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The Changing Face of Belfast: An Oral History of Immigration to the City after the Signing of the Good Friday Agreement

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History

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the history of migration to Belfast from outside of the UK from the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 to the time of writing in 2024. Using an oral history approach, it aims to centre the voices of migrants and use them to guide the conversation around how the recent history should be viewed. Combined with newspaper reporting and census data from the period, the interviews also allow for a more nuanced understanding of the differences in the experience of immigrants to the city in the last 26 years as

compared to the during the Troubles conflict before. The findings also highlight the mismatch between the perception of Belfast as an extremely racist place, and its reality as a city with problems like any other. The dissertation expands on the recent literature by Jack Crangle and Marta Kempny that attempts to view Belfast and Northern Ireland through the perspective of an immigrant.

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The Changing Face of Belfast: An Oral History of Immigration to the City after the Signing of the Good Friday Agreement

A thesis submitted to the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy, and Politics of the Queen's University of Belfast in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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List of Abbreviations

A.C.S.O.N.I	African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland
C.W.A	Chinese Welfare Association
G.F.A	Good Friday Agreement
E.U.	European Union
I.C.C	Indian Community Centre
M.L.A	Member of the Legislative Assembly
N.I.H.E	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
N.I.L.T	Northern Ireland Life and Times
N.I.S.R.A	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
O.B.E.	Order of the British Empire
P.S.N.I	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Q.U.B	Queen's University
R.R.O	Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Ordinance
U.A.E	United Arab Emirates
U.D.A	Ulster Defence Association
U.K	United Kingdom
U.S.A	United States of America
U.V.F	Ulster Volunteer Force

Introduction

It was clear to residents of Northern Ireland and observers worldwide that the 1998 signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) would start a period of Northern Irish prosperity. As the conflict between Nationalist and Loyalist forces eased, there was and continues to be a sense that, as a part of the United Kingdom (UK), it was now a place that could provide a lot of opportunities for individuals wanting to start a new life away from their home countries. From the signing until now, but especially from the expansion of the European Union (EU) in 2006 to the UK's secession from it in 2016, many immigrants have come to Northern Ireland each year. According to the 2021 Census, most of these immigrants are not White a group that makes up 96.6% of Northern Ireland's population and thus are a small minority.[1] This, combined with the fact that migrants usually have a Catholic faith or a faith not common in Northern Ireland, means that immigrants to Northern Ireland can have difficulty being a part of the wider culture in the region, or be part of a community that could be the victims of sectarianism, which led to many racist interactions with members of the native population.[2] Combined with the recency of the rise of immigration, academia (especially history) has neglected to research this group, leaving many unaware of the community. This section will provide an overview of what research has been done on immigrants to Northern Ireland thus far and illustrate the need for an oral history of immigrants who moved to Northern Ireland after the signing of the GFA.

While immigration in large numbers only started in the last 25 years, there has been a documented population of modern migrants in Northern Ireland since the late nineteenth

[1] Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency, 2021 Census, 2021. https://build.nisra.gov.uk/en/custom/data?d=PEOPLE&v=SETTLEMENT15&v=COB_AGG4&v=ETHNIC_GROUP_AGG2&~SETTLEMENT15=N11000151&~COB_AGG4=4.

[2] Ibid, https://build.nisra.gov.uk/en/custom/data?d=PEOPLE&v=SETTLEMENT15&v=COB_AGG4&v=RELIGION_BELONG_TO_AGG4&~SETTLEMENT15=N11000151&~COB_AGG4=4.

century.[3] While only a few thousand migrants were living in the region before 1998, and the following oral testimonies do not cover this period, it is important to discuss their lives in Northern Ireland because they can help frame the current experiences of immigrants. The first large wave of migration, which created the region's Indian, Chinese, and Italian communities, occurred between the end of the Second World War and the start of the Troubles. It was characterised by the creation of takeaways and door-to-door sales businesses, which allowed individuals with little connections to the cities they lived in to earn a reliable income from the locals.[4] As well as providing a near-immediate job for the first immigrants, ownership of an expanding business meant that it was easier to bring friends and family into the country, as they could be employed in their establishment. This process of chain migration allowed the first immigrant communities to quickly expand but also led to a lack of economic diversity within each community.[5] While the economic diversity problem did not affect incomes in many cases, it eventually created stereotypes centred around each community.

Pre-1998 Racism and its After-Effects

All three of the first immigrant communities faced, and continue to face, abuse directed towards them which is often focused on the profession in which the community primarily worked. While racism centred around professional stereotypes is not unique to Northern Ireland, it is important to understand its history in the region's unique context, as it influenced the lives of all immigrants. The Chinese community, the largest non-White group in Northern Ireland in the

[3] Jack Crangle, Migrants, Immigration and Diversity in Twentieth-century Northern Ireland (2023), p 25.
[4] Ibid, p 40.
[5] Martin N. Marger, 'Asians in the Northern Ireland Economy' in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, xv, no. 2 (1989), p 204.

twentieth century, provides a good case study into the unique long-term effects of this racism and illustrates its importance to this paper.[6]

Chinese immigrants to Northern Ireland, like those going to other parts of the UK, often came intending to set up small takeaways that brought their home cuisine to the Northern Irish public. Through the creation of these shops, the community was able to make use of chain migration to become a large community with enough capital to live decently. While successful, these takeaways demanded that much of the community work long hours, often late into the night. This meant that many, especially women (who were often only found at home or in the takeaway kitchen), were unable to properly participate in the wider Belfast community.[7] As such, the only interactions that many Chinese immigrants had with the local population were through the serving of food, and the lack of English skills meant conversations could rarely extend beyond the transactional.[8] Therefore, although Chinese takeaways became a staple in both Nationalist and Loyalist areas, Chinese migrants were not seen as full community members.[9] While other groups often had better command of the English language, members of other immigrant communities that lack it often find it extremely difficult to live in the region, due to the isolation caused by the language barrier.[10]

It is now easier than ever to remain connected with those who speak a migrant's native language, due to new technologies and an increase in cultural support in major cities that help build communities and connect people who speak the same language. Despite this, the historical disconnect between migrants and those born in Northern Ireland has led to a persistence of racial

[6] Crangle, p 138.
[7] Ibid, pp 155-9.
[8] Ibid, p 153.
[9] Ibid, p 46.
[10] Marta Kempny, *Polish Migrants in Belfast* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010), p 91.

stereotypes and racist acts being directed at the former communities. While racism was purposely not a major theme in the interview questions, as the author wanted to avoid portraying migrants to Northern Ireland simply as victims, its reality cannot be ignored, as it shapes aspects of their lives.[11]

The working-class element of most migrants is important to note, as it has meant that migrant communities form in working-class areas that have traditionally been known as only Nationalist or Loyalist. This is due to these areas having the lowest house prices, and thus In Belfast neighbourhoods such as the Donegall Pass, the Village and Sandy Row, both historically Protestant and connected to the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), Chinese and Polish migrants have settled and created small communities.[12] While the UDA and the UVF were formed to defend Protestant neighbourhoods from Republican paramilitary incursion, some members have begun to view defence against the presence of immigrants as a continuation of the original mandate. This is evidenced both in the common aggressions that migrants face in the areas and by the attacks on these populations. For the Catholic-majority Polish community in the Village, this quickly manifested in often being called slurs, being labelled as noisy and drunk, and occasionally having things thrown at their windows, as well as often being included in general anti-Catholic actions.[13] For multiple years from 2012, Polish flags were also burnt on the July 12th bonfires, a signal that Poles were an enemy of the Loyalist movement to 'protect' their communities from outsiders.[14] Because of this, Poles often felt that Protestants in their areas were to be avoided, and thus felt unsafe in their communities.[15]

[11] Appendix 2: Interview Questions.
[12] Anna Poloni, 'Bonfire Time in Belfast: Temporalities of Waste in a Loyalist Neighbourhood' in *Etnofoor*, xxxiii, no. 2 (2021), p 114. And Kempny, p 145.
[13] Kempny, p 144.
[14] Crangle, p 217.
[15] Kempny, pp 144-5.

While interviewing members of the Polish community, it was anticipated that this context would most likely feature prominently in their lived experience, but it did not.

Chinese migrants have been similarly isolated by their neighbours in their largest community on the Donegal Pass, despite very few of them identifying as Catholic. Instead, the antagonistic actions stem from the idea that the Chinese businesses in the area are removing the Protestant identity from the community.[16] Many of the actions were similar to the anti-Polish actions in the Village, but the visibility of the Chinese community has meant that there have also been more violent threats. This includes a 2003 statement made by rogue members of the UVF, calling for a large riot to remove all Chinese residents from the area.[17] However, despite this history, Ma, the Chinese interviewee did not mention racism at all.[18] The omission of racism from most of the interviewees suggests that it is not an issue at the forefront of their thoughts.

During the writing of this dissertation, a week of anti-immigration rioting occurred in Belfast and across the UK in response to the murder of three girls by a second-generation immigrant. These events damaged and destroyed many businesses that were known to be owned by immigrants, thus causing many to feel unsafe where they lived.[19] These events demonstrate that issues of racism are still present in the city and are part of the lived experience of many of those interviewed. However, while the events do factor into the analysis of migrants in Belfast, all interviews were conducted before the riots, meaning little could be done to analyse the events.

[16] Elizabeth Rosemary McKeever, 'The Construction of Collective Identity in Northern Ireland in Relation to Minority Ethnic and Immigrant Populations' (PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 2017), p 136.
[17] Ibid, p 157.
[18] Ma, Interview by Benjamin Harris, 1 July 2024.
[19] BBC News, 'Belfast: Police Condemn Violence and Disorder on Streets' in *BBC News* (2024) (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4nggpp5nz7o) (5 Aug. 2024).

While the author believes it is important to consider the riots, it has been done in a way that minimises conjecture about the future.

Community-Building

While racism has remained a constant presence in the lives of migrants, becoming a barrier to becoming close with many White Belfastians, it is important to recognise the efforts made by migrants to combat this, particularly through community-building efforts. This is evidenced by the various community organisations, such as the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) and the African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI). All these organisations are instrumental in aiding their communities, not just in providing spaces to celebrate elements of one's home culture, but also in acting as a liaison between the group it represents and other cultures, both from Northern Ireland and other migrant communities. This secondary goal has, in many instances, led to wider learning about other cultures, and more contact with them, which can help reduce inter-community tensions.[20] This theory is known as the contact hypothesis.[21] Due to their importance in these communities, an analysis of their history in Northern Ireland is important to better understand the interviews.

The first of these organisations to be founded in Northern Ireland was the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA), which was created in 1986 to help address many of the issues the community was facing.[22] Created partly as a response to the lack of anti-racism legislation, and partly to gather the community together within Northern Ireland ,the CWA became an organisation that not only provided opportunities to the Chinese community to practice their

[20] Wan Ting Wu, 'Dancing with Lions: The Assertion and Transformation of Chinese Community and Identity in Belfast' in *Queen's Political Review*, iii, no. 1 (2015), p 118.
[21] John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson, *Sport and Peace-Building in Divided Societies* (London, 2017), p 20.
[22] Suzanna Chan, '"God's Little Acre" and "Belfast Chinatown": Diversity and Ethnic Place Identity in Belfast' in *First EURODIV Conference: Understanding Diversity: Mapping and Measuring* (Milan, Apr. 2006), p 2.

culture and to take English lessons but also spent much of its time delivering anti-racism training to other organisations across the region, and lobbying Stormont and Westminster for more legislation.[23]

As Northern Ireland shifted from being a region with net emigration to net immigration in 2003, groups like the CWA, ACSONI, and the ICC were no longer the only supporters of migrant communities, as migrants began to gain confidence and create groups outside of them.[24] This is most evident in the various cultural festivals that have occurred in Belfast for the past 20 years, which have exposed a wide audience to many different cultures. Belfast City Council and local businesses have given space for cultural performances at some of the year's biggest events and have included traditional events from many cultures around the world within the local celebration calendar. Through her involvement with an independent Lion Dance group, Wu Wan Ting, a former QUB anthropology student and immigrant to Belfast, was able to connect with her Chinese identity and demonstrate it to audiences who would normally not have been exposed to Chinese culture, such as the Indian community at the ArtEkta's annual Mela and in Belfast's St. Patrick's Day parade. By showing aspects of Chinese culture to non-Chinese individuals, the Lion Dance allows the community to demand respect within Northern Ireland.[25] By normalising Chinese culture, there is also a perception that it can lower inter-community tensions, as explained by the contact hypothesis, which suggests that the more that different groups are exposed to each other, the more they will be able to find similarities that decrease stereotypes

[23] Ibid, p 3, and Crangle, p 163.
[24] Chris Gilligan, Paul Hainsworth and Aidan McGarry, 'Fractures, Foreigners and Fitting In: Exploring Attitudes Towards Immigration and Integration in "Post-Conflict" Northern Ireland' in *Ethnopolitics*, x, no. 2 (2011), p 254. And *Long-Term International Migration Statistics for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin (2012)*, by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (Belfast, 2013).
[25] Wu, p 115.

and racist/sectarian thoughts about the other group.[26] A more thorough discussion of this can be found in Chapter Two.

