



Book review of Lubit,
Amanda J. 2025. *Life
as a Migrant Muslim
Woman in Sectarian
Northern Ireland: An
Exploration of Gender,
Visibility, Movement, and
Placemaking*. New York:
Berghahn Books, 205 pp.

BOOK REVIEW

SEYEDEH GOLAFROOZ RAMEZANI

**Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article.*

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Life as a Migrant Muslim Woman in Sectarian Northern Ireland offers a critical and engaging examination of how migrant Muslim women navigate Northern Ireland's complex social, political, and cultural landscapes. Authored by Amanda J. Lubit, a scholar of migration, identity, and intersectionality, the book bridges migration studies, gender studies, and peace and conflict scholarship. Focusing on the post-Good Friday Agreement context, Lubit explores how these women experience visibility, movement, and place-making within a still-divided society. Northern Ireland presents a rare empirical case where post-conflict dynamics intersect with new patterns of migration, making it an especially fertile ground for studying *how historical divisions shape contemporary inclusion and exclusion*. She foregrounds their voices to show not only the exclusions and stereotypes they encounter but also the strategies of resistance and belonging they craft through everyday practices. By analysing the micro-geographies of place and movement, the book contributes to migration scholarship by connecting intersectionality and transnationalism with the historical specificity of Northern Ireland's sectarian divisions.

The 14 substantive chapters, framed by an introduction and conclusion, move from contextual background to thematic analyses. Chapters 1–2 trace Northern Ireland's history of sectarian conflict and profile the region's migrant Muslim population. This framing is crucial: since 1998, in-migration has increased, yet policy and research remain focused on the Catholic–Protestant divide, rendering minorities 'officially invisible' (p. 3). Chapters 3–4 introduce the dual concepts of visibility and invisibility, examining how Islamic clothing and women-only religious spaces shape public perceptions, personal safety, and belonging. Visibility is both a marker of identity and a site of negotiation: the hijab can attract Islamophobic aggression yet also convey pride and solidarity; invisibility can be protective and empowering alike. Chapters 5–6 examine the institutional nature of sectarianism and its intersections with sexism, racism, and Islamophobia. Participant narratives and policy analysis reveal how housing authorities, police, and other bodies perpetuate exclusion, echoing

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

**SeyedeH Golafrooz
Ramezani**

Faculty of Arts, Department
of Cultures, University of
Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

[golafrooz.ramezani@
helsinki.fi](mailto:golafrooz.ramezani@helsinki.fi)

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McVeigh's (2014) argument that sectarianism underpins racism even when policy treats them separately.

Chapters 7–8 turn to social exclusion, belonging, and the ‘creative power of care.’ In a context where institutional support is limited and legal precarity is common, care becomes a crucial resource for survival and solidarity among migrant women. Lubit explores practices such as sharing housing, providing childcare, and emotional support networks within the Sadiqa Women’s Space, a women-only community center created by and for migrant Muslim women. Care here is strategic as well as altruistic—used to build alliances, manage scarcity, and negotiate belonging—highlighting how care can be both strategic and relational in navigating exclusion and building community.

Chapters 9–10 explore women-only spaces such as the Islamic Centre and Sadiqa Women’s Space as sites for social, emotional, and physical mobility, allowing women to gather, move safely through the city, and engage in community life without fear of surveillance or hostility. Bodily practices like prayer and yoga emerge as gendered forms of emplacement, resonating with de Certeau’s (1984) notion of ‘everyday practices’—the subtle, often overlooked actions, such as walking, cooking, or ritual movement, through which individuals navigate and personalise structured spaces.

Chapters 11–12 address asylum-seeking and refugee women, whose legal precarity heightens restrictions on movement and access to resources. Lubit resists victim narratives, instead highlighting how women collectively transform spaces as a form of resilience.

The final chapters (13–14) examine digital placemaking during coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic lockdowns. Online spaces—WhatsApp groups, remote classes—provided safety and agency, complicating assumptions of lockdown as solely isolating. The conclusion synthesises the work’s analytic framework, stressing the interconnections between gender, visibility, movement, and empowerment.

