Possibilities for change? Diversity in Post-Conflict Belfast

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Possibilities for change? Diversity in Post-Conflict Belfast

Abstract: Belfast is often presented as an exemplary divided or post-conflict city. However, this focus can be limiting and an exploration of alternative narratives for Belfast is needed. This paper investigates the diversification of post-conflict Belfast in light of the substantial migration which has occurred in the last decade, outlining the complexities of an emerging narrative of diversity. We note discrepancies in how racial equality is dealt with at an institutional level and report on the unevenness of migrant geographies, issues which require future consideration. We also raise questions that problematize the easy assumption that cultural diversity ameliorates existing sectarian divisions.

Introduction

Belfast is often presented as an exemplary divided or post-conflict city. However, this status can be a type of "imprisonment" within a paradigmatic silo (O'Dowd and Komarova 2013). While social, cultural and political life in early 21st century Belfast still consists largely of relations between two embittered dominant groups (Lee 2013), a focus on the two largest groups simplifies the messiness of social life and could perpetuate longstanding divisions. Different narratives offer alternative perspectives (Murtagh 2010, Nagle 2013) and are increasingly important, since, as Nolan argues, "the war of narratives has replaced the war of weapons" (2014:163). O'Dowd and Komarova (2013) contend that to avoid an approach premised on a utopian city and to give voice to diverse and marginalized groups, any unfolding narratives must be mindful of the legacy of the city. So too alternative narratives are not silver bullets to the wicked problem of Northern Ireland's conflict. To support their emergence they need to be rigorously considered. This paper outlines the limitations, possibilities and complexities of a narrative of a diverse city.

The promise of alterity from newcomers has been considered since the conjunction of Northern Ireland's history and increased diversity began to be meaningfully explored. Although some have commented on the fact that increased diversity and associated multiple identities offer alternatives to the two tradition paradigm (Hainsworth 1998; Nic Craith 2002: Gaffikin et al. 2009), Gilligan et al. argue that "If 'integration' and 'diversity' are to be meaningful they need to have some content, rather than simply being catchphrases" (2011:267).

Plurality should not be approached as a vague solution to a difficult problem; much work needs to be done to understand diversification in Northern Ireland.

This paper discusses the limitations of institutional focus on sectarian division and considers the spatial effects of increased migration in the city. We draw on a growing body of literature that has examined the experiences of migrants in Northern Ireland (Jarman 2005; Gilligan 2008; Geoghegan 2010, Kempny 2010, 2013; Gilligan et al 2011; McAreavey 2012; Russell 2012; Bell 2012; McMonagle and McDermott 2014; Wallace et al. 2013; Irwin and McAreavey 2014) and builds on research that McAreavey has been conducting with migrant communities in Northern Ireland since 2005[i]. We use data from the 2011 Census to map new geographies of diversity in Belfast, and consider these in light of discourses describing post-conflict urban change in the city. We end by reflecting on the emerging narrative of a diverse Belfast.

Migration to Northern Ireland

All cities are in some way 'divided' as all experience disputes among social groups over a range of issues, including perceived power imbalances and identity (Gaffikin and Morrisey 2011). Belfast is one of a number of cities throughout the world which, despite historical, political and cultural differences, share the intractability of entrenched division between the two largest ethno-national groups, Protestants and Catholics.[ii] In Belfast division is manifest in many ways including enduring segregated residential, schooling and domestic practices (Boal 1972, 1996, 2002; Shuttleworth and Lloyd 2009, 2013; Jarman and Bell 2009), walls which divide communities at "interface areas" (Byrne

2012), identity conflicts, and the possibility of violent hostilies. (Nolan 2012, 2013, 2014).

The influx of migrants to Northern Ireland following the expansion of the European Union (EU) in 2004 has been notable. Between the 2001 Census to the 2011 Census, the number of non-UK/Ireland migrants to Northern Ireland tripled (from 1.6% to 4.5%) and number of ethnic minorities doubled (from 0.8% to 1.7%). Belfast Local Government District had 6.56% non-UK/Ireland migrants and 87.5% of residents born in Northern Ireland in the 2011 Census. [iii] EU expansion in 2004 was matched by a significant rise in Central and Eastern European migrants, a pattern that tailed off with the market downturn. Meanwhile humanitarian and environmental crises have led to the movement of citizens from a range of African countries. It is estimated that at least 500 individuals from the Horn of Africa live in Northern Ireland, many of whom moved since 2010 (Young 2012). In contemporary Belfast, no single group constitutes a clear demographic majority, a change partially attributable to the recent influx of migrants.[iv]   This complexity extends to migrant groups themselves. Though the generic label 'migrants' is used to group individuals who typically move to benefit from new economic opportunities, in reality it denotes many different types of individuals, all of whom have different motivations for migrating and diverse experiences of migration (Bell 2012, McAreavey 2012).