As events such as the ones Wu participated in become normalised, there has been a large shift in how immigrants to Northern Ireland operate, as culture becomes an external action rather than an internal one. However, racial harassment and assaults still frequently occur, rates of prejudice are rising within many communities, and many consider the PSNI's attempts to combat hate crimes as a failure due to low conviction rates.[27] This presents a potential dichotomy within the immigrant experience in the region, with displays of an immigrant's home culture becoming more common despite the seemingly growing risk it poses to the communities that host these events. While no attacks on these events have occurred, there are many negative conceptions of public displays of immigrant culture, as demonstrated by the August 2024 anti-immigration riots, which attacked minority-owned businesses.[28]

Addressing Issues in the Scholarship with Oral History

As demonstrated above, there are two conflicting narratives about the people's experiences after moving here. While both are rooted in the concept of being foreigners and far from their home culture, one is rooted in reconnecting with culture and the other with the fear of being racially abused by the local population. These two concepts are not mutually exclusive, with Kempny discussing both elements as a part of the broader experience.[29] The inclusion of these complexities in academic analysis is important because it allows the field to acknowledge that the human experience is complex and does not conform to linear stories. Since 1979, with

[26] Crangle, p 166.
[27] McKeever, pp 38-39.
[28] Connor Lynch and James Martin McCarthy, 'Police and Businesses Attacked during Overnight Disorder in Belfast' in Belfast Live, 5 Aug. 2024 (https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/live-updates-multiple-protests-planned-29670383).
[29] Kempny, p 70.

Portelli's pivotal defence of the practice, scholars have acknowledged that oral history was able to use the subjective experience of its subjects to its advantage, as it could better grasp the realities of the lived human experience.[30] Oral history is used as the primary method of evidence-gathering in this dissertation to better reflect the entire experience of immigrants in Belfast.

The set of questions that each participant was asked was not divided into 'positive' and 'negative' experiences, but by theme, and did not mention problems, such as racism, by name.[31] This was done to ensure the results and subsequent discussion of them reflect the holistic experience that can be captured by oral history and to give the participants the agency to discuss the elements of their lives that they feel are important, rather than what the researcher believes is important. In shifting the focus of the interview into a conversation that can be guided by the interviewee, they become a creator of the historical analysis, which allows the researcher to think about the history of the interviewee through the lens of how the latter perceives it.[32] Baird also demonstrated in her history of migrants from New Zealand that it is important to consider that the interviewees' memory will not be perfect, and thus needs to be understood within the context of how people remember. This allows the interviewer to not only understand what occurred but also how the interviewee interpreted the event.[33] These approaches help to ensure that there is as little positive or negative bias in the telling of the history of immigration as possible. This dissertation used these values to improve the analysis of the interviews.

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[30] Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce and Jason Ruiz, 'What Makes Queer Oral History Different' in *Oral History Review*, xliii, no. 1 (2016), p 2.
[31] Appendix 2.
[32] Amanda de Mello Calabria, 'Life story, Prostitution and Activism: Challenges and Possibilities of Research in co-creation' in *Global Public Health*, xvii, no. 10 (2022), p 2516.
[33] Rosemary Baird, 'Constructing Lives: A New Approach to Understanding Migrants' Oral History Narratives' in *Oral History*, xl, no. 1 (2012), p 59.

Filling Gaps in Scholarship with Oral History

As well as allowing for the creation of a historical narrative with the interviewees, an oral history approach to this topic was necessary because of the lack of previous scholarly historical study on this topic. The most recent oral history of migrants in Northern Ireland was Jack Crangle's book which, while published in 2023, was based on interviews conducted between 2016 and 2018, and focused on life in the region before 1998.[34] While other works, such as Marta Kempny's, focus on the same period as this project, they were written over ten years ago, and thus cannot draw on major events such as Brexit or the Covid-19 pandemic.[35] Kempny's work only focuses on one community, thus leaving others with very little presence within academic scholarship. As such, there is a large gap in the literature on more recent histories of migrant communities and, due to the recency of the period this dissertation explores, traditional archives do not have many resources. As such, oral history was the only way to collect meaningful data for this dissertation.

By setting the requirements for the participation of interviewees to be adult immigrants to Belfast who have come from outside the UK and Ireland and have lived there for at least one year, the project was able to present many different views on life as an immigrant in Belfast, from individuals from many backgrounds. While this means the data cannot provide any definitive conclusions on the experiences of certain groups, it allows for a holistic view of immigration in Belfast after 1998. Due to its scope and methods, this project is unique and presents an example of how to fill the gap in historical studies on immigrants to Belfast.

[34] Crangle, pp 249-50.
[35] Kempny, p 46.

Another gap in the literature is the criteria for participation in oral interviews and other forms of study. Most works on immigration to Northern Ireland focus on immigrants from countries that were considered part of the Global South during the period studied. There is thus little information, in any discipline, about the experiences of migrants to Northern Ireland who are from the Global North. While Poland is considered a Global North country, the experiences of Polish migrants cannot be considered representative of the entire Global North migrant experience, as Poland is unique among this group for its long-declining economy and large rates of religiosity.[36] Because of this difference, this project also includes multiple interviews with immigrants from the Global North, most notably the United States. While the circumstances of immigration and experiences in Belfast differ vastly from the other interviewees', their inclusion is important because they illustrate that there are many stories of immigration to Belfast and that the topic cannot be condensed into a simple narrative. However, despite the differences, the common experience of moving to and living in Belfast means that all immigrants do share similar experiences. These similarities are used to understand which elements of the immigrant experience in Belfast are universal, and which differ by ethnicity and/or country of origin.

[36] Arkadiusz Michał Kowalski, 'Global South-Global North Differences' in Walter Leal Filho, Anabela Marisa Azul, Luciana Brandli, Amanda Lange Salvia, Pinar Gökcin Özuyar and Tony Wall (eds), *No Poverty: A Living Refrence Work* (Cham, 2020), p 3 (https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-69625-6_68-1). And Kempny, pp 29, 137.

Chapter 1: Finding One's Feet as an Immigrant

As previously stated, much of the academic literature and journalistic reporting on the topic of twentieth-century migration to Northern Ireland is focused on the lack of positive integration between non-British/Irish immigrants and the native population. Thus, a negative perception of immigrant life in Northern Ireland was born. On review however, much of the analysis is based on the reporting of major incidents and conflicts between immigrant and established/native populations in national newspapers, such as the 2009 attacks on the Roma community in South Belfast, or the rise in race-based hate incidents over the past decade years, with almost 300 more reported incidents in 2023/24 as compared to 2013/2014.[1] While secondary sources must be considered in the study of immigration to Belfast and will be done so below, accounts of the lived everyday experience of immigrants are also critically important. As such, interviews are used as primary sources to complement the other sources. By combining the two, a more holistic view of the experience of immigrants to Belfast can be ascertained.

A small sample size was used due to the limited timeframe of a master's dissertation and the researcher's lack of prior connections with Belfast's immigrant community. As such, they cannot be considered representative of immigrants to Belfast. The primary source data for this dissertation is drawn from seven oral interviews and two written responses. The interviewees are from: the United States (2), Sudan (2), Zimbabwe (1), Poland (1), China (1), the United Arab Emirates (1) and India (1).[2] This study aimed to interview individuals of diverse origins, both

[1] Robbie McVeigh, 'Racism in the Six Counties' in Julieann Veronica Ulin, Heather Edwards and Sean T O'Brien (eds), *Race and Immigration in the New Ireland* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 2013), pp 86-8. And *Trends in Hate Motivated Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland: 2004/05 to 2022/23*, by PSNI Statistics Branch (Belfast, 2023), p 6.
[2] Appendix 1: List of Interviewees and Details

geographically and economically. However, due to the restrictions of this study, comparisons and generalizations based on nationality cannot be made. As such, this dissertation will look instead at other factors for different responses, some of which correlate closely to nationality.

The Effect of Language on Prior Knowledge of Belfast

In answer to the question about prior knowledge of Belfast and/or Northern Ireland, there were three types of responses.[3] Interviewees either reported that they had no prior knowledge, knew only facts that would be advertised to tourists, or had awareness of the Troubles. Despite the small sample size, a pattern emerged that suggested that one's nation of origin and native language are major factors in determining prior knowledge of the region. The depth of prior knowledge was reflected by the investment in interest in foreign affairs by the local news media outlets in the home nations of the interviewees. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a global decrease in interest in foreign news, only increasing when global conflicts arise.[4] Results gathered in the interviews and supported by Aalberg's data demonstrate that India and the United States feature a relatively low volume of foreign stories in their major news networks, only accounting for approximately 13-14% of all reporting.[5] Because Northern Ireland is currently not a conflict zone, news from the region is reported on even less frequently than regions that are at war. This is demonstrated by an investigation of articles focussed upon Northern Ireland that appeared in the largest newspapers in the interviewees' home countries. Only one or two articles about Northern Ireland appeared per year, and almost all of these were focused upon the

[3] Appendix 2: Interview Questions
[4] Toril Aalberg et al., 'International TV News, Foreign Affairs Interest and Public Knowledge' in *Journalism Studies*, xiv, no. 3 (2013) (https://air.unimi.it/handle/2434/222606), p 389.
[5] Ibid, p 394.

Northern Irish Assembly.[6] As such, people would have to specifically seek out information on life in the region to learn more.

As of 2021, 4.6% of residents of Northern Ireland did not report English as their first language and as such, had varying degrees of fluency.[7] This could present a challenge to potential immigrants who sought knowledge about life in Northern Ireland, as much of the in-depth material on the subject, both historical and current, is in English. Among those interviewed, those who had been speaking English for longer tended to be more aware of the news and politics of Northern Ireland before arrival. This had a clear impact on immigrant perception of life in Belfast, depending on their nation of origin.

Of the four native speakers, two were American and held degrees from Queen's University Belfast (QUB). They demonstrated extensive knowledge of the sectarian conflicts and tensions that have occurred throughout Belfast's history and recognized how these events manifested in the present day to a greater extent than the rest of the interviewees. This is possibly because both studied social sciences within the Northern Irish context. As a result, they often discussed segregated neighbourhoods and marches as examples of hatred in the city.[8] The interview with the anonymous American was particularly interesting because, despite her being White and having a distinctly American accent, she:

> did get a little uncomfortable during marching season. I grew up, as I said before, in a Mexican family, but I also grew up Catholic. So, even though I'm not a visible target to people who might hold prejudiced ideas about Catholics, I emotionally was kind of perturbed by some of the stuff that was going on during marching season.'[9]

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[6] Appendix 3: Screenshots from International News Websites.
[7] *Main Statistics for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin: Language*, by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2022, p 4.
[8] Pike, Interview by Benjamin Harris, 19 June 2024. And Anonymous American migrant, Interview by Benjamin Harris, 28 June 2024
[9] Ibid.

Partly due to her prior knowledge of the sectarian elements in the marches, she felt the marches were indirect attacks on the Catholic community and, although she is an atheist, she empathised with them. The other American interviewee, Pike, who has a background in political psychology and is also non-religious, noted that, even as an American, 'There were a couple of times that I took a wrong turn down the street and got a friendly reminder that I was not supposed to be on that street', ones with 'all the flags flying'.

The opinions of the two highly educated immigrants are interesting because, although they said they were very happy in Belfast, they were the only interviewees to definitively report that sectarianism affected them. The impact of prior knowledge of Belfast's history becomes apparent when one compares the results of the interview conducted with another highly educated individual. This interviewee however was not a native English speaker, but rather reported Chinese as their native language. This subject immigrated to Belfast from China in 2016 and reported that his only prior knowledge about Northern Ireland before arriving included, 'the university and Liam Neeson. Let's see… and the Giant's Causeway. That's all. And maybe the Titanic?'[10] This is a radically different view of Northern Ireland than the politically informed perspectives of the Americans, but he still demonstrates more knowledge than the other Asian and African interviewees, who reported no prior knowledge of the region before arrival.

Ma, the interviewee of Chinese origin, had a skewed, but positive, perception of Belfast and Northern Ireland, one that did not include any ideas about past or current sectarianism. He reported that he attended cultural festivals, including 'the Orange Day Festival', meaning the festivities that surround the holiday which marks the Battle of the Boyne, a turning point in

[10] Ma.

William of Orange's campaign to capture Ireland and place it under Protestant rule.[11] The parades on July 12th and the associated bonfires the night before are often seen as representations of the fight against the so-called 'Protestant decline', an idea that is common in right-wing loyalist groups, including para-military groups. This is a belief that the increase in the Catholic and immigrant populations in Northern Ireland translates into a negative impact on the historical Protestant majority, as they are now a minority group in the region, and this threatens their way of life.[12] This belief was one of the factors that instigated the posting of a call from fringe members of the UVF for the violent removal of Chinese immigrants on the Donegall Pass in 2003.[13]

Due to the minimal international reach of Belfast news, Ma was most likely never aware of this incident and did not know of or understand the loyalist undertones of the July 12th celebrations. His safe participation in these events also demonstrates that the reactionary political strategy of the parades may be reduced as compared to the early 2000s, leading to an event more focused on celebrating Loyalist culture in a way that is more inclusive to all. However, Leonard and McKnight found, through interviewing teenagers in Belfast's most segregated communities, that parades such as those on July 12th and St. Patrick's Day are still seen as events for one community, despite attempts at inclusivity, mainly due to the prevalence of flags and other symbols of the hosting community.[14] While this does not mean that those from other communities would be harassed at these events, it is clear that a political aspect remains.

[11] Ibid.
[12] Amanda Hall, 'Vanity of the Bonfires? Eleventh Night Bonfires and Loyalist Influence After Negotiated Settlement in Northern Ireland' in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, xxxv, no. 8 (2023), p 1756.
[13] Crangle, p 148.
[14] Madeleine Leonard and Martina McKnight, 'Traditions and Transitions: Teenagers' Perceptions of Parading in Belfast' in Children's Geographies, xiii, no. 4 (2013), pp 404-5.

It is interesting to note that this interviewee's lack of awareness of the politics of the July 12th holiday may be representative of migrants who move to South Belfast. Some areas of South Belfast, such as Queen's Quarter and the Holylands, are less divided along sectarian lines, and thus, residents may not encounter sectarian attitudes daily. As a student of QUB, Ma likely lived in one of these areas. While it is possible that Ma went to Orangefest, a depoliticised event at City Hall, run by the Orange Order and Belfast City Council that attempts to make the July long weekend inclusive to all, his participation still demonstrates a lack of knowledge about the history and politics of the city.

