

# Religious and Non-religious Forms of Hospitality: Muslim and Jewish Engagement in Welcoming Newcomers in Britain

Ekaterina Braginskaia 

## Introduction

William Temple's *Christianity and Social Order* reflects his theological and social ethics about the role of Christianity and its values in rebuilding the fabric of British society of the 1940s.<sup>1</sup> And yet, some of his principles about the role of religious institutions in the public square continue to have resonance with contemporary challenges of faith-based social action despite some of the obvious caveats about Britain's increased pluralism and post-secularity. The discussion about mutual benefits and moral complexities of church–state relations remains particularly relevant. Although the book was written in a particular context, and largely for a Christian audience, some of its concerns relate to other religious groups and institutions, including religious minorities, whose activism, based on religious and humanitarian values, is sometimes facilitated, and sometimes resisted, by the state. The case of faith and civil society responses to the refugee crisis in the context of hostile environment, neoliberal transfer of state responsibilities to the third sector, and increased opportunities for collaborative and interfaith action is no exception.

In this article, I explore how religious minorities, namely Muslim and Jewish organizations, participate in welcoming and supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Britain. I analyze some of these processes and practices in relation to William Temple's ideas about intermediate groupings, their role in welfare provision, and the function of the state in enabling and protecting their participation in associational life. While the article does not seek to offer a critical evaluation of Temple's ethical and social principles of religious engagement in the public sphere, it discusses some of his ideas about state–religion entanglements in the British multicultural context, marked by moderate secularism and religious diversity.<sup>2</sup> In particular, I examine how Muslim and Jewish groups facilitate and negotiate multicultural forms of hospitality and welcome, sometimes working in partnership with the state and sometimes criticizing injustices of its “organized inhospitality.”<sup>3</sup>

## Research Design and Methodology

The empirical data provided in this article is part of the wider research project about minority faith and civil society responses to refugee integration in England and Scotland (2018–2022), funded by the Leverhulme Trust. In this study I conceptualize minority faith and civil society organizations as multicultural agents, facilitating and contesting acts and practices of integration

<sup>1</sup> William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> See Tariq Modood, *Essays in Secularism and Multiculturalism* (Rowman and Littlefield International, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Boudou, “Good Concept, Bad Politics? The Heuristic Value of Hospitality,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 89, no. 1 (2022): 69–93.

for the newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers. In particular, I focus on the role of Muslim and Jewish communities as already “settled” and “established” ethno-religious minorities engaged in renegotiating hospitality and social integration in the domain of organized civil society.

The study was based on the data from forty qualitative interviews with Muslim and Jewish groups and a small number of interfaith, Christian, and secular organizations. Most of the interviews were carried out in different localities, including London, Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Glasgow in 2019–20. Participants included senior representatives and general members of congregations from Muslim and Jewish places of worship, community and welfare groups, umbrella organizations, interfaith and refugee sponsorship groups. The sample did not include large transnational organizations, but rather focused on the groups working at national and local levels. While the sample is relatively small and does not claim to be representative of Muslim and Jewish communities in general, the data offers insights into some of the challenges, perspectives, and experiences of Muslim and Jewish organizations involved in refugee welcome and support. The data collection was done before the COVID-19 pandemic, with a small number of additional conversations online during the pandemic. Further findings were drawn from analyzing policy and community reports written during and after the pandemic, including some of the recent statements in relation to immigration and asylum.

The identification of groups and organizations as Muslim or Jewish is informed by Samantha May’s approach to defining Muslim charities. For the purposes of this article, it has been adapted to include both Muslim and Jewish groups. Organizations were considered Muslim/Jewish when: (1) they categorized themselves as such “in name or goal”; (2) included humanitarian but also “faith as the prime motivator behind charitable actions”; and (3) were perceived as Muslim/Jewish by the majority of its donors and the general public.<sup>4</sup> The article teases out some commonalities in Muslim and Jewish theological and humanitarian approaches to welcoming newcomers. While it acknowledges a rich internal diversity of religious, ethnic, and political perspectives within each respective community, most of the analysis draws on the shared aspects of understanding and offering hospitality.

The terms “refugees” and “asylum seekers” refer to different legal status and entitlements to benefits, employment or accommodation. I will use the terms together and intermittently throughout the article, echoing a similar way of referencing used by interview participants, apart from the instances where a clear differentiation is required to explain differences in rights and welfare provision determined by the legal status or a mode of arrival to the UK.