Alba notes that migration is a 'path-dependent process that hinges on the materials available in the social-structural, cultural, legal, and other institutional domains of the receiving society as well as on characteristics and histories that

the immigrants themselves present' (2005:41). Belfast is thus an excellent case to examine how migrants experience the particular challenges, institutional, social and otherwise, of a divided post-conflict society and to explore their capacity to shape new narratives for the city.

Institutional Discrepancies

Sectarianism has a structural role in governance in Northern Ireland, as embodied in Strand One, item 6 of the 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement which requires politics to function according to ethnonational identity as nationalist, unionist or 'other'. This is for the stated purpose of measuring cross-community support, but there is growing evidence that in practice it has led to sidelining of the "other" identities and concerns (Geoghegan 2010; McDermott 2012; McGonagle and McDermott 2014). An example of the import of this sensitive issue was the controversy over the new NI21 Political Party opting for 'other' designation from the 'unionist' designation; as one party member stated this put the party into "no man's land" (Newsletter 2014; BBC 2014).

As relations between social groups are considered predominately within the binary of Protestant/Catholic, race relations are considered separately and can seem an afterthought, placing less value on other identities and offering little opportunity for structural change. This is borne out through policy interventions. For example, the 2013 'good relations' strategy document, *Together Building a United Community* (OFMDFM 2013) addresses sectarian division. Current policy for racial equality is contained separately in the outdated *A Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2010* (OFMDFM

2005) with a new document for race relations to be consulted on in 2014. As one advocacy group pointed out, the legal and policy framework has been operating without an underpinning strategy, making it difficult to realize racial equality and rights (NI Assembly 2013). Moreover what policy exists is disjointed, in contrast to the unified approach of the Single Equality Act (2010) that is found in other jurisdictions in the UK (Wallace Consulting 2011; ECNI 2011). For example the 2005-2010 Racial Equality strategy seeks to overcome inequalities in the labour market, and yet the Economic Strategy for Northern Ireland (DETI 2012a) and the accompanying Action Plan (DETI 2012b) both fail to mention migrants as a potential and untapped economic resource.

There is also evidence of difficulty in addressing racial equality issues in policy implementation. The words of a third sector professional illustrate an institutional inability to accommodate wider social interests:

> *I also think it's something to do with where we're at in terms of Northern Ireland and in terms of our systems and our understanding. There's a lack of any proper employment strategy or of a qualification strategy and it's almost as if the people who are coming here are still visitors and the idea is that they are going to go home again and it's reflected right through the system... when [refugees] sign up at jobcentre plus or wherever they are not called in for interview in the same way as locals would be because the thinking is that it's easier to keep them on benefits than to train them. That's a real problem and I really do think that we haven't ...got our heads around the fact that people are here to stay...* (FG 03.04.12 Stakeholder No. 3).

Inconsistent public responses to the challenges of migration are evident across different policy domains (Wallace et al 2013) and there is a need for monitoring to ensure policy is more than just a 'paper exercise'. (McAreavey 2012). One

individual articulated the implications of such discrepancies within the schooling system:

'…money goes to the school and it is not earmarked, it is not ring fenced like disability, for ethnic minorities it just goes into the school pot. More appallingly in Northern Ireland the education system is the only system that is outside the Section75 power[v] so basically there is no scrutinising…' (FG 03.04.12 Stakeholder No. 2).

This led to a practice where *'Some schools are very good and they will spend the money on supporting ethnic minorities, and some schools aren't so good'* (FG 03.04.12 Stakeholder No. 7).

An overall lack of coordinated efforts means that Racial Equality is often dealt with in a piecemeal manner, and the absence of scrutiny further demonstrates institutional limitations. The institutional approach to diversity requires legitimacy if migrants and ethnic minorities are to participate across society and contribute to an emerging narrative.