The Zimbabwean interviewee's testimony is enlightening because, although he did not choose to come to Belfast, as he was fleeing persecution at home, he was immediately connected with organisations who could help him settle into Belfast through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and the Jobs and Benefits office.[15] This allowed him to quickly connect with many locals and to learn from them. One of the first things he seemingly learned, despite his lack of prior knowledge of the city, was the sectarian landscape. In his words, he 'had to be cautious and manage [his] anxieties about sectarianism and possible racial abuse.'[16] By connecting with residents rather than other immigrants, he had a unique experience among those interviewed. Coming from an English-speaking country also would have been a factor in learning about complex conversations regarding Belfast life, including sectarian issues. These conversations provided him with a knowledge of Belfast's sectarian politics that other migrants do not have. These two aspects of his immigrant experience, connecting with local residents through living

[15] Anonymous Zimbabwean migrant to Benjamin Harris, 5 July 2024.
[16] Ibid.

and having the advantage of English fluency, set his experience apart from that of other interviewees without these advantages.

A curious exception to the link between English skills and pre-existing knowledge of Belfast. seems to be found with the Indian and Emirati (who were both born in India) interviewees as, despite their fluency in English and their choice to move to Belfast, they knew either a little about Northern Ireland's politics and history, 'known for maintaining peace in spite of past troubles',[17] or only what was known also known by Ma, which was solely touristic information:

> I knew it was quite a beautiful place in terms of nature and it had a lot to offer in terms of the nature and the North Coast. I heard a lot about Giants Causeway from the movies. And obviously, from Game of Thrones, I've heard about the Dark Hedges and stuff like that. And I've obviously also heard that the cost of living in talking about Belfast in specific is lesser compared to other cities in the UK. [18]

This may be due to the previously mentioned lack of news coverage of Northern Ireland in foreign media, or a lack of desire to learn the history of the country beyond a general understanding, only its current status. However, this phenomenon has not been thoroughly studied and this question was not asked in the interviews so as not to lead interviewees' thinking.

Reasons for Coming to Belfast

It is important to note that the American and Chinese interviewees represent a very small minority of immigrants to Belfast, as they moved to pursue a degree at QUB. The other interviewees immigrated to the city as they perceived the United Kingdom as a safe place to live that offered more opportunities to thrive than in their home country.

[17] Anonymous Indian migrant to Benjamin Harris, 6 June 2024
[18] Ma.

When asked, interviewees commonly reported that having new, but very loose, ties to the city contributed to their decision to move to Belfast. Despite having no prior knowledge about the region, two Hassan and the Indian stated that either they or their spouse already had jobs arranged, and the Polish migrant noted that they had friends who could host them while they settled in.[19] All of the other interviewees migrated to Belfast by themselves. These are commonly documented reasons that can lead to the selection of a destination for migration. Ties to a city can promise future economic stability and thus provide more hope for individuals, both in terms of prospects and visa applications.[20] Reminiscent of the chain migration of Chinese and Indian migrants in the latter half of the twentieth century, this trend demonstrates that, despite the complicated history of migration to Northern Ireland during the Troubles period, more recent immigration trends in the region are not wholly unique.[21] The data collected from these interviews also suggest that little, if any consideration, is given to racism in Belfast before one moves.

Many students often study Northern Ireland in a vacuum, without comparison to other locations. When considering racism and racial prejudice, many authors point to the rise of hate crimes in the Police Service of Northern Ireland's (PSNI) annual statistics report, but do not reference trends in other cities before dubbing it the 'race-hate capital of Europe.'[22] In this context, it is perplexing that most immigrant interviewees reported that they are happy in Belfast. It is interesting to note that Northern Ireland is not unique when viewed in a UK-wide context. In

[19]Hassan, Interview by Benjamin Harris, 19 June 2024.. And Anonymous Indian migrant. And Anonymous Polish migrant, Interview by Benjamin Harris, July 2, 2024.
[20] Louise Ryan, 'Migrants' Social Networks and Weak Ties: Accessing Resources and Constructing Relationships Post-Migration' in *The Sociological Review*, lix, no. 4 (2011), p 709.
[21] Crangle, p 72.
[22] For example, see Gilligan et al, p 262. Also Gerry Moriarty, '"Race Hate Capital of Europe" Tag for North' in *The Irish Times*, 2006 (https://www.irishtimes.com/news/race-hate-capital-of-europe-tag-for-north-1.1022447).

fact, there has been a sharp rise in race-hate incidents across the four countries after the 2016 Brexit referendum. The right-wing politics have become normalised in the post-Brexit political climate.[23] Despite this, migration to the UK has been consistently rising and has spiked in the last two years.[24] As such, it cannot be assumed that Northern Ireland is a less desirable location for immigration because of its history and/or current issues. However, the rise in migration could also be accounted for by a lack of fluency in English among the immigrant population and a lack of access to current news due to a minimal focus on the region by international news media outlets, as a study of asylum-seekers has shown.[25]

Given the growing economy in the UK and Northern Ireland at the time these interviewees immigrated to Belfast, many came to pursue job or academic opportunities. Interestingly, a clear split emerged among the interviewees when asked about their job search experience. Only the individuals who came to study at QUB reported difficulty finding employment, and that, in one of their words, it was 'really fucking difficult' to gain employment in the city, due either to sponsorship issues (Pike notes that many companies in Belfast seem unwilling to hire applicants who they would need to sponsor for a work visa) or a lack of jobs in one's field.[26] While interviews did not inquire about the nature of the interviewees' work due to privacy concerns, those who independently volunteered that information, or who were contacted through their work, demonstrated a divide in the types of work different immigrants sought. Both American interviewees were hoping to leverage their PhDs to secure high-paying jobs within

[23] Jon Burnett, 'Racial Violence and the Brexit State' in *Race & Class*, lviii, no. 4 (2017), p 89.
[24] The Migration Observatory, 'Net migration to the UK - Migration Observatory' in *Migration Observatory*, 2024 (https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/long-term-international-migration-flows-to-and-from-the-uk/) (7 July 2024).
[25] Alan Gilbert and Khalid Koser, 'Coming to the UK: What Do Asylum-Seekers Know about the UK before Arrival?' in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, xxxii, no. 7 (2006), p 1210.
[26]Pike. And Anonymous American Migrant.

their field of study, while the Polish interviewee is content within the less specialised field of hospitality, and the Indian interviewee works in a not-for-profit that supports her own community. A probable contributing factor to the difficulty of finding employment after academia is the different visa requirements for a person to remain in the UK as a skilled worker rather than a student. To obtain a skilled worker visa, an applicant must either earn over £38,700 a year or receive sponsorship from a company.[27] As none of the QUB students interviewed has had success in finding a position that fulfils either requirement, it has affected their hopes of living in Belfast in the future, even though all wanted to remain. The Emirati individual did find a job after he 'applied for more than 500 jobs. Landed about 11 interviews, three of them went on to the last stage, and got one job offer.'[28] The difficulty he went through to find a job despite having a master's degree further demonstrates the stress graduates face when looking for jobs so they can remain in the country.

The Zimbabwean interviewee to Belfast via Dublin to escape threats to his life in his home country, which makes him an outlier among the other interviewees.[29] Although he did not disclose if he was officially a refugee/asylum seeker, his story provides an important perspective on a growing minority of people who did not choose to immigrate to Northern Ireland but rather moved under duress. Although there are no reliable statistics that accurately reflect the number of refugees in Northern Ireland, the NIHE reports that it helped to house 54 families between 2021-2023, demonstrating that there is a consistent influx of refugees and asylum seekers into

[27] UK Government, 'Skilled Worker Visa' in *GOV.UK* (https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa) (8 July 2024).
[28] Anonymous Emirati migrant.
[29] Anonymous Zimbabwean migrant.

Northern Ireland.[30] However, it is important to note that some who come to the country on work or study visas may do so to escape the political situation in their home country.

Experiences in Belfast

Belfast is a divided city, with many neighbourhoods closely tied to either Unionism or Nationalism, which reinforces the near-total religious segregation in certain areas.[31] Thus, the neighbourhood in which one lives has a significant impact on their experience. In Kempny's analysis of Polish migrants living in Belfast in the early 2000s, she shows that, because they were coming from a Catholic-majority country, those living in certain areas of the city (mainly the Village) were thrust into sectarian tensions.[32] The majority of the Polish population outside of the Village, on the other hand, seemingly had less overt issues and felt safer because they were living in diverse areas such as on the Ormeau Road in South Belfast.[33]

Most people interviewed for this dissertation stated they originally moved to South Belfast, where many continue to live. Although there are many working-class and Protestant sections of this area, it is regarded as the most multicultural part of Belfast. This is evidenced by the concentration of grocery stores and shops that cater to a variety of cultures.[34] Between the multicultural student body at QUB and migrants from all over the world, the population of South Belfast has much fewer ties with Belfast's sectarian politics than elsewhere. While the

[30] Northern Ireland Housing Executive, *Response to FOI_22-23_217* (https://www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/1a38b327-d581-41a6-b1a9-d8d717754caa/Refugees-in-these-schemes-that-have-availed-of-accommodation.pdf), February 2023
[31] Joanne Hughes, Andrea Campbell, Miles Hewstone and Ed Cairns, '"What's There to Fear?" A Comparative Study of Responses to the Out-Group in Mixed and Segregated Areas of Belfast' in Peace & Change, xxxiii, no. 4 (2008), p 523.
[32] Kempny, p 145.
[33] Ibid, p 147.
[34] Appendix 4: Examples of shops serving immigrant populations on Ormeau Road.

implications of this in the context of prejudice will be discussed in the next chapter, the unique character of this area allowed individuals to access support when settling in the city.

The two women interviewed at a Sudanese cultural group meeting demonstrated the importance of South Belfast's unique multicultural nature. They both noted that it was easy for them to find the Sudanese community without the support of an official organisation.[35] When Hassan moved to Belfast in 2012 with her small children, she was one of the first Somalians to come to South Belfast. Though she found 'five or six other Somalian families' living in the area, she did not feel comfortable engaging with the community in and around the hostel she was initially staying in.[36] She felt confused and nervous among people of diverse nationalities and was unable to connect with many people on arrival because she 'didn't know what would happen. Just I'm [here for] the first time. I guess I [worried I would] lose all my controls [sic] of my children.'[37] She only managed to connect with others when she settled in, with help from the NIHE in finding a house. In contrast, when the anonymous Sudanese woman arrived in the area six years later, in 2018, she 'found like a big community of Sudanese. That's why it was not hard for me to set up.'[38] This example demonstrates, that as the immigrant population of South Belfast grows, newcomers have a larger network of people from the same country to rely on.

It is neighbourhoods like South Belfast that have been proven to have a large positive impact on the lives of migrants. When a community that represents a migrant's culture is present, newcomers can acclimatise to their new surroundings more easily, while remaining rooted in things they recognise (food, language, festivals etc.). This allows a new immigrant to gain the

[35] Hassan. And Anonymous Sudanese migrant, Interview by Benjamin Harris, 26 June 2024
[36] Hassan.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Anonymous Sudanese migrant.

skills needed to thrive in a new space with support from the community.[39] Immigrants who find a connection and reside within the diaspora seem to make social connections quickly, reducing isolation and bolstering mental health. These effects are also seen in East Belfast, where a substantial Polish community reside.[40] When he moved to Belfast at 15, the Polish interviewee said he settled in East Belfast and was able to enrol in a school that 'provided lots of help [in English skills] for students, especially Polish students because there were Polish teachers in my school.'[41] This program allowed him to develop a close group of Polish friends, who were receiving the same help, which helped in reducing the feelings of isolation he experienced in the first few months before classes started. He was able to become accustomed to this new culture through the lens of a culture that he already knew.

The ability to make quality social connections among fellow migrants from one's home country is critical to success. The experiences of the Polish interviewee and the Sudanese women demonstrate how this supports healthy adjustment and acclimatization to life in Belfast. Studies demonstrate that it is often difficult for immigrants to overcome cultural boundaries to connect and build friendships with the local population, especially when daily pressures such as work or school are considered.[42] While many of the interviewees had found friendships with other migrants from a variety of countries, including Northern Ireland, some remarked that it was harder to make connections with locals beyond simple friendships, due in part to the latter 'being more protective' than others with their feelings.[43] Building the trust necessary to push past that

[39] Christopher C. Sonn, 'Immigrant Adaptation: Understanding the Process through Sense of Community' in Adrian T. Fisher, Christopher C. Sonn and Brian J. Bishop (eds), *Psychological Sense of Community* (New York, 2002), p 211.
[40] *Polish Residents in Belfast: Issues of Discrimination, Safety and Integration*, by Belfast Interface Project 2011.
[41] Anonymous Polish migrant.
[42] Maja Povrzanović Frykman and Katarina Mozetič, 'The Importance of Friends: Social Life Challenges for Foreign Physicians in Southern Sweden' in *Community, Work & Family*, xxiii, no. 4 (2019), p 390.
[43] Pike.

initial protectiveness takes time but is worthwhile as social connection is critically important to reduce isolation and encourage inclusion.

The interviewee from Zimbabwe appears to be the exception in terms of social connections, perhaps due to his unique journey to Northern Ireland compared to the other interviewees. After moving to North Belfast, he was assisted by the NIHE and did not feel compelled to develop friendships or seek out other Zimbabweans. Instead, his focus was to find individuals to help him adapt to his new country of residence.[44] Although this strategy was successful for him, it is rare for immigrants to be accepting of isolation from a community of those from the same country or culture. Among those fleeing violence in other countries, feelings of isolation often lead to very poor mental and physical health.[45] However, due to his prior residence in Dublin, it is possible that he had an easier time integrating into Belfast's similar culture, soon finding employment with a respected organisation and becoming a prominent member of his field. This integration, though more difficult without a connection to one's own diaspora, is one of the key factors that determines an immigrant's success, both in terms of mental health and also employment opportunity.[46] This interviewee's example demonstrates that despite the benefit of having a community of people from the same country, an immigrant does not need to have one for them to thrive, at least when viewed in economic terms.