### “Intermediate Groupings” and Multicultural Forms of Hospitality

Religious motivations play an important role in mobilizing support for refugees and asylum seekers, with academic studies highlighting some convergencies in faith-based and secular discourses of hospitality, which are often shaped by both sacred texts and humanitarian concerns for wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> These contextualized accounts of hospitality note religious, community and refugee-based practices and responses to displacement, with some studies exploring Christian participation in “settling those seeking sanctuary and unsettling negative attitudes” towards them.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding partial efforts to diversify the context of “hospitable politics” by opening it up to other religious traditions and their own approaches to hospitality, little research to date focused on the role of religious minorities in supporting asylum seekers and integrating refugees in British multicultural society.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See Samantha May, “‘The Best of Deeds’: The Practice of Zakat in the UK,” *Journal of Church and State* 61, no. 2 (2019): 208.

<sup>5</sup> See discussions in Benjamin Boudou, Hans Leaman, and Maximilian Miguel Scholz, “Sacred Welcomes: How Religious Reasons, Structures, and Interactions Shape Refugee Advocacy and Settlement,” *Migration and Society* 4, no. 1 (2021): 99–109, and Audrey Macklin, “Working Against and With the State: From Sanctuary to Resettlement,” *Migration and Society* 4, no. 1 (2021): 31–46.

<sup>6</sup> See Luca Mavelli and Erin Wilson, eds., *The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016); Mette Louise Berg and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, “Introduction to the Issue: Encountering Hospitality and Hostility,” *Migration and Society* 1, no. 1 (2018): 1–6; Susanna Snyder, “Un/settling Angels: Faith-based Organizations and Asylum-Seeking in the UK,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 3 (2011): 565–85.

<sup>7</sup> Luke Bretherton, “A Postsecular Politics? Interfaith Relations as a Civic Practice,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 2 (2011): 346–77, 360.

Muslim and Jewish communities in Britain developed associational structures and networks to support newcomers in public spaces. In their capacity as “intermediate groupings,” they mediate between state expectations to facilitate welfare provision and local community efforts to welcome and support new arrivals, from running a foodbank in a mosque or organizing a drop-in center in a synagogue to taking part in a community sponsorship group to welcome a refugee family in the local area.<sup>8</sup> Temple suggests that Christian organizations “act in their civic capacity” and in conformity with their Christian principles.<sup>9</sup> A similar approach could be extended to Muslim and Jewish groups to explore their efforts to create and curate spaces of welcome for newcomers, sometimes with co-religionists and sometimes in collaboration with other faith and civil society groups.

The multicultural character of these initiatives is shaped by religious and civic values, lived practices of migration and integration, and experiences of welcome and exclusion. In a wider context of political and social integration, rather than seeking accommodation and recognition from the state, or participating in everyday micro-interactions to assist newcomers, Muslim and Jewish organizations I interviewed engaged in social action in the domain of organized civil society.<sup>10</sup> These acts and practices of hospitality can be characterized as relational and dialogical not only because of ongoing conversations between religious and secular values that shape them, but also because they reconfigure social connections between those offering hospitality and those being welcomed.

### Conceptualizing Hospitality: Between Theological and Humanitarian Values

Hospitality has become a widely used, though highly contested, concept in various scholarly disciplines.<sup>11</sup> Some scholars praised its “epistemological flexibility” which allows to “bridge the gap between secular and religious approaches to welcoming.”<sup>12</sup> In his theoretical search for the common ground between hospitality and multicultural recognition, Thomas Sealy highlighted the importance of hospitality in developing “a deep and substantive theological orientation of identity, religious being, and how this orients social relations across difference.”<sup>13</sup> Both Muslim and Jewish respondents framed their experiences of supporting refugees and asylum seekers with references to religious teachings and humanitarian concerns for newcomers and their welfare.

Different Muslim respondents spoke of a strong thread about refugees within the Islamic tradition. As was noted by one organization engaged in recruiting Muslim groups to become refugee sponsors:

We are a tradition founded upon refugees and we are a tradition that has always flourished with new communities. We draw parallels with the other Abrahamic traditions, based on their prophetic leadership. So, we use that, and we find that it helps to motivate people.<sup>14</sup>

These motivations centered on the importance of religious duty to help strangers and offer charity and generosity to those in need, regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliation. In the Islamic tradition, welcoming strangers into one’s home is part of religious obligation, but it is also an act of “receiving guest/stranger with kindness, dignity, and respect.”<sup>15</sup> There is a further connection between hospitality and charity, with “the act of hospitality [being] framed largely in the act of giving.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Temple’s definition of intermediate groupings in *Christianity and Social Order*, 70.

