


BOOK REVIEW

## Niall Gilmartin and Brendan Ciarán Browne. *Refugees and Forced Displacement in Northern Ireland's Troubles: Untold Journeys*

**Migrations and Identities. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022. Pp. 256. \$130.00 (cloth).**

Ashley M. Morin 

University at Buffalo, The State University of New York  
Email: [ammorin@buffalo.edu](mailto:ammorin@buffalo.edu), [ashleymorin65@gmail.com](mailto:ashleymorin65@gmail.com)

Through *Refugees and Forced Displacement in Northern Ireland's Troubles: Untold Journeys*, authors Niall Gilmartin and Brendan Ciarán Browne offer insight into an oft acknowledged, yet rarely researched, element of the Troubles: forced displacement. They define displacement as a communication or perception of intimidation and fear, which leads to either permanent or temporary flight in search of security. Through application of this definition, Gilmartin and Browne move beyond the standard approach to conflict scholarship of key events and people, and in doing so, offer readers new perspectives on the conflict that had previously been silenced. While lending voice to this silence is one goal of the monograph, another seeks to broaden understandings of conflict-related violence, loss, and harm. Both claims encourage a reconsideration of the Troubles beyond well-trodden events and moments. Such an approach contributes to understanding the lived experience of the conflict as well as considerations of conflict transition.

Based on eighty-eight interviews, these first-hand accounts shed light onto varied ways forced displacement impacted not only individuals, but also altered urban spaces in Northern Ireland. On the individual level, Gilmartin and Browne claim, “[t]he often-violent uprooting of families and communities produced, for many, a legacy of dislocation and unease that remain potent and unresolved” (4). They go on to cite a perception, among both affected Protestants and Catholics, of forced movement as being part of ethnic cleansing; though the authors assert that while forced displacement was extensive in Northern Ireland, it is unlikely to amount to international crime. Rather, these personal accounts and evocations lend credence to the fears, dangers, and emotions behind the statistics. Though no definitive number of those forcibly displaced has been agreed upon, the authors offer sobering data to contextualize this crisis, such as Belfast’s 11.8% population decrease due to home evacuations between 1969 and 1973 (8). With the centrality of land, possession, and territory in relation to the conflict, Browne and Gilmartin’s research demonstrates how imperative examining these silences are. In terms of urban space more broadly conceived, their analysis exposes how increased violence contributed to homogenous communities that mobilized collective identities. The high degree of segregation within urban spaces in Northern Ireland persists in a post-Good Friday Agreement society, necessitating deeper understanding of conflict-related forced displacement.

While the monograph broadly considers the lived experiences of forced displacement, chapter 2 provides insight into the context surrounding this phenomenon. Though the authors recognize innumerable individual considerations related to forced displacement in

organizing their discussion, such as socio-economic factors, social networks, and state policies, Gilmartin and Browne propose three broad categories that contributed to displacement: direct intimidation, indirect intimidation, and mutual arbitration. By allowing for a selection of the varied so-called push and pull factors, the authors account for the plurality of determining factors within conversations on forced displacement. While the three aforementioned categories provide a basis for organizing experiences of forced displacement, as Gilmartin and Browne attest, the individual case of intimidation, for example, was frequently complex and varied.

Arguably, when looking at the dynamic between intimidation and forced displacement, the two most readily associated parties are those contributing to intimidation and those being intimidated. Browne and Gilmartin, however, reveal a recurring theme in relation to this within the third chapter. Moreover, they suggest a failure of the state to do anything regarding this crisis of forced displacement. For example, though the Irish government initially responded to the influx of refugees, the authors argue that after 1971, the responsibility was shifted away from the Irish state. In contrast to any substantial state intervention or response, a common thread among those displaced was a reliance on civil society, community groups, and friends or connections either in terms of evacuation or refuge. Gilmartin and Browne discuss the duality within forced displacement and communal loss, noting how on the one hand, such trauma could create silences and destabilize communities, whereas on the other, the overwhelming response by community groups and civil society suggests a degree of solidarity and collective action.

In arguing for broadening conceptions of conflict-related violence and loss, Gilmartin and Browne suggest such recognition is necessary to conflict transition and to peacebuilding. With regard to this, they acknowledge that the Good Friday Agreement specifically and post-conflict society in general have failed to address the past or formally commit to transitional justice approaches and campaigns. In broadening conceptions of conflict-related violence and loss, Gilmartin and Browne advocate that those affected by displacement should be part of active peacebuilding. As *Refugees and Forced Displacement in Northern Ireland's Troubles* is the first book to significantly examine the question of forced displacement, its contribution to scholarship on the Troubles cannot be understated. The authors cite a desire to be heard among those impacted by forced displacement, claiming that it is up to society to listen. With greater attention to the silences within the conflict, scholarship such as this can contribute to increasing such conversations and hearing the silenced.