The ability to thrive without much community support is also shown through the Emirati immigrant, who despite not finding a community of other people from the UAE, managed to find a well-paying job and enjoy his time in the city.[47] However, his lack of a close social circle in

[44] Anonymous Zimbabwean migrant.
[45] Krishna Roka, 'Adjusting to the New World: A Study of Bhutanese Refugees' Adaptation in the US' in *Journal of Sociology and Social Work*, v, no. 2 (2017), p 101.
[46] Ibid, pp 102, 105.
[47] Anonymous Emirati migrant.

Belfast and his taking of a job in England demonstrates that he did not develop a close connection with the area, which conflicts with the idea of 'true' integration. This dissertation relies on the International Organization of Migrants' definition of immigrant integration, which emphasises that it is a cooperative process between immigrants and the native population to develop various strategies that ensure immigrants can have full access to participate in society at the same level as the hosts.[48] As such, it is debatable how 'successful' the Emirati migrant was in his time in Belfast.

The Gaps that Cannot Be Filled by Community

While connecting with people who share the same language and culture is important when a person moves to a new country, these groups that one forms can only mimic the social aspects of the home nation, which is often cause for much complaint and homesickness. This means that immigrants are forced to adapt to the loss of many things that they are used to. In the interviews conducted for this dissertation, one of the things that most interviewees complained about was the weather, with Ma even stating that it was the worst aspect of living in Belfast.[49]

The consistent rainfall throughout the year that characterises Irish weather, as well as the few hours of daylight in the winter, are not common in any of the complaining interviewees' home regions.[50] This is important to note as the lack of sunlight, especially in the winter months, is strongly correlated with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which is a temporary decrease in

[48] *IOM and Migrant Integration*, by Labour Migration and Human Development Division: International Organization for Migration (Geneva, 2012) (https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/migrated_files/What-We-Do/docs/IOM-DMM-Factsheet-LHD-Migrant-Integration.pdf), p 1.
[49] Ma.
[50] 'Compare the Climate and Weather in Belfast, Khartoum, Shenyang, and Bydgoszcz - Weather Spark' in *Weather Spark* (https://weatherspark.com/compare/y/35084~97252~139918~84085/Comparison-of-the-Average-Weather-in-Belfast-Khartoum-Shenyang-and-Bydgoszcz#Sections-Precipitation) (30 July 2024).

mood.[51] While SAD also affects individuals who have lived in a climate like Ireland's for their entire lives, studies in London demonstrate that immigrants have a higher risk of voluntary and involuntary mental health-related hospitalizations, and immigrant certain groups are more prone to depression than native British residents.[52] This suggests that an immigrant would find it harder to benefit from mental health treatment in the UK, due to physical or cultural barriers, as a need for hospitalization suggests that preventative forms of mental healthcare have been inadequate, forcing a visit to the hospital.[53]

Along with the weather, food was one of the things that most interviewees missed about their home countries. While many who spoke about food mentioned that many restaurants in the city represent their home cuisines, only Ma said that they helped him feel connected with China, stating that 'It's easy to find [Chinese food], but it will be a little bit different.'[54] Others found the food options that claimed to represent where they were from to be poor substitutes for what they were craving. The Emirati migrant, for example, explained that 'being from an Asian background, I love spicy food, and I am very disappointed with the food available in Belfast. very honest. It's nowhere close. Even the Indian food here or the Arabic food here. I've tried it and it's really not authentic or anywhere close to how it should be.'[55] The same sentiment was shared about American and Mexican food.[56] This issue is also reflected in the types of

[51] Jeanne Molin, Erling Mellerup, Tom Bolwig, Thomas Scheike and Henrik Dam, 'The Influence of Climate on Development of Winter Depression' in *Journal of Affective Disorders*, xxxvii, no. 2-3 (1996) (https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0165032795000909), p 154.
[52] Dirk Claassen, Micol Ascoli, Tzeggai Berhe and Stefan Priebe, 'Research on mental disorders and their care in immigrant populations: a review of publications from Germany, Italy and the UK' in *European Psychiatry*, xx, no. 8 (2005), p 542.
[53] Bibha Simkhada, Mariam Vahdaninia, Edwin Teijlingen and Hannah Blunt, 'Cultural Issues on Accessing Mental Health Services in Nepali and Iranian Migrants Communities in the UK' in International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, xxx, no. 6 (2021).
[54] Ma.
[55] Anonymous Emirati migrant.
[56] Pike. And Anonymous American migrant.

ingredients that can be bought for home cooking in Belfast. The anonymous American interviewee, who grew up in a Mexican family stated:

> Finding the right chillies is something that has gotten exponentially easier with the new Asian Supermarket. The old Asian Supermarket would occasionally have stuff for tamales or Mexican food, but not always. I have a couple of friends who own restaurants in Belfast, and we just don't have the right ingredients to make food from home. I've spoken to other people who are from Brazil and from other countries in Latin America and they have the same complaints I do as a Californian.[57]

Access to food from their home country is important because it is one of the clearest ways for immigrants to connect with their home culture regularly.[58] A study of immigrant women in Canada demonstrated that when immigrants struggle to find ingredients that are essential to cooking traditional food, it increases the sense of isolation and confusion in the first months after arrival. While new stores such as the Asian Supermarket can now provide more ingredients to help alleviate this, the American migrants' comments demonstrate that there are still items that cannot be purchased in Belfast.[59] Because many of the stores that carry these international foods are smaller than the major supermarkets, prices may also be more expensive, meaning that students and working-class migrants may be unable to afford some items.[60] While the issue of availability may be resolved in the future, the current absence of staple products, as well as their prices leads to a feeling of isolation among many migrants.

Connecting with Culture

An important benefit of connecting with others from the same country is that it reduces feelings of isolation and homesickness by maintaining a connection with one's culture.[61]

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Helen Vallianatos and Kim Raine, 'Consuming Food and Constructing Identities among Arabic and South Asian Immigrant Women' in Food, Culture & Society, xi, no. 3 (2008), p 356.
[59] Ibid, p 365.
[60] Ibid, p 366.
[61] Kempny, p 110.

However, it is also important to find social connections among others with different cultural backgrounds to assist with integration.[62] Belfast City Council and its partner organisations, as well as smaller ethnic community groups, have devoted much attention to welcoming immigrants to the city. As most immigrants are engaged in full-time employment and/or have children to take care of, scheduled time to connect with members of one's community ensures that everyone can maintain a connection.

In Belfast, events that encourage cultural connection are often organised by members of the community or new organisations within the immigrant community. For example, the Sudanese women's sewing group at the Markets Community Centre, located on the border of South Belfast and the City Centre, is an informal group organised by the women themselves so they could connect outside of their busy lives. While sewing was not a part of their cultural experience in Sudan, these women sewed together to connect outside of their homes with friends.[63]

Although individual community members do occasionally create formal groups such as the one mentioned above, they are mostly created by larger organisations that aid communities within the city. Organisations such as the CWA, the ICC, ASCONI, and many others have had large impacts on the communities they represent. Starting with the CWA in 1986, the focus for many of these groups was to establish a body that would advocate for the needs of the community, mainly regarding issues of racism. These groups often take the form of community outreach programs but mainly work with local and national government officials behind the

[62] Saeid Abbasian, 'Festival Participation for Integration and Inclusion? A Critical Reflection' in *World Leisure Journal*, lxv, no. 4 (2023), p 465.
[63] Hassan.

scenes.[64] As such, only one organisation, Sudarshanam NI, was directly referenced in the interviews.[65] This may also be due to the reluctance of other such organisations to give interviews. The public events that these institutions hold tend to be religious/spiritual, and thus may not feature in the day-to-day thoughts and activities of all immigrants. The ICC, for example, promotes itself as a Hindu temple, and thus would probably not be considered as a prominent part of the Indian community by those who are not practising Hindus.[66] This is also true of the leading group in the Polish Community, the Catholic Church.[67] As such, the impact of these organisations needs to be reevaluated.

The groups that received the highest praise by the interviewees were not the organisations mentioned above, but rather those that assisted in the securing of housing as well as access to language learning. For example, the after-school English program for primarily Polish immigrants, whose primary mandate was teaching language skills also created an informal community offering the opportunity for meaningful social connection and cultural familiarity.[68] The NIHE received similar praise. Although it serves the entire Northern Irish population, it is responsible for housing a few new immigrants, especially those who are coming from war-torn countries like Sudan or areas with civil unrest like Zimbabwe. While there is no scheme for the NIHE to place immigrants in an area with other people from the same country, applicants can select the neighbourhoods in which they would like to live and may be advised to choose multicultural areas like South Belfast.[69] It was through a placement in a hostel that Hassan found

[64] Crangle, p 163.
[65] Anonymous Indian migrant.
[66] 'Indian Community Centre, Belfast' in ICC Belfast (https://www.iccbelfast.org/) (14 July 2024).
[67] Kempny, p 118.
[68] Anonymous Polish Migrant.
[69] *Housing Myths and Migrants*, by Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2015).

the Sudanese community, within which she is now an active member.[70] While the Zimbabwean migrant was not successful in finding his community through the NIHE, Hassan's example demonstrates it can help do so.[71] In both cases, however, the interviewees were able to connect with people from many different cultures and nationalities.

Housing agencies are pivotal to enhancing cultural connection among immigrants which is highlighted by the role that Queen's Accommodation plays. Responsible for initially housing Pike, the male American migrant, and the Chinese immigrant when they first moved to Belfast to study at QUB, the organisation works to ensure all students, particularly those from outside Northern Ireland, have an enjoyable university experience. The Chinese immigrant met some of his closest friends in the accommodation.[72] Though Pike met friends in his classes, the proximity of his accommodation to campus also facilitated his ability to partake in social life and integrate into Belfast's culture.[73] However, despite these benefits, international students are often housed together which can pose a barrier to befriending Northern Irish people. As a result, the Chinese interviewee reported having no Northern Irish friends, despite having lived in Belfast for six years.[74] It is important to note that his weaker English skills could also be a contributing factor to this.

Due to their multicultural nature, the groups formed in these cultural communities often attend cultural events together, allowing everyone to not only showcase their own culture but also to experience others. This is particularly important when immigrants attend events that celebrate local Northern Irish culture, and when they, in turn, invite locals to come to their own

[70] Hassan.
[71] Anonymous Zimbabwean migrant.
[72] Ma
[73] Pike.
[74] Ma.

cultural events. All interviewees mentioned that they have attended many festivals from a variety of different cultures, including local ones such as Orangefest and Saint Patrick's Day. In doing so, they can better integrate with the host community, which lowers the risk of xenophobic sentiment and normalises their presence in the area.[75] Events such as the Belfast Mela, an annual city-wide festival that showcases cultures that have migrated to the city from outside the UK and Ireland, contribute to this integration process by demonstrating the humanity of all immigrants and their descendants, and thus showing that they have a right to be seen as full members of Belfast life. Created by Dr Nisha Tandon OBE, an immigrant to the city, the festival is run through her arts organisation ArtsEkta and funded in part by Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Executive Office. The Mela is a demonstration of the ability of community groups other than traditional immigrant support organisations to become major contributors to the improvement of the immigrant experience, although the traditionally supportive organisations also attend.[76] These cultural events, celebrating both distant and local communities promoted additional opportunities to enhance the lived experience of all newcomers.

[75] Abbasian, p 5.
[76] 'About' in *Belfast Mela* (https://belfastmela.org.uk/about/).

Chapter 2: Perceptions of Hatred

The previous chapter demonstrated that the historical study of immigration to Belfast does not reflect trends in migration that were seen before 1998, which highlighted the difference between the 20th-century immigrant experience and that of the 21st century. This is primarily due to the growth of the migrant population since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. According to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), between 1991 and 2021, the percentage of immigrants living in Belfast who have come from outside the British Isles had risen from 5.7% to 10.8% of the population.[1] This represents an increase of 15,570 people. This increase has instigated distress among some local communities and their leaders, some of whom have responded with a desire to stem the flow of immigration to keep their city as reflective of their own identity as possible. In contrast, others are concerned that the protectionist ideas of these groups will lead to violence against immigrants, similar to the sectarian conflicts of the past.[2] This fear has been realised on multiple occasions, including in the August 2024 riots. Although there is a wealth of data concerning the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment from NISRA's Life and Times (NILT) surveys and the PSNI's statistics on race-hate-related incidents, little work has been done in recent years to assess immigrants' perceptions of this issue in Belfast. This chapter intends to illustrate the reality of immigrant life in Belfast beyond the well-known and reported major incidents that perpetuate the notion that the city is extremely racist. In

[1] Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Census 1991 Migration Report (1993), p 23 and Census 2021 (2023), https://build.nisra.gov.uk/en/custom/data?d=PEOPLE&v=SETTLEMENT15&v=COB_AGG3&~SETTLEMENT15=N11000151

[2] Stefanie Doebler, Ruth McAreavey and Sally Shortall, 'Is Racism the New Sectarianism? Negativity Towards Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in Northern Ireland from 2004 to 2015' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, xli, no. 14 (2017), p 2427.

doing so, it will demonstrate that while Belfast has a problem with racism, the moniker of 'the race-hate capital of Europe' is not warranted.

Attempts at Understanding Instances of Immigrants' Conflict with Locals

Although all the interviewees had lived in Belfast for multiple years at the time of writing, those who had a greater knowledge of the city's history before they arrived (except the Zimbabwean), seemed to acknowledge the current sectarian issues that shape its physical geography. This is interesting because although many live in more multi-cultural areas of South Belfast, that are not coded as traditional Loyalist or Nationalist areas, there still are many areas around them that are clearly marked as Loyalist communities, such as the Village and the Donegall Pass. While a lack of knowledge of how flags (such as the Union Jack, UVF/UDA support flags, Orange Order flags and/or the Israeli flag) demarcate these areas may make them difficult to recognise at first, one would assume that newcomers would quickly learn their significance through inquiry or education by the local Northern Irish residents.