Patterns of plurality

Spatial elements of the Northern Irish conflict prevail including residential segregation, walls dividing communities, and a strong association between identity and space (territorialism). Migrants make sense of (and make home) in this nuanced socio-geography.

There has been a process of socio-spatial restructuring in Belfast in the 'peace process' era. This restructuring has been shown to be part of the process of Dual

or Twin Speed cities (likely a symptom of the global processes of widening disparities in wealth) wherein some spaces have a growing elite character and other parts of Belfast have been "left behind" (Murtagh 2010:1232).   With regard to sectarian territories, the complicated processes can be summarized spatially as an increase in Catholic middle classes in suburban and wealthy areas, both established and gentrifying, particularly in South and East Belfast, and a decrease in Protestant populations, particularly in East Belfast (Shuttleworth and Lloyd 2013).   These demographic changes have been interpreted by some Protestants as a 'retreat' with an accompanying narrative of loss (Nolan 2014: 13).   Migration adds a layer of complexity to an already complicated interaction between sectarian and socio-economic divisions.

As illustrated in Map I, migrants live in concentrated communities in different parts of Belfast.   They are thus changing the nature of different neighborhoods and communities.

Map I: COB "Other" and "EU Post 2004" residences in Belfast at the small area level.[vi]

<Insert Map I>

Source: © Crown copyright and database rights.

Map I illustrates that migrants are concentrated in particular areas of the city. This concentration and variability can also be evidenced in the percentage of migrants at the Census small area level as shown in Table I below. It should be noted that this geographic unit is variable in size and the numbers in questions are small, so percentages should be approached with caution. Nonetheless the data illustrates high concentrations of migrant communities in relatively small areas and, significantly, this has emerged over a relatively short period of time.

Table I: Census Small Areas in Belfast with migrant highest percentages, EU post 2004 (over 14%) or Other COB (over 20%)

Census Small Area	Ward	EU Pre 2004 (%)	EU Post 2004 (%)	Other (%)	Combined Non UK/Ireland Migrant (%)	Multiple Deprivation Ranking for Ward
N00000105	The Mount	1.69	20.08	4.23	26.00	25
N00001498	The Mount	0.22	14.13	2.61	16.96	25
N00001130	Duncairn	0	16.2	1.12	17.32	14
N00000993	Bloomfield	1.27	14.41	1.27	16.95	315
N00000982	Blackstaff	1.19	14.68	3.97	19.84	42
N00001155	Falls	2.2	6.13	24.43	32.76	2
N00001416	Shaftesbury	2.53	3.17	30.94	36.64	22
N00000927	Beechmount	0	0.71	29.93	30.64	34
N00001597	Windsor	2.21	5.17	23.17	30.55	421
N00000903	Ballynafeigh	2.91	4.37	33.98	41.26	251
N00001009	Botanic	2.66	4.79	21.28	28.73	237

Sources: 2011 Census KS204NI. Deprivation data from NISRA 2010. 1 is most deprived, out of 582

Non-EU migrants (COB "Other") are concentrated in the city center (at the center of the map between the motorway and river) and regenerated Titanic areas, with additional notable clusters near Queen's University, in Ballynafeigh and the

Royal Hospital. The city center was little used for residential development during the Troubles (Neill 2004, O'Dowd and Komarova 2010), but there has been substantial apartment building as part of a regeneration agenda. Gaffikin et al. (2008) identified considerable numbers of migrants living in new apartment buildings.

Post-2004 EU migrants have notable communities to the east of the River Lagan, as well as the city center, and Inner South and North Belfast neighborhoods. These inner-Belfast areas are traditionally Protestant. Many of the Protestant communities in East Belfast are adjacent to, or part of, diversifying areas inhabited by relatively large numbers of migrants. Diversification here has occurred in tandem with the emergence of the sense "retreat" for some Protestants and perceived attacks on identity resulting in the flag protests.

More affluent parts of the city have experienced diversification as well (such as the Bloomfield, and Windsor wards) evidencing variation in migrant experience. Some areas have seen substantially less diversification. To the west of the city center (as indicated by the motorway network), outer East and North Belfast there are less concentrated and smaller migrant communities, illustrating that diversification is occurring spatially unevenly and is disproportionately concentrated.

Migrants are part of a nuanced social geography in areas of the city with substantial ethno-national segregation (2011 Census KS212NI) and disparity in deprivation (NISRA 2010). As migrants are concentrated there is the possibility

of migrant segregation adding a new layer of segregation onto ethno-national segregation. Additionally, tenure patterns are substantially different for migrants compared to those born locally, which has a number of implications.