<sup>9</sup> Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 58.

<sup>10</sup> I conceptualize Muslim and Jewish organizations as multicultural agents of civil society integration which operate on the middle/mezzo level. For analysis of state multiculturalism and accommodation of minority interests in policy contexts (top-down), see Tariq Modood, *Essays in Secularism and Multiculturalism*. For accounts of everyday, convivial forms of multiculturalism (bottom-up), see Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham, “Introduction: Multiculturalism and Everyday Life,” in *Everyday Multiculturalism* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1–17.

<sup>11</sup> A summary of different approaches can be found in Fataneh Farahani, “Hospitality and Hostility: The Dilemmas of Intimate Life and Refugee Hosting,” *Journal of Sociology* 57, no. 3 (2021): 664–73.

<sup>12</sup> Boudou, “Good Concept, Bad Politics?” 81.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Sealy, “Multiculturalism and the Multi-Religious Challenge,” in *Religiosity and Recognition: Multiculturalism and British Converts to Islam* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 69.

<sup>14</sup> Senior representative of Muslim community organization, interview by author, London, February 21, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> El-Aswad, El-S, “Hospitality in Islam,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: Cengage Learning, 2015), 462.

<sup>16</sup> Mona Siddiqui, *Hospitality and Islam: Welcoming in God’s Name* (London: Yale University Press, 2015), 31.

In the Jewish tradition, the Passover story plays a vital role in aligning hospitality with a sense of social responsibility to strangers. Edward Kaplan notes that an act of remembering being “strangers in a strange land” not only constitutes an act of solidarity with Jews but also “establishes solidarity with all oppressed people.”<sup>17</sup> Jewish respondents made numerous references to the Torah to emphasize the importance of religious obligations to love the strangers. For example, explaining their views on integration, one Jewish participant remarked, “36 times it says love the stranger in Torah, so I don’t understand how to interpret my Judaism in a way that would make me have different views of immigration.”<sup>18</sup>

Theological accounts of “welcoming strangers” emphasize the relational importance of hospitality as a key ethics of engaging across different faith traditions and communities. However, some of these theologically informed narratives of welcome went hand in hand with more personal accounts of coming to Britain and humanitarian motivations to alleviate some of the injustices of the UK asylum system. Drawing on their own struggles with integration, some respondents felt their experiences could help new arrivals to deal with similar issues, including the lack of social contacts and discrimination. A rabbi noted that as “another minority group [they] wanted to ensure that others had the same benefits and possibilities that some of the ancestors of the Jewish community.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, a Muslim respondent expressed concern that refugees and asylum seekers continued to experience inequality and racism. However, she also felt empowered by how Muslim groups, such as theirs, “found a way to navigate through the spaces [of inequality] and [were] able to share best practices with refugee communities.”<sup>20</sup>

Religious and civic values get entangled, creating plural and multiple forms of self-identification and experiences of lived religion. One respondent made strong linkages between what they understood to be the essence of their religion with the desire to “give back to society, to help those less fortunate.”<sup>21</sup> Another participant from a Jewish drop-in center for asylum-seekers commented on a fine line between what he saw as Jewish values and universal values to offer support.<sup>22</sup> These religious and humanitarian experiences are indicative of how different members of minority faith groups mobilize and reconnect their spiritual motivations and social capital in public spaces. At the same time, they illustrate that minority faith groups exercise a degree of multicultural agency by remaining true to their identity, without necessarily “flattening of difference” but transforming their social action into “something for which civic respect can be won.”<sup>23</sup>

The transformative and intrinsically dialogical nature of mobilizing one’s values and beliefs for the benefit of others provides a good illustration of what Luke Bretherton called “civic practices of hospitable politics.”<sup>24</sup> For new forms of friendship to emerge, “both guest and host [must] emigrate from the familiar” which is a prerequisite for the “formation of shared memories and an interdependent identity narrative.”<sup>25</sup> A key aspect of these interfaith and intercommunal experiences of hospitality, while fostered by individuals, but exercised within the organizational context, is their relational character and a sense of interdependence between those offering and those receiving hospitality. In a way this resonates with Temple’s approach to “freedom, fellowship and service” which includes a feeling of “count[ing] for something and that others depend on us as we on them.”<sup>26</sup>

The process of offering hospitality often requires blurring and renegotiating the boundaries between hosts and guests to create more reciprocal and dignified relations. A series of studies reflected on the dangers of asymmetrical power relations, including paternalistic attitudes and negative stereotypes of organizations hosting and welcoming refugees in different contexts.<sup>27</sup> Hospitality can be “a gift as well as a poison,” leaving either guest or host “wounded” or

<sup>17</sup> Edward Kaplan, “The Open Tent: Angels and Strangers,” in *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions* (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2011), 69.