The Zimbabwean migrant's experience reflects how one can quickly learn about sectarian and racist attitudes in Belfast. He was able to do this because he was socially connected to local residents when he arrived and thus became quickly aware.[3] While the fear this initially caused him may have been warranted, because he answered that locals treat him 'mostly as an equal'.[4] He decided not to elaborate on this in his statement, rendering it impossible to know whether he experienced discrimination or exclusion. However, it is important to note that he did report that he felt completely safe throughout the areas he frequented in Belfast. While this initially seems like a positive response, it is one of the only interviews that discusses negative treatment at all.

[3] Anonymous Zimbabwean migrant.
[4] Ibid.

As Crangle found, immigrants in Belfast tend not to discuss incidents of hate that they have faced. This is especially relevant in the case of the Zimbabwean because he is a highly respected member of his field, making it less likely for him to discuss racist incidents or other conflicts with locals, due in part to the common desire to demonstrate one's successes rather than their struggles.[5] Therefore, in noting that he is not always treated equally, he is giving a rare insight.

The Polish interviewee reported a similar experience, making him and the Zimbabwean the only two who demonstrated that they had issues with the local population. He stated that, while he has had no issues with his current neighbours in the suburb in which he lives, or at his job in the city centre, he had some negative experiences when he was in secondary school in East Belfast.[6] He downplayed the issue, stating '… [my Polish friends and I] had troubles with the local kids. But it wasn't really nothing really serious. Just Belfast.'[7] While the specific issues were not outlined, it is possible that these incidents were wholly or partially motivated by racism, or xenophobia, due to the language barrier in the first years after he arrived. It is also possible that these incidents were due to him being perceived as a Roman Catholic because he was Polish (he did not mention his religion in the interview), and he went to school in the Protestant-majority Ravenhill neighbourhood. This would have made him an outsider in multiple ways, he could have potentially been bullied because of any/all of them.[8] Although he likely went to a Catholic school, he would have still been an outsider while walking through the neighbourhood, as well as an outsider within the school by being Polish.

[5] Crangle, pp 113-114.
[6] Anonymous Polish migrant.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Census 2001, https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/2001-census-key-statistics-tables-ethnicity-identity-language-and-religion

It is important to note that while speculating about the above incidents is important to the understanding of the complexities of Belfast, both the Zimbabwean and Polish migrants decided not to elaborate on the subject. Because interviewees are partners in the creation of the primary source material for this dissertation, it is important to respect their decision to stay silent.[9] Silence or downplaying certain situations are tactics that are often used as a coping mechanism to protect the interviewee from reliving painful memories, as fear may exist of criticising the country they moved to or because they do not feel that these negative interactions are important enough to integrate into their own life story [10]. Due to the partnership, the researcher must be cautious not to disrespect the interviewee by prying into their story. To mitigate the chance of this, the same interview questions were utilized for all individuals.[11] While this allowed for transparency in the research process and easier comparison of the interviews, this strategy also limited the scope for violating the trust of the interviewee by way of pressuring them into divulging additional information. While this may seem like a flaw in the project, it allowed for the interview the be minimally invasive into the interviewee's life, thus creating an informed discussion that does not infringe on the privacy of the interviewees.

Hatoss' oral history of racism involving South Sudanese refugees in Australia provides a thorough analysis and specifically their response to questions related to racism and mistreatment. This approach employed direct questions concerning racist interactions to gauge the different types of reactions.[12] While the responses were much more in-depth than those obtained in this

[9] Calabria, p 2516.
[10] Anikó Hatoss, 'Denial from the Other Side: Experiences of Racism as Narrated by South Sudanese Refugees in Australia' in *Discourse Studies*, xxvi, no. 3 (2024), p 326. And Jennifer A. Cramer, '"First, Do No Harm": Tread Carefully Where Oral History, Trauma, and Current Crises Intersect' in *The Oral History Review*, xlvii, no. 2 (2020), p 206
[11] Appendix 2.
[12] Hatoss, p 315.

study, many of the types of responses were common to both. The Polish immigrant mentioned trouble he used to have in East Belfast, as seen above, but called it 'just Belfast.'[13] This is possibly a minimization of the anti-immigrant attitudes that he faced. A similar response to a question about the trouble one faces in a new country is reflected in Hatoss' second interview, in which the interviewee described the abuse he received from gangs as 'little things' and reiterated that he loved his community.[14] In both cases, the interviewee rationalises the incidents as extraordinary and out of character with the city. The Polish migrant's experience in Belfast, at first, seems to be contrary to the reported 50.2% increase in annual race hate crimes across Northern Ireland over the last 20 years.[15] However, because the immigrant population has doubled over the same period, these attacks have decreased on a per capita basis.[16] Even if he was not downplaying the incidents or the events were not racially motivated, the interview is part of the surprising absence of discussions of racism within the material collected for this dissertation.

The Zimbabwean migrant's brief mention of receiving unequal treatment at times, while also saying he feels 100% safe when walking around Belfast is a response received from other refugees/asylum seekers. This comment is possibly an example of this group feeling like they can bear abuse in their new country because the threat of violence is much worse in the country that they fled.[17] This interviewee reported that he left the country due to 'political instability [and] threats to [his] life', so it is possible that occasional encounters with racism may not have

[13] Anonymous Polish migrant.
[14] Ibid, p 322.
[15] *Trends in Hate Motivated Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland: 2004/05 to 2022/23*, by the Police Service of Northern Ireland Statistics Branch (Belfast, 2023).
[16] Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2023).
[17] Hatoss, p 324.

been his greatest concern.[18] This is also reflected in Ben's study of Eritrean refugees in Australia. Some of this population believe that their community should not complain about racism, though prevalent, in their adopted country. This is because, despite it being prevalent in Australian society, they argue that racism is much worse in other countries and that there is no war in Australia like in their home nation.[19] As such, experiencing racism became a 'price to pay' for freedom from other struggles.

By downplaying racist interactions, or by refusing to acknowledge racism altogether, immigrants may feel that they can maintain a sense of control of their lives, as well as minimise any perceived risks associated with discussing racism, such as being viewed as weak or ungrateful.[20] Racist attitudes and prejudices are also expressed in a variety of ways in different countries and cultures, therefore a newcomer to Northern Ireland may not recognise more subtle forms of racism (i.e. gestures or stares) as an attack against them. Although there is no way to be certain, it is possible that the other interviewees, who did not mention racist experiences, were consciously omitting these events, or perhaps were unaware of being a victim of racist attitudes. As such, the fact that only two of the nine interviewees mentioned racism does not necessarily mean that one can conclude that racism is not a significant problem in Belfast, or that seven of the nine interviewees did not experience it. This lack of discussion around racism is like that found in Crangle's work.[21]

The interviews challenge the notion portrayed in the media that Belfast is a racist and violent place. There is a tendency to focus on threats and acts of racist violence in UK-wide and

[18] Anonymous Zimbabwean migrant.
[19] Jehonathan Ben, '"People Love Talking about Racism": Downplaying Discrimination, and Challenges to Racism among Eritrean Migrants in Australia' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, xlvi, no. 5 (2023), p 922.
[20] Ibid, p 924.
[21] Crangle, pp 113-114.

international reporting, such as the 2009 attacks on the Roma community, thus portraying it as a common occurrence.[22] This perspective is in contrast with most of the interviewees' narratives, who reported feeling completely safe when walking around their neighbourhoods, travelling to work and going shopping. While one may not notice smaller acts of racism, this demonstrates that the large events such as the 2009 attacks, or instances of racist and threatening graffiti, are rare enough not to be at the forefront of the minds of most migrants, despite many of them occurring in areas nearby to where the interviewees live. This is further evidenced by interviews conducted by the BBC in 2022.[23]

While these reactions are important in understanding the daily thoughts about racism and safety among immigrants, many of these reactions may have changed since the interviews were conducted. On 3 August 2024, an anti-Islamic protest and march proceeded from Belfast City Hall to South Belfast, attempting to reach the Belfast Islamic Centre to intimidate local Muslims.[24] Part of a UK-wide spate of riots in response to the killing of three young girls by a boy who is the son of Rwandan immigrants, many migrant-owned businesses and hotels that housed refugees and asylum-seekers became targets of the rioters, who were hoping to scare their victims into leaving the UK.[25] Many establishments were the victims of vandalism, with one business being destroyed in a fire.[26] While none of those interviewed for this dissertation are shop owners, it is important to consider that their views regarding safety may have changed because of these recent events. However, due to time constraints, follow-ups for all participants

[22] Henry McDonald, 'Belfast Romanians in Hiding as Attacks Continue' in *The Guardian*, 18 June 2009, sec. UK news (https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/jun/18/belfast-romanians-moved-race-attacks).
[23] Kieran Connell, 'Episode 2', *The Crisis Files*, podcast audio, 12 November 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001f4bk
[24] BBC News.
[25] Jermey Culley and Hafsa Khalil, 'Southport Stabbings - What We Know so Far about Knife Attack' in BBC News, 29 July 2024 (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy68z9dw9e7o).
[26] Lynch and McCarthy.

are impossible. Many of those who were interviewed by the BBC after the attack noted that they were afraid that they would be victims of racist violence in the future, so it is likely that some of the interviewees would feel similarly.[27]

Considering that the August riots could tempt some to generalise and discuss a Belfast-wide conflict between immigrants and White individuals born in Belfast, it is significant that all but two of the interviewees mentioned that they had Northern Irish friends. This demonstrates that newcomers can be accepted and integrated into society. However, this does seem to have its limits, at least according to the American interviewees. As well as noting that the native Northern Irish were more closed off about their personal lives than the Americans were accustomed to, one interviewee also remarked that it would be impossible for someone from outside of Belfast ever to be considered a Belfastian:

> If you're not born here and you don't grow up here, you're never really a Belfastian. I've heard this from multiple people, even people from the UK who've moved here. I think you're always kind of considered a blow-in. Whereas in other places I've lived, you just kind of get to be an honorary person from that place. But I think in Belfast, there's a special grittiness.[28]

The interviewee had a hypothesis about this, suggesting the collective trauma the city suffered during the Troubles could be a reason for this.[29] This idea of regional exceptionalism is not unique to Belfast and Northern Ireland. In Israel, another society divided along religious lines, the government has, with the backing of its people, limited the immigration of non-Jewish people, as they are not perceived as having a role to play in the Jewish state and its goal to protect all Jewish people from a future Holocaust.[30] This sense of a lack of belonging has had

[27] BBC News.
[28] Anonymous American migrant.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Yuval Feinstein and Bart Bonikowski, 'Nationalist Narratives and anti-Immigrant attitudes: Exceptionalism and Collective Victimhood in contemporary Israel' in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, xlvii, no. 3 (2019), p 745.

larger consequences for migrants in the past, particularly if they were non-White. The most famous example of this was Anna Lo's 2016 retirement from politics because of the racial abuse she regularly faced. A British citizen born in Hong Kong, Lo first became a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Belfast South in 2007 but was active in anti-racist groups from the 1990s. Despite living in Belfast for over 40 years, she was regularly threatened by members of the loyalist community, both because of her otherness and her more liberal political views.[31] While she did have the option to leave Northern Ireland, she decided against this because most of her friends lived in Belfast and because she considered it to be her home.

All but one of the interviewees answered yes to the question 'do you consider Belfast to be home'. Only the Emirati interviewee said no, owing to the difference in lifestyle compared to life in Dubai.[32] This is significant because, despite interviewees coming for a wide variety of reasons, there is a desire to stay, even though all have lived in the city for less than ten years. While this is a similar response to Lo about the thought of moving elsewhere, it is very different from other communities, such as the Roma. After the 2009 attacks in South Belfast, in which many were petrol-bombed out of their houses soon after they arrived in the city only two of the 114 immigrants remained, with only 12 others wishing they could stay in Northern Ireland, the rest moving to their country of origin or elsewhere.[33] Although it is unclear how long the Roma who were attacked lived in Belfast, it was evident that they did not consider the city to be home, despite being settled with other Roma and having received support from local organisations.

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[31] Henry McDonald, 'Only Chinese-born Parliamentarian in UK to Quit Politics over Racist Abuse' in *The Guardian*, 29 May 2014, sec. UK news (https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/29/northern-ireland-chinese-mp-might-leave-province-racist-abuse).
[32] Anonymous Emirati migrant.
[33] Emily Moulton, 'Only Two Roma from 114 Remain after Northern Ireland Race Shame' in *The Belfast Telegraph*, 27 June 2009, sec. News (https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/only-two-roma-from-114-remain-after-northern-ireland-race-shame/28486117.html).

One of the main aspects of Belfast society that endeared the interviewees to the city, and contributed to the feeling of 'home' was the friendliness of the people. Despite issues of racism and the reluctance of locals to open up to anyone they do not know too well, many noted that most who live in Belfast were extremely friendly. This was most evident in the interviews with the American and Polish migrants, who stated that people in Belfast tended to be much more willing to connect and converse with people whom they met in the street or public places around the city, more so than in their countries of origin. One American interviewee said 'Everyone I found was very friendly. They're kind of like Midwestern folks in America in that they're very friendly. If you need something, you're happy to help out.'[34] The Polish migrant similarly stated:

> 'Poland's a wee bit more closed off to other people, whereas Belfast is, sort of more open… You can meet your best friend randomly on the street, like you start to have conversations on the middle of the street you know yeah but with Poland it's very rare to do that.'[35]

This friendliness may have been a contributing factor to the ease with which many found friends and romantic partners among the local population. Although all but two interviewees described themselves as having friends from Northern Ireland, it is important to note that the three who remarked on the friendliness of the city in random situations present as White and speak English fluently. While this may seem to be demonstrative of a trend toward racial exclusion throughout the island of Ireland, this is complicated by the ambiguity of the concept of race when considering Eastern Europeans who have moved to either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.[36]

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[34] Pike.
[35] Anonymous Polish migrant.
[36] Mairtin Mac An Ghaill, 'Beyond a Black—White Dualism: Racialisation and Racism in the Republic of Ireland and the Irish Diaspora Experience' in *Irish Journal of Sociology*, xi, no. 2 (2002), p 100.

