discrepancies in experiences reflect broader societal inequalities. The critique that because integration is constructed by an elite who benefit from particular power structures and dynamics, integration discourses tend to reinforce status quo (Choules 2007, Martson 2004), is relevant to the Northern Ireland case. In this case, however, it is not about

reinforcing the status quo, but rather about reinforcing the new political order born of the 1998 peace agreement. Through particular forms of power sharing that ensure both sects are represented in government positions and the passing of legislation (Northern Ireland Act, 1998) and by the fact that politicians' power bases are sects, institutionalized sectarianism projects the past into the future. While there is no official discourse of RAS integration in Northern Ireland and discussions about more general migrant integration are only recently gaining momentum with the establishment of the Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership, a similar reinforcing process exists in the region. Even in the absence of RAS integration plans or policies, integration reinforces existing power relations. The political project of post-1998 Northern Ireland denies the possibility of genuine integration, because it is itself built on the recognition of sectarian divides whose elimination would compromise their power base. This denial of a societal level, local integration is the basis for the very forms of division which complicate RAS integration.

The fundamental irony in the Northern Irish case is that forms of division create similarities. Northern Ireland is deeply divided by a sectarian conflict, where both sects construct themselves through social, cultural, and political opposition to each other. Both sides of the divide, however, employ very similar forms to construct and to reproduce their sectarian identities. Both loyalists and republicans engage in celebrations and memorializations to affirm their historical narratives, use highly visual ways to demarcate their territory, such as painting sidewalks, poles, and murals, and consolidate identities through institutions, such as religious schools and denominational churches.

These similarities form the basis for the 'us,' 'them,' and 'other' categories used by both sects to justify their equivalent forms of inclusion and exclusion. For refugee and asylum seekers it is these shared sectarian sensibilities that not only constructs them initially as the 'other,' but creates quite unrealistic expectations. While loyalists and republicans exist in a mutually constitutive, non-integrated, and antagonistic relationship, refugees and asylum seekers are expected to actively participate in a community which is itself divided. Thus, refugees and asylum seekers are expected to accomplish the impossible task of integrating into a non-integrated society.

The impossibility of their situation is the direct result of the region's dichotomous sectarian conflict, but it is not a uniquely Northern Irish problem. The entrenched sectarian divisions are, in many ways, what makes the case of RAS integration in the region so interesting. Though most democratic societies have, since 1950s, moved away from these sorts of divisions, Northern Ireland remains deeply divided on sectarian lines. Yet, while the Northern Irish case is exceptional for the depth of its sectarian divide and the level of related historical violence and ongoing tensions, the divisive dynamics noted here operate at other levels in all Western societies.

The stark divisions in Northern Ireland elucidate the problems refugee and asylum seekers face more broadly, because divisions along other lines exist in all societies. The difference, however, is that in liberal democratic societies, sectarianism is widely condemned, while divisions along other lines, such as gender, race and class are normalized. Yet, these other divisions do operate in a very similar manner. Collective processes influenced by perception through which people associate and dissociate themselves from others and forms of spatial

boundary making whereby people include and exclude others are common along different lines of divisions across liberal democracies. Thus, the exceptionalism of Northern Ireland, in fact, allows us to better conceptualize the 'normal' in liberal democratic societies.

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## 9 Appendix

### Profile of interviews

Interviews were conducted by the author in April 2012 in Belfast. For the sake of further anonymizing my interviews, specific dates are not listed. All interviews took place between April 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Code Name	Job/Volunteer Position	Immigration Status
Key Informant A	Immigration Lawyer	UK citizen
Key Informant B	Manager, NGO working with refugees and asylum seekers	UK citizen
Key Informant C	Volunteer, NGO working on refugee and asylum seeker and broader migration issues	UK citizen
Key Informant D	Volunteer, NGO working with refugees and asylum seekers and other migrants	UK citizen
Key Informant E	Researcher, Northern Irish research organization working on issues of conflict (including refugees and asylum seekers and migration)	UK citizen
Key Informant F	Doctoral Student researching unaccompanied minor asylum seekers	Migrant (with residency rights)
Key Informant G	Employee, NGO working on community issues including migration	Refugee (with status)
Key Informant H	Employee, statutory agency dealing with migration	Refugee (with status)
Key Informant I	Employee, partnership dealing with migration	UK citizen

### Profile of observations

Observations were conducted by the author in April 2012 in Belfast and Newtownabbey.

Code Name	Event Description	Date
Public Event A	Weekly integration initiative led by volunteers in which migrants and locals are encouraged to meet and develop friendships.	April 19, 2012
Public Event B	Integration workshop involving over 25 employees from relevant statutory agencies and non-governmental organizations as part of larger conference organized by migration partnership.	April 19, 2012