Lubit’s intervention is timely and significant for three reasons. First, it broadens the horizons of Northern Ireland studies, long dominated by sectarian conflict research (cf. Bryan 2015). By focusing on a minority population outside the ‘two communities’ framework (i.e., the Catholic–Protestant divide), the book compels a reconsideration of what constitutes social division in post-conflict societies. Second, it contributes to global literature on Muslim diasporas, which has centered on cities with longer migration histories. Comparable ethnographies, such as Hopkins’ (2016) study of young Muslim men in Scotland or Keaton’s (2006) research on Muslim women in Paris’s *banlieues*, operate in different political and demographic contexts. Lubit’s setting—small-scale migration into a still-segregated city—challenges prevailing assumptions in migration studies about integration trajectories, public visibility, and inter-minority relations. Third, the book extends intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1989) through embodied ethnography, showing how gender, religion, race, class, migratory status, and local sectarianism intersect in spatial practices and social relations, resonating with Mirza’s (2013) application of intersectionality to Black and Muslim women’s lived experiences in Britain.

Three themes stand out for their conceptual and empirical depth. First, Lubit shows that sectarianism in Northern Ireland is not merely parallel to racism but actively shapes it, with Muslim women encountering prejudice shaped by both global Islamophobic tropes and local territorial politics. For example, navigating ‘single-sect’ or so-called ‘interface’ neighbourhoods—zones where segregated communities meet—means

reading visual cues such as flags, murals, and graffiti that may signal hostility; a process seen elsewhere in Europe but uniquely layered by Belfast's sectarian context.

Second, Lubit's analysis of mobility—whether crossing town for a gathering, entering a government office, or joining a yoga class—foregrounds the micro-geographies of migration. Extending [Al-Ali and Tas's \(2018\)](#) work on Kurdish and Turkish women's activism, Lubit shows how even seemingly apolitical movements are shaped by security concerns, gender norms, and racialised surveillance; immobility can be a deliberate strategy. Finally, her exploration of care relations reveals them as strategies for alliance-building, resource management, and belonging—including practices such as shared childcare, temporary housing arrangements, and emotional support within the Sadiqa community—echoing [Hochschild's \(2015\)](#) 'global care chain' while grounding it in local migrant community dynamics.

The book's strength lies in its meticulous ethnography and theoretical synthesis of intersectionality, transnationalism, and placemaking. Lubit avoids reductive victim narratives, emphasising agency in navigating restrictions and hostility. One area for further development could be a deeper comparative discussion of Muslim migrant experiences in other post-conflict or divided societies, such as [Haniffa's \(2015\)](#) study of Northern Muslims in Sri Lanka to situate her findings in a broader global framework. Given the rise of online community-building during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, an expanded analysis of digital mobilities—such as the use of WhatsApp groups, remote learning, and online support networks to sustain connection and community across physical distances—could also enrich the study.

Despite these potential expansions, the book's critical approach to the intersection of migration and sectarianism fills an important scholarly gap and offers practical insights for both academic and professional audiences. It is essential reading for scholars in migration, gender, and peace and conflict studies and for practitioners in refugee support, integration policy, and community development. Its empirical depth, vivid ethnographic scenes, and nuanced theory make it valuable for postgraduate courses on ethnographic methods, intersectionality, and minority integration in divided societies, while its policy insights call for context-specific approaches to social inclusion and minority rights.

Life as a Migrant Muslim Woman in Sectarian Northern Ireland is a timely, thorough, and insightful contribution to multiple fields. By weaving rich ethnographic data with critical theory, it illuminates the contested processes of identity-making and belonging in a historically divided society. While there is room for expanded comparative and digital perspectives, its core contributions provide a strong foundation for future research and policy on migrant Muslim lives in Northern Ireland and beyond.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Seyedeh Golafrooz Ramezani

Post-doctoral Researcher, Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland; Faculty of Arts, Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

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