Most of Irish history is based around the British idea that the native Irish were not White, despite having the same skin tone as the British, but equivalent to Black people and other subjugated groups.[37] This theory allowed British colonising forces to rationalise their subjugation of the local Irish and later allowed for the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland to discriminate against the Catholic minority, as the latter were viewed as 'Irish' and thus less than human.[38] It can be argued that this was the reason for the maltreatment of the Catholic population that led to the 1968 civil rights marches.[39] Race was, and often still is, determined through listening to someone's accent, asking their name, where they went to school, and by many more identifying questions.[40] Once answered, it can then be determined if the answerer can be deemed as an equal or as someone who is of another 'race'.

In this context, it could be possible that, while everyone was friendly to the Polish migrant, it is possible that some of these interactions were an attempt to determine his 'race' and social standing. While this was not mentioned in the interview with the Polish migrant, the anonymous American interviewee experienced this while living in East Belfast:

> when I had somebody from a paramilitary knock on my front door the day I moved in. I think me having an accent that's not from here was actually a good thing in terms of me being white and not from here. I found that a little bit intimidating, but I wonder if I would have found it intimidating if I didn't know as much as I do about the conflict and like tensions around sectarianism or if I would have just thought, 'oh, this person is like a random person'. But then I had my friends who are from here be like, 'oh, that person was checking to see who you were and what community you're from and stuff.'[41]

[37] Ebun Joseph, 'The Wages and Price of Whiteness' in *Radical History Review*, mmxxii, no. 143 (2022), p 79.
[38] Ibid, p 106.
[39] Simon Prince, 'The Global Revolt of 1968 and Northern Ireland' in *The Historical Journal*, xlix, no. 3 (2006), pp 855-856.
[40] Fiona Elisabeth McCormack, 'Fear, Silence, and Telling: Catholic Identity in Northern Ireland' in *Anthropology and Humanism*, xlii, no. 1 (2017), p 57.
[41] Anonymous American migrant.

It is important to highlight that although she comes from a Catholic background, her American accent saved her from raising any suspicions in the community, in the same way that she felt it kept her safe during marching season. This interaction is important because it makes one wonder how often this questioning of identity in Belfast's racial hierarchy is misinterpreted as friendliness.

Resisting Simple Narratives of Racism and Safety

The Zimbabwean migrant offered one of the most interesting responses to the question 'How do you feel you are treated by other immigrants?' He wrote 'Immigrants have their own divisions too.'[42] While this statement is obvious, it was placed after he said his neighbours treated him kindly and just before he made the comment that Northern Irish people treated him mostly as an equal. Because his was a written testimony rather than an oral interview and was sent before the interviewer could fully explain the goals of the dissertation, it may be possible that the interviewee assumed that the project was to include a discussion on the possible tension between immigrants and the Northern Irish. Creating questions that can lead the interviewee to assume that there is a preferred response is a common mistake in oral history, one that the author accidentally replicated.[43] While this was carefully considered when designing the interview, and all questions were created to limit biased answers, the interviewee interpreted these questions slightly differently than the others. Because he often works with other researchers at QUB, it is possible that this too influenced his response.

Although the response from the Zimbabwean migrant needs to be examined within the context of bias, this contribution is still important because it further highlights that challenges

[42] Anonymous Zimbabwean migrant.
[43] Heather Cairns-Lee, James Lawley and Paul Tosey, 'Enhancing Researcher Reflexivity about the Influence of Leading Questions in Interviews' in *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, lviii, no. 1 (2022), p 165.

which immigrants face when interacting with others do not only stem from racist behaviour by the Northern Irish. As the immigrant from the UAE demonstrated, the interpersonal challenges he said he faced were limited to difficulties with other immigrants.[44] He described how one fellow immigrant (from a different country than himself) mistreated him:

> Mostly the same, and mostly everybody's very nice and welcoming. Obviously, there are always a few exceptions. To be honest. I wouldn't like to mention the name, but there was this other person in my course…. He's been very rude, disrespectful and thankless to say the least. I helped him in his assignments. He asked me for help because I was a senior at uni, and then once my help was no longer required, I could see how his attitude shifted.[45]

While this originally started as a simple argument, it soon escalated as 'because he was invading my personal space, I gave him a little push [and]… He gave me this formal e-mail that "I'm going to hire a solicitor. If you don't give me a formal apology by 12:00 AM, I'm going to do a case against you" and whatnot, which is absolutely absurd.'[46] This interaction and the threat of legal action demonstrate that the issues of racism and prejudice from native Belfastians are sometimes less of an issue than how they are treated by other immigrants.

While the above dispute escalated to a level that harmed the well-being of the interviewee, it should not be considered a complaint about Belfast, as the dispute could have occurred anywhere. Interviewees were very positive when discussing their perceptions of safety and their treatment in Belfast, feeling safe navigating within the city. Pike, the male American interviewee, also noted that, while much of his feeling of safety may be due to his large stature as well as being male, he 'had one colleague. She was as short and petite as they come did not have my privilege and she loved Belfast. She ended up having to move back to North-eastern America

[44] Anonymous Emirati migrant.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

[due to visa restrictions], but I think she had similar experiences [of safety].'[47] By explicitly stating the difference in stature and gender between himself and his colleague, Pike demonstrated that one of the draws to remain in Belfast is its safety, regardless of someone's perceived identity. It is important to note, however, that Pike is White and non-religious.

While major incidents of hatred do not feature prominently in the minds of immigrants, and most feel very safe in the city, this is not always the case. Hassan exposed that these perceptions could simply be a matter of where the interviewees lived. She said, 'I have friends in North Belfast, but not all in North Belfast have problems. Some people, when they move house, have problems. But now it has settled down, not like the last few years.'[48] This demonstrates how a person's experiences of Belfast are shaped by a variety of different factors, including location. As most of those interviewed lived in a more multicultural area of South Belfast, their experiences of safety may be influenced by being surrounded by those who are culturally or ethnically like themselves.

Perceptions of safety in Belfast are also related to the time of year. Multiple interviewees noted that mid-July was a period of elevated anxiety due to the lead-up to the Battle of the Boyne celebrations. For some, the events themselves did not cause anxiety, perhaps in part due to the lack of contextual knowledge, as discussed earlier, but other residents warned them about potential dangers. As Ma said when asked about safety in Belfast in general, 'Well, I think it's safe, but sometimes just like Orange Day where some festivals. My friend told me not to cross some way or some place after maybe 11 pm.'[49] Others feel July is not safe due to how they identify. While it has already been noted that the anonymous American migrant felt uneasy

[47] Pike.
[48] Hassan.
[49] Ma.

during marching season due to her Catholic upbringing, she also said that she felt less safe due to her identity as a queer woman, stating:

> that's kind of like a mixed bag because I would say because of the sectarianism, during some of the summer months, I actually don't feel comfortable in the neighbourhood I'm in now. It's actually not even just me, like I have Protestant friends who don't feel comfortable staying around during the 12th. I think that's a really common experience for a lot of younger people and I think everybody tends to skip town if they're not part of those celebrations. I understand that to a lot of members of that community, they don't see it as bigotry or sexist or anything like that to them. It's literally a celebration of their culture and what they grew up with. But for people who aren't from that background, it can feel very threatening, especially because it's a very male-dominated celebration. I don't think it's very queer-friendly.[50]

The above quotation shows that much of the anxiety around this time is not related to sectarian ideas around Loyalists being more aggressive than Nationalists, but reflects the structure of the celebrations, as well as many of the activities that surround it. The parades themselves are very militaristic, reinforcing an ideal of hegemonic masculinity that promotes the ideals of strength and toughness.[51] Possibly as a result, there have been accounts of rough treatment of those in the crowds by parade participants each year, but the Orange Order insists that these events are rare.[52] All-day drinking has also become common at the parades.[53] While drinking is a common factor in many celebrations in Northern Ireland, this in combination with militaristic masculinity exaggerates the tension during this time of year. These factors seem to have created an atmosphere that people believe has the potential to become volatile, thus making those who are not represented in the celebration feel unsafe. The author had personally experienced this at the 2024 bonfire near the Sandy Row neighbourhood, a popular event that starts the celebrations at midnight on the 12th, when a peaceful crowd suddenly turned violent

[50] Anonymous American migrant.
[51] Ramon Hinojosa, 'Doing Hegemony: Military, Men, and Constructing a Hegemonic Masculinity' in The Journal of Men's Studies, xviii, no. 2 (2010) (https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3149/jms.1802.179), p 180.
[52] Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition and Control* (London; Stirling (Virginia), 2000), p 141.
[53] Ibid, p 144.

when a pro-Palestine protestor interrupted the event. Alcohol was thrown at him, and he was tackled to the ground and kicked repeatedly. This experience, as well as the quote from the American, demonstrate that July 12th is not solely avoided because of fears of racism, but because of general, drunken militaristic aggression. While the Orange Order has worked with Belfast City Council to reduce this by creating regulated events such as Orangefest that are open to all and publicly campaigning against drunken behaviour, the elements of drunken aggression remain within certain celebrating groups.[54]

Comparison with Existing Literature

While Belfast has problems related to xenophobia and racism that impact the immigrant community, data gathered by these interviews demonstrate that much appears to have changed since 1998. This renders much of the existing literature, though still relevant to the discussion of pre-1998 immigration, less applicable to the understanding of the recent history of immigration to Belfast. The doubling of the immigrant population as a percentage of the city's population, and the subsequent increase in diversity since 1998, are likely responsible for many of these discrepancies. This increase in diversity can promote contact between the majority group and different minorities.

One lens through which to view immigration and discrimination is the contact hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that when this contact occurs regularly, ideas from the majority group about other groups shift from being prejudiced to being more accepting. This theory has been debated over the last decade, however. One approach argued by contests that inter-group contact initiatives cannot create meaningful outcomes on a large scale due to

[54] Kurtis Reid, '"Orangefest" Plans Revealed for Twelfth of July Events at Belfast City Hall' in *Belfast Telegraph* (3 July 2024) (https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/orangefest-plans-revealed-for-twelfth-of-july-events-at-belfast-city-hall/a732027525.html).

historical and current complexities that lead to few opportunities to mix. In Belfast, this point is often argued because the Catholic and Protestant communities continue to remain segregated even when safe opportunities to interact are given.[55] However, immigrant communities often disrupt the segregation of the city, as they often move into areas that have cheaper housing prices and may also choose to live with other immigrants from their country of origin. They do so regardless of religious affiliation. Analysis of the 2015 NILT surveys demonstrates that among those who live in religiously diverse areas, a more open-minded response around foreigners exists.[56] Studies have also demonstrated that the more diverse an area is, the fewer stereotypes persist that differentiate groups within it. This may indicate that residents recognise that stereotypes do not accurately portray the complexity of experience that immigrants have when residents see them regularly.[57] Therefore, while there is still racist sentiment in Belfast, the level to which this occurs fluctuates by area.

The contact hypothesis contextualises the shift in the behaviour of the Northern Irish state and the native population. The low numbers of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland before 1998 were mainly due to upheaval in the region during the Troubles, as it was regarded as an undesirable and unsafe place to migrate to. As these minorities were often employed in demanding service jobs or remained at home at that time, in the case of many women, they were not often seen within the public sphere outside of their businesses.[58] This lack of visibility led to a belief expounded by the Northern Irish government, illustrated by the saying used vduring the

[55] John Dixon et al., 'Parallel lives: Intergroup Contact, Threat, and the Segregation of Everyday Activity Spaces.' in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, cxviii, no. 3 (2019), p 2.
[56] Cameron D Lippard and Catherine B McNamee, 'Are Refugees Really welcome? Understanding Northern Ireland Attitudes Towards Syrian Refugees' in *Journal of Refugee Studies*, xxxiv, no. 3 (2021), p 3092.
[57] Xuechunzi Bai, Miguel R. Ramos and Susan T. Fiske, 'As Diversity Increases, People Paradoxically Perceive Social Groups as More Similar' in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, cxvii, no. 23 (2020), p 12743.
[58] Crangle, pp 125, 155.

years of debate before 1997 about the need for anti-racism legislation in the country: 'There's no racism because there's no Black people here'.[59] As such, the government successfully argued that there was no need to pass legislation that protected minorities, as doing so would have no benefit and could allow the Catholic population to challenge the government on grounds of mistreatment.[60] Therefore, it was only in 1997 that the first legislation against race-based hate, the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order, was passed.[61] The denial of the existence of racism in Northern Ireland both by society and government officials, in conjunction with the underlying assumption that racism is caused by the presence of minorities, created a hostile environment for many immigrants during that time.[62]

With the rise of immigration after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, it soon became apparent that Northern Ireland was not immune to racism, as evidenced by events mentioned previously. However, by focusing on these events through a lens of Northern Irish exceptionalism, thereby ignoring similar events occurring in the wider world, the literature often fails to acknowledge that the issues that immigrants face in Northern Ireland are common to the immigrant experience the world over. Although Crangle dedicates a four-page section of his book to discussing racism in British media and politics during the Troubles period, this mention does not do enough, as there is not any explanation of how the events in Belfast compare to similar events in other parts of the UK.[63] For example, in the subsequent discussion of how migrants, despite remaining mostly neutral in sectarian conflict, tend to be targeted more by

[59] Robbie McVeigh, '"There's No Racism Because There's No Black People Here": Racism and Anti-Racism in Northern Ireland' in Paul Hainsworth (ed.), *Divided Society: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland* (London, 1998), p 12.
[60] Crangle, p 62.
[61] Ibid, p 50.
[62] McVeigh, p 14.
[63] Crangle, pp 204-7.