<sup>18</sup> Rabbi of liberal Jewish synagogue, interview with author, London, January 29, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Rabbi of liberal Jewish synagogue, interview.

<sup>20</sup> Activist, Islamic center, interview with author, London, March 15, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Volunteer at Muslim umbrella organization, interview with author, London, February 14, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Senior representative of progressive synagogue, interview with author, London, February 21, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 41.

<sup>24</sup> Bretherton, “A Postsecular Politics?,” 373.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>26</sup> Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 70.

<sup>27</sup> James A. Chamberlain, “Responsibility for Migrants: From Hospitality to Solidarity,” *Political Theory* 48, no. 1 (2020): 57–83.

“limping” as a result of the encounter.<sup>28</sup> In developing a theory of feminist hospitality, Maurice Hamington suggested resisting some of the more directional and benevolent tendencies of those offering hospitality by developing relationships in which hosts and guests can “gain something from the encounter [...] [and] both learn and grow together.”<sup>29</sup> Hospitality cannot last indefinitely and acts of welcome tend to provide a poor substitute for long-term integration and belonging. The data suggests that some Muslim and Jewish organizations tried to address this challenge by developing opportunities to empower their guests by inviting them to participate in social activities on an equal basis, including offering food and catering for events, singing in the synagogue choir, or taking part in the mosque’s outings and social activities.

Tahir Zaman notes that “being a host or guest indefinitely can be tiring,” while “Islamic traditions allow for a reconfiguration of the stranger: first as guest and then as neighbour.”<sup>30</sup> In the Jewish tradition, some of these relational aspects of interdependence between hosts and guests become epitomized in the account of the Sukkot festival. Moving away from security of one’s home was seen “symbolic of a move away from security to dependence and interdependence—on God and on other people.”<sup>31</sup> As Richard Kearney writes, the Sukkot “serves to remind the followers of Abraham that they are forever tent dwellers, strangers on the earth committed to the hosting of strangers.”<sup>32</sup> Some of this mutual commitment between hosts and guests has been summarized by a Jewish organization in North London:

When we had our last action on the festival of Sukkot, which is the festival of welcoming strangers, the Syrian families catered the event free of charge, which was very wonderful, very collaborative and this was absolutely an example of starting to use what they had to contribute, to do the same for others.<sup>33</sup>

### Navigating Hospitality: Between Co-optation and Contention

A key function of the state, as envisaged by Temple in relation to associational life, is to encourage intermediate groupings to flourish. The state should “giv[e] them freedom to guide their own activities provided these fall within the general order of the communal life and do not injure the freedom of other similar associations.”<sup>34</sup> Drawing on a Christian ethics of fellowship, he noted that free society should not allow space for self-interest but rather seek to promote human interaction and relationships which find their expression in “the network of communities, associations and fellowships.”<sup>35</sup> The role of the state in this context is to “foster these many groupings of its citizens.”<sup>36</sup>

In the neoliberal context of state retreat from the welfare provision, coupled with pressures of securitization and oversight of religious organizations, for example by the Charity Commission, the process of developing mutually beneficial partnerships between the state and minority faith groups provides different scenarios of co-optation, contention, and collaboration in local and national settings. In her analysis of “oppositional and collaborative politics of sanctuary” in Canada, Audrey Macklin suggests that churches and religious congregations participate in state programs of hospitality and integration where “the state constructs a bridge between global injustice and local hospitality.”<sup>37</sup> However, “where the state does not comply with its own legal obligations,” they develop local forms of resistance in solidarity with the refused asylum seekers.<sup>38</sup> My research suggests that Muslim and Jewish organizations negotiate hospitality for

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Claviez, ed. *The Conditions of Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics on the Threshold of the Possible* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 40.

<sup>29</sup> Maurice Hamington, “Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality,” *Feminist Formations* 22, no. 1 (2010), 28.