Figure I: Tenure by Birth Location for Belfast Local Government District[vii]
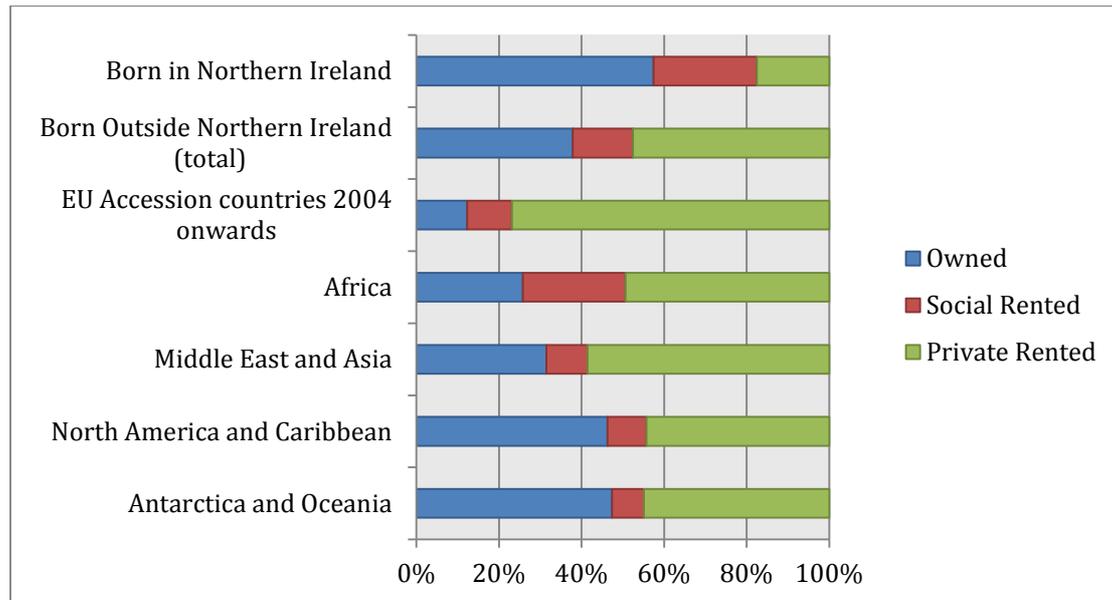
Source: 2011 Census dataset DC2407NI

Private renting in Belfast is disproportionally high for those born in post 2004 EU Accession countries (76%), as well as those born outside Northern Ireland (48%), compared to 18% of those born in Northern Ireland.   Social rented accommodation is substantially lower for those born outside of Northern Ireland (15%) than those born in Northern Ireland (25%).

The disproportionate reliance on private housing allows migrants to move between addresses before they settle and, in more extreme cases, before they feel safe. Just as some Protestant working class areas are perceived to be safe

(Guardian 2007), certain Catholic working class areas are considered by a number of migrants as being 'unsafe'. A focus group interpreter elaborates:

> *"[No. 4] lives in a very good area and all of her neighbours are really nice, she even mentioned that she doesn't have to close the door! (lots of laughter)...if she has something that she doesn't understand she will ask them, she lives in the Belmont Area [in East Belfast, predominately Protestant gentrified]...It really depends on the area, [No.1] used to live in the Falls Road [Catholic working class area] and that wasn't very good – she had been disturbed by local kids and she ended up moving. She moved to the Ormeau Rd...and this is much better"* (Interpreter, FG, Chinese Women, 21.03.12).

Time and again research respondents reported their multiple moves; for example one Polish woman moved with her two children and husband several times from the South to the North of the city, before settling in a new housing development on the edge of North Belfast. In this way migrants exert agency and also draw on social networks to find a neighborhood that suits them.

However, without access to knowledge or sufficient finances there are possibilities of migrants getting "stuck" in particular areas, or being pushed from private rental to private rental. Leaving the free market to provide for migrants channels them to specific locations that are not necessarily welcoming, a particular concern given the Protestant narrative of "loss" and widening class inequalities. The possibility of conflict has been demonstrated in recent months with racial attacks frequently in the media. (Belfast Telegraph 2014, for example). Lack of an adopted and integrated equality strategy, as well as strong political leadership, will hinder the ability to addresses these issues.