Loyalists than Nationalists, Crangle does not mention how this situation compares to that in similar cities with issues of sectarianism.[64] An example he could have used was Glasgow, as the city has been known to have issues with both racism and sectarianism. Although not as geographically divided as Belfast, Glasgow has had issues with Catholic/Protestant conflict and is now seeing a similar rise in racism.[65] While Clayton and others have done extensive research on this topic already, including it in future discussions would be very beneficial to understanding racism against migrants in Ireland. While Crangle aims to create a 'heterogenous approach to UK immigration studies', doing so risks ignoring factors from outside Northern Ireland. While he attempts to do this in multiple places, these mentions are infrequent and thus do not provide an adequate comparison with the rest of the UK.[66]

Although he mentions that many British right-wing figures and groups have found support in Northern Ireland, such as Enoch Powell and Combat 18, he does not investigate why right-wing/fascist views were so prevalent in England before migrating to Northern Ireland.[67] This is important to consider because the August 2024 riots were, in part, stoked by right-wing figures such as Tommy Robinson, a prominent British anti-Islam campaigner and the founder of the far-right English Defence League.[68] This example demonstrates how attitudes towards migration in Belfast are often linked with those in Britain, and that this link should not be ignored.

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[64] Ibid, p 209.
[65] Tristan Clayton, '"Diasporic Otherness": Racism, Sectarianism and "National Exteriority" in Modern Scotland' in *Social & Cultural Geography*, vi, no. 1 (2005), p 100.
[66] For Example, Crangle p 139.
[67] Ibid, p 208.
[68] BBC News, 'Tommy Robinson Not Welcome in Glasgow, Says Council Leader' in BBC News (1 Aug. 2024) (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c06k0m52p24o).

As Hogan and Haltinner demonstrate, modern anti-immigrant sentiment in the UK is not new. It was first seen when large waves of migration came to various countries to fill the labour shortages caused by the deaths of thousands of working-age men after World War Two, as well as fleeing parts of Europe that suffered more damage. In recent years, the idea of immigrants being inherently bad for a country has continued. In viewing migrants as 'parasites' on the British state, groups like the British National Party (BNP), which won their first seats in 1977 but have since become a fringe movement without electoral power, believe that immigrants must return to their 'home countries' to allow for 'native Britons' to rise out of unemployment and poverty, as well as to lower crimes rates, which they also attributed to immigration.[69] The BNP and other far-right parties harness existing sentiments of displacement and abandonment within a nation, primarily among the less-educated and working-class members of society, and point to increased immigration as the cause of the people's economic struggles.[70] This discontent is not unique to the working class in Northern Ireland, but is common around the world, as evidenced by the significant and growing support for far-right parties in countries across Europe.[71] While this study focuses on racism within the working class, this is only because they are the main group that participates in the overt racist activities being studied. It is important to acknowledge that prejudiced/racist attitudes are common in all sections of society, with rates of prejudice rising among employers and managers as well as workers across Europe between 2001 and 2011.[72]

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[69] Ibid, pp 528-9 and David Renton, '"A Day to Make history"? The 2004 Elections and the British National Party' in *Patterns of Prejudice*, xxxix, no. 1 (2005), p 26.
[70] Matt Golder, 'Far Right Parties in Europe' in *Annual Review of Political Science*, xix, no. 1 (2016), p 483.
[71] Ibid, p 491.
[72] Magne Flemmen and Mike Savage, 'The Politics of Nationalism and White Racism in the UK' in *The British Journal of Sociology*, lxviii, no. S1 (2019) (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1468-4446.12311), p S234.

While this is an issue of Crangle's work, it is important to mention that this lack of research into comparative analysis could be because of his immense interview schedule, in which he was able to develop strong links to four immigrant communities and interview 39 people across them.[73] This allowed for the work to be more representative of the immigrants in Northern Ireland during the Troubles than this oral history is of its more recent period of study. Therefore, while disagreements between the two works are a result of many factors, mainly their different scopes, it should be acknowledged that Crangle's data is the more representative.

It must be acknowledged that most of the hateful events noted in this dissertation were perpetrated by a small minority of violent individuals and their acts were condemned by the majority, as evidenced by public reaction to the 2024 riots in Belfast. While there are currently no accurate numbers on how many people took part in the anti-immigration protests and the counter-protests, images from the events show a significant counter-protest which rivalled the size of the anti-immigration groups.[74] A fundraiser has also raised over £110,000 for repairing minority-owned businesses, with almost six thousand individual donors.[75] Some of those who have donated and contributed to the success of this campaign are confirmed to be White Northern Irish residents, and many more donors are assumed to be White Belfastians.[76] Although these donations may have also arrived from international donors, this initiative demonstrates the widespread support for the victims that greatly outnumbers those engaging in racist actions. While these riots ignited fear within the immigrant community, it is important to acknowledge

[73] Crangle, p 237.
[74] For example, Lynch and McCarthy.
[75] 'Donate to Help Repair Racially Motivated damages, Organized by Stephen Montgomery' in *gofundme.com*, 2024 (https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-repair-racially-motivated-damages?cdn-cache=0) (6 Aug. 2024).
[76] Eoin McCaul, 'Belfast Businessman Felt Sick Seeing Neighbouring Cafe Being Destroyed by anti-immigration Protesters' in *Belfast Telegraph* (5 Aug. 2024) (https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/belfast-businessman-felt-sick-seeing-neighbouring-cafe-being-destroyed-by-anti-immigration-protesters/a1592541254.html).

the support extended to them by non-immigrant strangers, which highlights the sense of solidarity and community between immigrants and the native-born population.

By not including the supportive community reaction and action to anti-immigration activity, such as similar fundraising efforts by the local community, or explicitly noting their absences, Crangle and the authors of *Divided Societies* portray Northern Ireland as hateful and are thus potentially ignoring the more complicated reality in the country. While one might expect that this sense of community between the Northern Irish and immigrants is a relatively new phenomenon, this does not seem to be the case. According to NILT surveys, there has been a 4% increase in prejudice towards ethnic minorities from 2005 to 2023 in the random population samples who participated across Northern Ireland.[77] While not a perfect predictor of attitudes of community between immigrants and those from the region, the NILT results suggest that Northern Irish society may have been more open to a cross-ethnic community than it is currently. This is an important point that deserves inclusion in these studies, even if the authors disagree with it.

Although the historical works referenced in this dissertation portray non-White migrants as victims in a markedly racist society even after 1998, other fields have been more successful in giving a more accurate depiction of the immigrant experience, as is demonstrated by the oral histories gathered for this dissertation. For example, Kempny's anthropological approach allowed her to immerse herself within Belfast's Polish community and witness all aspects of their life, by living with her subjects and attending many cultural events with them.[78] In doing this, she was able to comment on various aspects of immigrant life, from religion to food. While

[77]ARK. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, 2005 and 2023, ARK, www.ark.ac.uk/nilt, June 2006 and May 2024.
[78] Kempny, p 43.

there were discussions of racism between Kempny and her subjects, it was clear that these did not dominate the Polish experience in Belfast.

The nature of historical work often means that current events tend to be ignored, yet this dissertation has demonstrated that they are often critical to this field of study. As such, Kempny's immersion approach to her research should be considered for future historical studies on immigration to Belfast, because it can uncover more information than a traditional interview. As a Polish woman, she was able to fit in with the community, and recognise elements of Poland were being forgotten, like patterns of consumption, and which were being recreated within the Northern Irish context, such as cooking and Easter traditions.[79] While this approach is not possible for those studying multiple communities or communities with languages that the researcher is not fluent in, the variety of information that can be gained from outside the formal interview can be important in the advancement of this field.

Kempny's work is also useful because its complexity of analysis ensures that the Polish community does not become seen primarily as victims. Although racism is a subject in her book, both against Polish people and perpetrated by them, it is shown as just one aspect of their experience in Belfast.[80] Because she immersed herself in the community while being an outsider who never lived in the city, she was able to adopt a perspective that was curious about Polish life in its entirety.[81] This allows for a more nuanced perspective on the lives of Polish migrants.

[79] Ibid, pp 105-6, 117-27.
[80] Ibid, pp 32-33, 74-76.
[81] Ibid, p 36.

Conclusion: A New View of Immigration to Belfast

As this dissertation has demonstrated, the immigrant experience in Belfast has changed dramatically since the signing of the GFA in 1998, as have the overall perception of and reception to immigration, both in the Northern Irish government and the public. By placing a focus on the testimonies of immigrants through new interviews, while referring to newspaper articles highlighting some of the most important immigration flashpoints in the last 25 years, the author has been able to demonstrate a need to expand the historical literature on immigration to Belfast to include the post-Troubles period. The city's changing demographics, and thus a more robust support system that allows immigrants to thrive upon arrival, warrants this study and further exploration, especially after the recent August 2024 anti-immigration riots which took place after the interviews were conducted for this dissertation.

The rioting reinforces the idea that any study of Northern Irish history must be situated within a larger context of the United Kingdom. For example, Crangle's discussion of significant anti-Chinese racism in 1990s Northern Ireland does not make any mention that anti-Chinese racism was also prominent across Great Britain at that time, and victims were suffering similar methods of abuse.[1] Although there are sections within the work that advocate for analysis within the UK context, and attempt a 'heterogenous approach' to UK history, more could be done throughout the book to compare it to the other nations of the UK.[2] By omitting this context, there is an inherent assumption that Northern Irish issues are unique from those in the rest of the United Kingdom. However, the recent riots, which were sparked by similar riots in England, demonstrate that attitudes towards immigration in one area of the UK are similar to those in

[1] Crangle, pp 145-151. And *Hidden from Public view? Racism against the UK Chinese Population*, by Sue Adamson et al. (Hull, 2009), p 10.
[2] Crangle, p 231.

another, thus showing the connection between attitudes across it. While the migrant community in Belfast is smaller and newer than other cities that had these riots, the impact of this would have been small, as all the locations had the same trigger, and were fuelled by similar voices on social media.[3] This underlines the importance of the larger context of the immigration debate that currently defines political debate around the world and that such consideration must be seen in future studies. However, Crangle is correct to acknowledge that the recent history of Northern Ireland is often unique from the other nations within the UK and warrants separate analysis.

The interviews conducted for this dissertation have exposed a difference between the recent immigrant experience in Belfast in comparison to the experience of those who moved to the city before 1998, primarily in the perception of how one feels as a member of the city. Each interviewee was asked the same questions, and thus, the interview results can be compared easily. While this allowed for consistency across the interviews, the author's strict adherence to this meant that there were potentially important narratives that were not heard, especially ones that related to the interviewee's culture. As such, future projects should allow for more follow-up questions that could reveal more about the migrant experience among specific groups.

Though the nine interviews cannot be considered a representative sample of the immigrant population, the interviewees' responses did demonstrate that many immigrants from diverse origins feel that Belfast is a safe place to live and settle.[4] While the August 2024 riots may have eroded this sense of safety, the interviews are still relevant because they illustrate the trust that does and can exist between the immigrant community and the local Northern Irish. If there has been any loss of trust since the recent anti-immigration riots, this is likely to be

[3] Martin Lindsay and Calum Grewar, 'Social Media Misinformation "Fanned Riot Flames" in North East' in *BBC News* (2024) (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c70jz2r4lp0o) (14 Sept. 2024).
[4] Ma. And Pike. And Hassan.

temporary, at least at a community level. This mutual trust has been evident even after decades of racist incidents, suggesting that though this level of trust may fluctuate, it normally remains positive. However, with European debate around immigration being at most polarised as it has been in living memory, and with this being such a large event stoked by racist elements on social media, this is not certain, and warrants further study in the years that follow this dissertation.[5] Despite this Wu demonstrates, for example, there has been a growing sense of community between the Chinese community and the Northern Irish, particularly through participation in cultural events, despite many racist actions being directed against the former group in the past.[6]

The severity of racist attitudes and the prevalence of racial abuse in Northern Ireland is not as extreme as what is often portrayed in newspapers and academic literature, even considering the latest riots. This was contextualized by the predominant complaints of the interviewees, being about the weather and the food. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, this implies that the interviewees are not living in fear or feeling under threat, but rather they are preoccupied with finding belonging in Belfast and adjusting to the different climate and food.[7] As these aspects of the lived environment demand adjustment in any new locale, these results indicate that the immigrant experience in Belfast may share more similarities than differences in comparison to the immigrant experience in other cities.

This contrasts with the existing literature findings, which suggest that after the Troubles, Belfast became a 'normal' city to immigrate to. The conflict in the region before the mid-1990s would have made many feel that it was an unsafe destination to settle in, which therefore led to

[5] Mariusz Kwiatkowski, Anna Mielczarek-Żejmo and Martin Strouhal, *Multiculturalism: From Crisis to Renewal?* (Prague, 2020), p 77.
[6] Wu, p 117.
[7] Marlise R. Lonn and Jamoki Z. Dantzler, 'A Practical Approach to Counseling Refugees: Applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs' in *Journal of Counselor Practice*, viii, no. 2 (2011), p 67.

Northern Ireland having very few minorities at the time.[8] This perception has changed since the peace, but it is important to note that those who moved to Belfast over ten years ago from African countries can recall the absence of community support from other immigrants from their home country, as they were the first to arrive.[9] Both immigrants and locals suffer without these immigrant communities. Encouraging immigration into Northern Ireland with community support in place allows for better integration between locals and newcomers, without adversely impacting employment availability for native residents.[10] The contact hypothesis suggests that a sense of community allows for a migrant to experience easier integration.[11] It follows that the greater number of diverse migrants in the city has allowed it to be a more welcoming place for future immigrants.