<sup>30</sup> Tahir Zaman, “A Right to Neighbourhood: Rethinking Islamic Narratives and Practices of Hospitality in a Sederist World,” in *The Refugee Crisis and Religion* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016), 168.

<sup>31</sup> Hugh Cummins, “Sukkot: Levinas and the Festival of the Cabins,” in *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions* (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2011), 74.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 11.

<sup>33</sup> Rabbi of liberal Jewish synagogue, interview with author, London, January 29, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 71.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>37</sup> Macklin, “Working Against and With the State,” 43.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

refugees and asylum seekers in Britain in a similar way. Rather than segregating from wider society, they mobilize their spiritual and social resources to engage in welfare provision and political campaigning in public spaces, sometimes as state partners and sometimes as its critics.

### Collaborative Forms of Refugee Support and Integration

Faith-based organizations in Britain play a key role in providing welfare services. The state had increasingly relied on their social capital under New Labour and then devolved further welfare responsibilities as part of the Big Society agenda and its greater involvement of local communities and civil society in urban governance.<sup>39</sup> It continues to develop new ways to enlist the resources of faith communities for public purposes under the plans for faith covenants between faith communities and local authorities.<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, this demonstrates how religious congregations are seen as “reservoirs of under-tapped and responsible voluntarism that could be channeled into the government’s initiatives for civil renewal.”<sup>41</sup> On the other, it indicates the extent to which faith-based delivery of social welfare has become visible in the public square and in some ways essential for propping up the structures of the welfare state. Muslim and Jewish groups and charities contributed their resources to support those in need by developing a wide range of welfare provisions and charitable giving within their own communities as well as in collaboration with other faith and secular organizations.<sup>42</sup> The refugee crisis in 2015 provided a renewed impetus for enlisting the support of religious and civil society groups.

Neoliberal forms of governance have been widely discussed in academic literature about faith-based organizations.<sup>43</sup> In situations where minority faith groups become co-opted by the state into delivering services to support new arrivals, they risk being “junior partners” in partnerships where the state controls the relationship rather than allows these groups and associations to flourish. At the same time, groups can exercise sufficient agency in co-instituting these collaborations by contesting and resisting some of the more restrictive pressures of neoliberal partnerships.<sup>44</sup> They are able to do this by pursuing “alternative philosophies of care” and engaging in “locally situated and ethically flavoured activities.”<sup>45</sup>

I found different examples of how Muslim and Jewish groups engaged in welcoming and supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the local settings, seeking to transform acts of hospitality and temporary kindness into more tangible and long-lasting forms of belonging. As was noted by a Muslim volunteer from Glasgow, “there’s a multitude of different services that Muslim community groups offer that aren’t necessarily celebrated and shouted about.”<sup>46</sup> While some of this social action was organized between co-religionists, many groups established collaborative partnerships to offer joined-up services of support together with other faith-based and civil society organizations and local authorities. The interview data collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, and complemented with some follow-up accounts of collaborations during the pandemic, suggests that Muslim and Jewish groups worked together to transform their religious and communal premises into “spaces of care.”<sup>47</sup> Some initiatives were also designed to encourage refugees and volunteers from different religious and cultural background to “come out of silos and feel part of

<sup>39</sup> See Adam Dinham and Vivien Lowndes, “Religion, Resources, and Representation: Three Narratives of Faith Engagement in British Urban Governance,” *Urban Affairs Review* 43, no. 6 (2008): 817–45; and Hannah Lambie-Mumford and David Jarvis, “The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in the Big Society: Opportunities and Challenges,” *Policy Studies* 33, no. 3 (2012): 249–62.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Baker and Stephen Timms, *Keeping the Faith 2.0 Embedding a New Normal for Partnership Working in Post-Pandemic Britain*. Project Report. All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society, London (2022).

<sup>41</sup> Therese O’Toole et al., *Taking Part: Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance* (Bristol: Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship, University of Bristol, 2013), 41.

<sup>42</sup> On the work of Muslim charities, see Samantha May, “Muslim Charity in the United Kingdom: Between Counterterrorism and Social Integration,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (2023): <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481221148325>. On faith-based collaborations, including the work of Jewish and Muslim organizations, see Therese O’Toole and Ekaterina Braginskaia, *Public Faith and Finance: Faith Responses to the Financial Crisis* (Bristol: University of Bristol, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space,” *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 380–404; Rana Jawad, *Religion and Faith-Based Welfare: From Wellbeing to Ways of Being* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Williams, Paul Cloke, and Samuel Thomas, “Co-Constituting Neoliberalism: Faith-based Organisations, Co-optation, and Resistance in the UK,” *Environment and Planning* 44, no. 6 (2012): 1480.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1480.