Conclusions

This article touched on some of the complexities of the emerging narrative of diverse Belfast. The prevailing institutional focus on sectarian division and lack of policy to address racial equality places limitations on migrants' and ethnic minorities' ability to participate across society and contribute to an emerging narrative. The diversification process is occurring spatially unevenly in Belfast, which requires migrants to navigate complex socio-geographies, and has had unequal effects on communities. Migrants can move between locations to find suitable homes, but this requires financial resources. The predominance of private renting coupled with the financial resources needed to relocate mean that migrants can be stuck in difficult neighborhoods. More diverse neighborhoods may provide a counter to territorialism. However, they may also entail plural segregation or result in conflict between migrants and other communities.

It is too simplistic to assume that cultural diversity somehow dilutes sectarian identities. Nolan notes how geography and education can ascribe a Protestant or Catholic identity to migrants (2013). We found evidence of migrants manipulating sectarian categories according to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Moreover Kempny (2013) shows how migrant use of sectarian identity is not necessarily a matter of straightforward adoption, documenting inconsistencies in Polish migrants' approaches which were a means of contesting the sectarian divide. In certain situations the frameworks of sectarianism limit plural identities, but it is evident that migrants use, reproduce, and change sectarian identities in differing ways. The influence of migration is more

complex than can be assumed and it requires further attention. Plural identities

have long been considered a possible mitigating factor to the problems of

entrenched sectarianism. So too the narrative of a diverse Belfast provides an

alternative to the narrative of a contested Belfast. However this narrative is

inchoate; it needs to be further understood and further supported if it is to lead

to anything other than a derisory bolt-on to existing division.

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[i] The paper draws on research with migrant communities that McAreavey has been conducting in Northern Ireland since 2005 and Doyle since 2012.

Data from 20 semi-structured interviews and ten focus groups with migrants and with representatives from advocacy groups is used (see Irwin et al. 2014 and Wallace et al. 2013 for full details). Most of the migrant research participants were recent arrivals to Northern Ireland. Although some have been living there for over 20 years, none had been born there. They include refugees and economic migrants from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa. They work in professional positions, in skilled and in unskilled jobs. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, with interpreters being used where appropriate.

Consent was granted from all participants and the payment of an honorarium to migrant participants provided token recognition of their contribution. Data was analysed and interpreted by reading and re-reading scripts, followed by a process of coding to identify and embed emerging issues (Boeije 2010).

A coding system is used to present the data. Data is presented according to the following key and in some cases pseudonyms are assigned to help make the analysis of certain incidents easier to follow:

Migrants
Focus Groups – #1, 2, 3, etc.; FG; gender; country of birth, date
Interviews- #1, 2, 3, etc.; I, gender; country of birth; date
Advocacy workers
#1, 2, 3, etc.; FG= focus group/I =Interview; organization; gender; date.

[ii] The terms Protestant and Catholic are used to denote ethno-national identity in Northern Ireland. The use of these terms reflects the 2011 Census, wherein these categories are a response to the Census question "religion or religion brought up in". The terms Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist are generally synonymous. Like all identity Northern Irish identity is complex and reproduced.
[iii] As measured by "Country of Birth" (COB)); Census 2011 Datasets KS204NI and KS201NI, 2001 Census datasets 201833 and 201837. Belfast local government district boundary is pre-reform of local government.
[iv] As measured by Religion or Religion brought up in, a census category which provides a measurement of Protestant or Catholic ethnic identity (KS212NI).
[v] Section 75 of the 1998 (Belfast) Agreement requires public bodies to consider impacts of their policies on equality and "good relations" between groups.
[vi] NISRA dataset KS204NI; this combines COB into the categories for non UK/Ireland COB of "EU Pre-2004, "EU-Post 2004, and "Other". "EU Post 2004" data approximates A8 migrants as a group. Substantial spatial variations between A8 migrant groups are evidenced in language and single COB data.   In Map I counts at the small area level were used to illustrate the raw numbers

of migrant residence at the most local level for which data is available. These differences are mapped in two Census 2011 categories, but differences are apparent for other categories as well. [vii] "Social rented" combines data for Northern Ireland Housing Executive and for housing associations and charitable trust households. Location of birth categories are selected from a larger dataset and do not equal the "total" born outside Northern Ireland.