Most of the more recent immigrant interviewees suggested that being able to immediately integrate with a familiar community, and rely on them for help while setting up their lives was beneficial to their success.[12] While there have been immigrant communities that offered support to each other before 1998, including employment for incoming friends and family, they were a much smaller subsection of the population than now.[13] The smaller migrant population, combined with the unsociable working hours while working in takeaways and restaurants, meant that there was less of a visible presence of immigrants in everyday life, thus presenting a challenge to communities to 'normalize' their existence within Belfast.[14] The Northern Irish government exacerbated this lack of visibility by failing to recognise a need to implement anti-

[8] Census 1991.
[9] Hassan.
[10] David Roodman, 'The Domestic Economic Impacts of Immigration' in *General Economics* (2014), p 2.
[11] Sugden and Tomlinson, p 20.
[12] Anonymous Sudanese migrant.
[13] Crangle p 72. And Census 1991.
[14] Crangle, p 155.

racial discrimination laws, based on the perception that there were too few minorities in the country for racism to be a problem, in part due to the working hours of the immigrants.[15] This cyclical pattern led to racism being a large and uncontrolled issue until the RRO was passed in 1997.

This challenge has been minimised since 1998, as migrant communities have grown in number and have become more vocal within Northern Ireland, both in terms of advocacy for more protections, as well as for cultural recognition in the form of festivals and celebrations, which help normalise their presence. Thus, Belfast has been able to become a host for many different major multicultural events, such as the Belfast Mela, and Northern Ireland has aligned its laws with the rest of the United Kingdom's racial discrimination laws, due to the advocacy of individuals such as Anna Lo, and organisations like the Chinese Welfare Association. While the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has suggested that improvements must be made to strengthen these laws in line with other European countries, it is obvious that the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 has vastly improved these protections since 1997.[16] While it is important to note that it should never be the responsibility of minorities to ensure their community is a safe place to live, the minority and immigrant community of Belfast actively sought change, resulting in a more welcoming city.

Despite the occasional outbursts of violence and news articles that stereotype Belfast as 'the race-hate capital of Europe', the interviews conducted within the scope of this study do not reflect this view. Regardless of sex, religion or race, all interviewees felt safe in the city almost all the time. This further demonstrates that these ideas about Belfast should be reviewed by

[15] Ibid, p 62.
[16] *Strengthening Protection against Racial Discrimination: Recommendations for Law Reform*, by The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (Belfast, 2014), pp 2-3.

academics and the media when discussing the modern immigrant experience, as Belfast should be viewed in a more generous light, although the issues that have been raised by these authors should not be ignored.

The study of the immigrant experience should be more holistic, particularly if there is a focus post-1998. As Kempny demonstrated in her findings after immersing herself in the Polish community and is found in the results of the research presented here, the migrant experience is primarily focused on integration into the community and incorporating traditions from one's home country into the new environment.[17] While her anthropological method of living with her studied community may not be an option for future historians, Kempny's work demonstrates the importance of studying the history of migration to Northern Ireland from a variety of perspectives and methods of research.

It is important to note that, while past studies focused primarily on difficulties endured by immigrants, this may not have been the intention of the researchers. As seen in the interview with the Zimbabwean migrant, interviewees may tailor their answers to fit what they perceive to be the researcher's aims. Without access to the interview questions employed by Crangle and others, it is impossible to say if this could have occurred during their research. However, as their goal was to assess life during the Troubles, it is possible that questions were, intentionally or as perceived by the interviewee, skewed toward racism and other negative societal aspects of life. While this influence can be mitigated through a thorough analysis and design of the interview questions, future studies may also want to consider anthropological forms of study, such as attending events as an observer.[18] Although it is not possible for a historian to fully immerse

[17] Kempny, p 110-130.
[18] For example, Kempny, p 43.

themselves within the communities they are studying, it is possible to do this at a smaller scale, by attending different events with participants, either special occasions or daily rituals (i.e. cooking), to gather data outside of the formal interview. Although the author was unable to do this under the time constraints of a master's dissertation, the implementation of this in future studies would possibly produce more accurate and nuanced findings.

By providing an opportunity to discuss their experience of immigration to Belfast, with the employment of open-ended, non-leading questions, this dissertation attempted to illustrate the history of immigration to Belfast without overly emphasising racism. In doing so, it has allowed for the sharing of diverse perspectives that highlight the realities of moving to and living in the city. However, the commonalities of experience, most being positive, are surprising considering the historical work on 20th-century migration which yielded more negative results. While this dissertation's oral history included interviews with two White Americans, when none were present in the secondary sources, which may have skewed the perceptions of racism found, the overwhelming positivity from all the interviewees suggests that this difference is not explained only by a different interview pool. Despite the small sample size, the interviews conducted for this dissertation demonstrate that immigration to Belfast after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement is starkly different from immigration before it, and thus warrants more thorough historical analysis in the future.

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Interviewees and Details

Anonymous American	American woman, working, current QUB student, lived in North, East and South Belfast
Anonymous Emirati	Emirati man, working, former QUB student, lives in City Centre
Anonymous Indian	Indian woman, working, lived in south Belfast
Anonymous Polish	Polish man, working, lived in East Belfast
Anonymous Sudanese	Sudanese woman, lives in South Belfast
Anonymous Zimbabwean	Zimbabwean man, working, lived in North Belfast
Hassan	Sudanese woman, Unemployed, lives in South Belfast
Ma	Chinese man, unemployed, former QUB student, lives in South Belfast
Pike	American man, working, former QUB student, lived in South Belfast

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Personal information and pre-coming to Belfast

1. Where did you live before immigrating to Belfast
2. How old were you when coming to Northern Ireland?
    a. What year was this?
3. Did you come on your own or with others?
    a. Who else came with you?
4. Was Belfast the first place you immigrated to?
    a. If not, where else have you lived
5. Why did you decide to leave your home country?
6. Who did you bring with you on your immigration journey?
7. Why did you decide to come to Belfast?
8. Did you know anyone who lived in Belfast or Northern Ireland before you arrived?
9. Did you connect with any organisations in Belfast
10. What did you know about Belfast and Northern Ireland before arriving?
11. How was your experience applying for a visa?

Arriving in Belfast

12. Did you have any help when you arrived, in terms of moving in or getting settled within Belfast?

13. What part of Belfast did you first settle in?
    a. What were your initial impressions of the area?
    b. Have those impressions changed now?
14. In the first few months after you moved in, did you have much contact with other people in your area?
    a. Were they other immigrants or locals?
15. Did you join any community/ religious organisations in the first months after you arrived?
    a. Did you find it easy to find these groups
    b. Have you joined any more recently
16. How did you find work?
    a. Did you find it easy to find work?
17. Did you make an effort to connect with other members of immigrant communities?
    a. If yes, were they from the same country as you, or other countries?
        i. Did they arrive around the same time as you or earlier?
18. Did you make any friends in the first months after your arrival?
19. If you came with children, how did they find school in Belfast?

Continued life in Belfast

20. Have you continued to be involved in community/religious groups?
21. Do you have a close group of friends?
    a. Are they mostly other immigrants or native Northern Irish people?
22. Do you consider Belfast 'home'?
23. Do you visit your home/birth country often?
24. What do you miss most about your home/birth country?
25. What do you do when you are missing your home/birth country?
26. Is it easy to find clothes/food/other things from your home country?
27. What are the best aspects of living here?
28. What are the worst the worst aspects of living here?
29. Do you still feel connected to your home country through culture/food/etc?
30. Do you participate in any cultural festivals here…
    a. From your home country?
    b. From Northern Ireland?
    c. From other countries?
31. How has your perception of Belfast changed from when you first arrived?
32. Are you happy in Belfast?
33. How long do you plan to remain in Belfast?
    a. Is there a place you would like to move to?

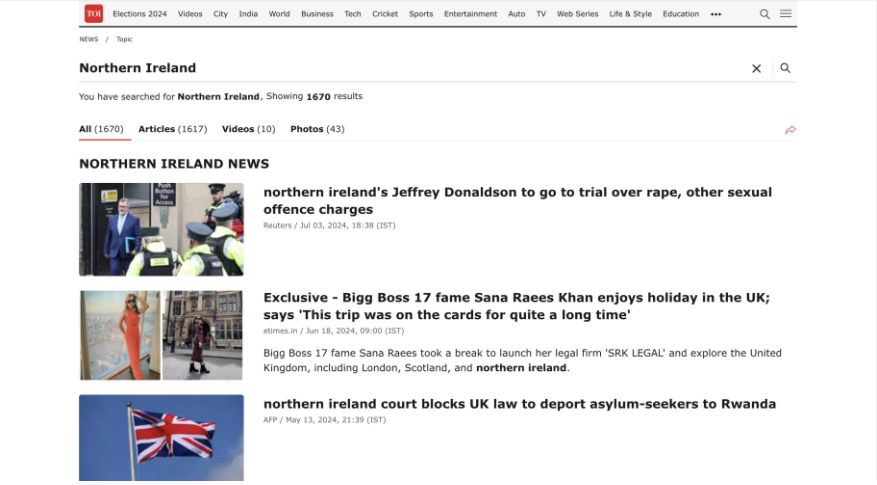
Treatment

34. Do you feel safe when walking around…
    a. Your neighbourhood?
    b. To work?

c. Shopping in the City Centre?

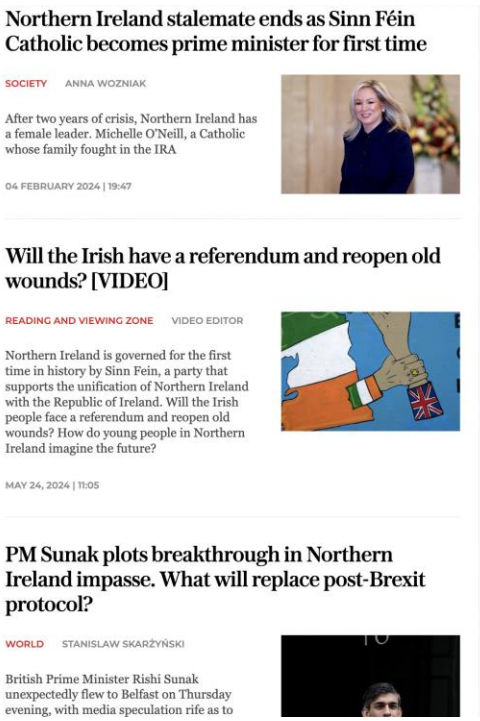
35. How do you feel you are treated…
    a. By your neighbours?
    b. By other immigrants?
    c. By locals Northern Irish people?
36. Do you think your friends and family have similar experiences?

Appendix 3: Screenshots from International News Websites



Times of India search for 'Northern Ireland' (July 3, 2024)

Xinhua News Agency search for 'Northern Ireland' (July 3, 2024)



Northern Ireland stalemate ends as Sinn Féin Catholic becomes prime minister for first time

SOCIETY ANNA WOZNIAK

After two years of crisis, Northern Ireland has a female leader. Michelle O'Neill, a Catholic whose family fought in the IRA

04 FEBRUARY 2024 | 19:47

Will the Irish have a referendum and reopen old wounds? [VIDEO]

READING AND VIEWING ZONE VIDEO EDITOR

Northern Ireland is governed for the first time in history by Sinn Fein, a party that supports the unification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. Will the Irish people face a referendum and reopen old wounds? How do young people in Northern Ireland imagine the future?

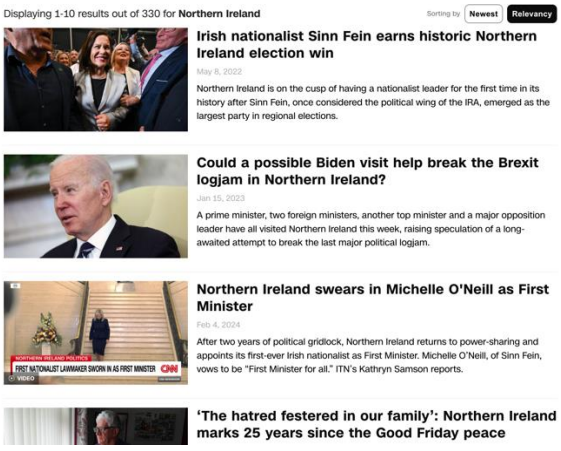
MAY 24, 2024 | 11:05

PM Sunak plots breakthrough in Northern Ireland impasse. What will replace post-Brexit protocol?

WORLD STANISLAW SKARŻYŃSKI

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak unexpectedly flew to Belfast on Thursday evening, with media speculation rife as to

Gazeta Wyborcza translated search for 'Northern Ireland' (July 3, 2024)



Displaying 1-10 results out of 330 for **Northern Ireland** Sorting by Newest Relevancy

Irish nationalist Sinn Fein earns historic Northern Ireland election win

May 8, 2022

Northern Ireland is on the cusp of having a nationalist leader for the first time in its history after Sinn Fein, once considered the political wing of the IRA, emerged as the largest party in regional elections.

Could a possible Biden visit help break the Brexit logjam in Northern Ireland?

Jan 15, 2023

A prime minister, two foreign ministers, another top minister and a major opposition leader have all visited Northern Ireland this week, raising speculation of a long-awaited attempt to break the last major political logjam.

Northern Ireland swears in Michelle O'Neill as First Minister

Feb 4, 2024

After two years of political gridlock, Northern Ireland returns to power-sharing and appoints its first-ever Irish nationalist as First Minister. Michelle O'Neill, of Sinn Fein, vows to be "First Minister for all." ITN's Kathryn Samson reports.

'The hatred festered in our family': Northern Ireland marks 25 years since the Good Friday peace

CNN search for 'Northern Ireland' (July 3, 2024)

Appendix 4: Examples of Migrant-Run Businesses on the Ormeau Road

Bangla Bazaar on the left and Yambo Food on the right. https://maps.app.goo.gl/8FiiWTZFgkzjTQZP6

Just Grill and Golden Harvest Takeaways. https://maps.appgoo.gl/6jkUfVMDWa7tDsPB9

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Ma, Interview by Benjamin Harris, 1 July 2024.

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