<sup>46</sup> Senior representative of Muslim welfare organization, interview with author, Glasgow, October 23, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Cloke, Jon May, and Andrew Williams, “The Geographies of Food Banks in the Meantime,” *Progress in Human Geography* 41, no. 6 (2017): 703–26.

the community” by taking part in collective activities, including singing together in a multi-faith and multicultural choir.<sup>48</sup>

Recent research by Christopher Baker and the APPG on Faith and Society found that the pandemic created “major shifts in expectation and understanding of the value of faith-based social action.”<sup>49</sup> Such collaborations have also become invaluable to both local authorities and Muslim and Jewish organizations working on the ground to provide services to refugees and newcomers. For example, a foodbank in Northwest London, originally established with the help of Muslim donations but dedicated to offering services to all, regardless of their religious and ethnic affiliation, was able to scale up their food provisions by developing existing partnerships with a local synagogue, a church, and local authorities. In a similar way, a drop-in center set up in a synagogue in another area of North London developed stronger relations with local organizations during the pandemic through their collaborative work with Barnet Refugee Service and Muslim Aid to deliver emergency food parcels and foodbank services.

### Community Sponsorship and Co-produced Forms of Hospitality

The UK Community Sponsorship Scheme was introduced in 2016 as part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. Designed to mobilize local community resources to assist with refugee integration, it provides a good illustration of co-produced forms of hospitality with elements of both co-option and contention. The aim of the program was for the government to transfer some of the responsibilities for welcoming and supporting refugees to civil society, drawing on the readily available social capital on the local level to facilitate refugee integration.<sup>50</sup> The government established a charity “Reset Communities and Refugees” to offer guidance, training, and support for the community sponsorship groups, but the groups are responsible themselves for raising funding, offering accommodation, and assisting a refugee family they sponsor.

I found examples of Muslim and Jewish organizations forming community sponsorship groups, sometimes as their own community endeavor, with members of a mosque, a Muslim school, or a synagogue coming together and sometimes in partnership with Christian as well as non-religious volunteers. Some respondents, particularly from Muslim organizations, expressed regret that the number of Muslim-led community sponsorship initiatives was relatively small in comparison with groups that defined themselves as Christian, secular, or mixed. Umbrella organizations, such as the Muslim Council of Britain and Mercy Mission sought to encourage mosques to actively engage with the scheme to resettle refugee families. Sometimes this entailed explaining not only the value of the scheme, but also working through some concerns the groups expressed, particularly in relation to safeguarding training for sponsors which included the controversial Prevent Duty.<sup>51</sup> Some Jewish organizations participated in the scheme by hosting refugee families in their own premises, such as the Abraham Tent project in South London, while other groups engaged in welcoming and supporting different groups of Syrian, Afghan, and later Ukrainian refugees through other resettlement provisions, without necessarily establishing a separate community sponsorship group.<sup>52</sup>

The scheme allowed different groups and organizations to take on responsibilities for supporting a refugee family by offering language training, accommodation, and support with wellbeing and social connections on the local level. This form of community activism, underpinned by humanitarian concerns and readiness to support refugees, coupled with a certain disillusionment of the government’s inability to guarantee safe and just forms of asylum, has been characterized as “a combination of social protest and prosocial behaviour.”<sup>53</sup> However, some respondents questioned the extent to which a securitized approach to community sponsorship offered an

<sup>48</sup> Volunteer from Reform Judaism synagogue, interview with author, London, March 7, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Baker and Timms, *Keeping the Faith 2.0*, 35.

<sup>50</sup> For a more detailed analysis of community sponsorship scheme and its implications, see Marisol Reyes Soto, Jenny Phillimore, and Sara Hassan, *Community Sponsorship in the UK: Formative Evaluation 2017–2020* (2020).

<sup>51</sup> The Prevent Duty was introduced in 2015 as a requirement for public sector personnel, including charities working with vulnerable members of society, to undergo extremism and radicalization awareness training.

<sup>52</sup> The Abraham Tent project was an initiative to support a refugee family. The Community Sponsorship group formed in 2017, bringing together volunteers from Liberal and Reform Judaism and was supported by the Hyderi Islamic Centre in South London. A caretaker’s flat attached to the synagogue was renovated and used as accommodation for a Syrian family. Jewish and Muslim volunteers worked together with Lambeth Council and other secular and faith organizations to welcome the family before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>53</sup> Jenny Phillimore, Marisol Reyes-Soto, Gabriella D’Avino, and Natasha Nicholls, “‘I have Felt so Much Joy’: The Role of Emotions in Community Sponsorship of Refugees,” *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations* 33 (2022), 387.

effective way of fostering solidarity and community integration, whereas increased scrutiny risked limiting involvement of some groups in collaborative social action.

### Campaigning Against Organized Forms of Inhospitability

Muslim and Jewish organizations not only facilitate existing support provisions for newcomers, but also make critical interventions in national debates about migration and asylum. The latter is not always encouraged by the state, particularly in relation to questions about immigration. Minority faith groups share with other faith and humanitarian charities some of the general burdens of responsibility in relation to lobbying and political campaigning. However, being part of the religious minorities landscape brings with it higher levels of scrutiny. While some larger umbrella organizations engaged in publicly calling out social injustices of the immigration system, some groups spoke of their involvement in supporting refugees and asylum seekers only with reference to welfare provision, noting that they are not a political organization. For example, one participant preferred to leave political campaigning to others and characterized their work in terms of its humanitarian value, focusing on offering help and support to asylum seekers.<sup>54</sup> Others emphasized the importance of facilitating welfare provisions because they saw themselves working “on the ground” and being “hands on.”<sup>55</sup> A spokesperson from a Jewish community organization acknowledged that they had to be “careful putting [their] names as a community or even as a representative organization to petitions calling on the government to do this, that or the other” because they spoke on behalf of a community with very diverse political views.<sup>56</sup>

Mike Aiken and Marilyn Taylor’s analysis of policy trends, civic action, and volunteering in England questioned the extent to which critical expressions of official views were still considered acceptable, particularly with the Charity Commission for England and Wales tightening its restrictions on lobbying and politics.<sup>57</sup> This resulted in some charities and organizations exercising self-censorship so not to “jeopardize [. . .] funding or even their charitable status.”<sup>58</sup> A report by the Sheila McKechnie Foundation provided further evidence of the negative effect of the Lobbying Act on civil society.<sup>59</sup>

Religious bodies and organizations are expected to show that “the religion is capable of impacting on society in a beneficial way.”<sup>60</sup> There is little doubt that the work directed at assisting refugees and asylum seekers can be seen as beneficial to the public. However, as was noted by Jonathan Chaplin, a rather vague and contested nature of what constitutes “public benefit” for mainstream society can be open to misrepresentation, particularly if there is a tension with “minority conceptions of the good” which carries a risk of some organizations refraining from partnering with government.<sup>61</sup> Some of these chilling effects affected the work of Muslim charities as their fundraising and campaigning activities became subject to increased regulatory oversight by the Charity Commission.<sup>62</sup> As was noted earlier, some members of refugee sponsorship groups found the inclusion of the Prevent Duty in safeguarding training problematic because of its stigmatizing impact on Muslim communities.

Between 2021 and 2023, the Nationality and Borders Bill and the Illegal Migration Bill became subject of intense debate between government officials and civil society groups campaigning for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers to remain in the UK. Faith and secular organizations engaged in collective forms of protesting against the bills as they went through the legislative process before becoming laws in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Hostile environment and its two-tier approach to refugees directly resettled by the government and asylum seekers entering the

<sup>54</sup> Senior representative of Jewish community organization, interview with author, London, February 13, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Senior representative of Muslim welfare organization, interview with author, Glasgow, October 23, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Senior representative of Jewish umbrella organization, interview with author, Glasgow, October 16, 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Mike Aiken and Marilyn Taylor, “Civic Action and Volunteering: The Changing Space for Popular Engagement in England,” *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 30 (2019): 15–28.

<sup>58</sup> Aiken and Taylor, “Civic Action and Volunteering,” 19.

<sup>59</sup> Sheila McKechnie Foundation, “The Chilling Reality: How the Lobbying Act is Affecting Charity and Voluntary Sector Campaigning in the UK,” (August 2020), [https://smk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SMK\\_The\\_Chilling\\_Reality\\_Lobbying\\_Act\\_Research.pdf](https://smk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SMK_The_Chilling_Reality_Lobbying_Act_Research.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Charity Commission, “The Advancement of Religion for the Public Benefit” (2011), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/358531/advancement-of-religion-for-the-public-benefit.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/358531/advancement-of-religion-for-the-public-benefit.pdf).

<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Chaplin, *Faith in Democracy: Framing a Politics of Deep Diversity* (SCM Press, 2021), 85.

<sup>62</sup> Stephen Cook, “Commission Has a ‘Disproportionate Focus on Muslim Charities,’ says Baroness Warsi,” *Third Sector* (2017); Sofia Yasmin, Chaudhry Ghafran, and Roszaini Haniffa, “Exploring De-Facto Accountability Regimes in Muslim NGOs,” *Accounting Forum* 42, no. 3 (2018): 235–47.



country, had already attracted strong criticism amongst those campaigning for better treatment of asylum seekers. An earlier report by the APPG on Refugees found it concerning that there was not “the same support or advice available to refugees who have gone through the asylum process” compared to those resettled through the government programs.<sup>63</sup>

A number of Muslim and Jewish organizations added their critical voices to others expressing solidarity with both refugees and asylum seekers, calling out structural inequalities and exclusionary nature of immigration policies. For example, the Muslim Council of Britain warned that the Nationality and Borders Bill would have “devastating consequences on a cross-section of our communities and wider society.”<sup>64</sup> In December 2021, twenty-eight rabbis from across the Jewish community published a joint letter calling the bill a “shameful attack on refugee rights” which divided “refugees based on their method of entry to the UK” rather than their needs.<sup>65</sup> Their concerns were grounded in both religious and humanitarian beliefs as their position stated that such a policy negated “Jewish values of justice and fairness.”<sup>66</sup> Speaking out against the plans to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, the Jewish Council for Racial Equality used similar discursive framing by mobilizing multicultural discourses of the Jewish “long experience of seeking refuge, including in the UK” and their unwillingness to accept the proposals because they flew in the face of Jewish values.<sup>67</sup>

In spring 2023, Muslim and Jewish leaders joined a diverse coalition of over 350 charities, unions, businesses, and faith leaders lobbying the government to scrap the Illegal Migration Bill as it would only lead to “dehumanization” of asylum seekers and harm vulnerable people fleeing conflict and persecution.<sup>68</sup> In light of the growing criticisms of immigration policies, some officials were weary of religious and civil society organizations speaking out against government position on the refugee crisis. In his address to the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organizations (ACEVO) in March 2023, the Head of the Charity Commission, questioned the extent to which charities should be allowed to engage in politics when they are not promoting interests of their beneficiaries.<sup>69</sup> In an earlier statement, he acknowledged the role of charities in “leading the charge on progress and speaking uncomfortable truths to power” but criticized their political campaigning on the refugee crisis and the use of “inflammatory rhetoric.”<sup>70</sup>

The ways in which religious minorities, and particularly some umbrella organizations, engaged in critical discourses highlight the importance of collaborative and interfaith attempts to deliver a stronger message. For example, speaking against deportations, the Muslim Council of Britain welcomed the Archbishop Justin Welby’s earlier intervention and spoke of the obligation to “speak truth to power.”<sup>71</sup> Campaigning as part of wider civil society networks does not always guarantee better results, but it begs a question about the extent to which such collective forms of social action are simply a form of “religious interference” into matters of the state, or whether they have become part of associational efforts to encourage human flourishing and social justice.

<sup>63</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, *Refugees Welcome? The Experience of New Refugees in the UK* (April 2017), 51, [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/APPG\\_on\\_Refugees\\_-\\_Refugees\\_Welcome\\_report.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/APPG_on_Refugees_-_Refugees_Welcome_report.pdf).

<sup>64</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, “United Against un-British and Sinister Nationality and Borders Bill,” December 16, 2021, <https://mcb.org.uk/united-against-un-british-and-sinister-nationality-and-borders-bill/>.

<sup>65</sup> Jewish Council for Racial Equality, “Anti-Refugee Bill is ‘not in our name,’” rabbis tell Home Secretary,” December 7, 2022, <https://www.jcore.org.uk/single-post/anti-refugee-bill-is-not-in-our-name-rabbis-tell-home-secretary>.

<sup>66</sup> Jewish Council for Racial Equality, “Anti-Refugee Bill is ‘not in our name.’”

<sup>67</sup> Jewish Council for Racial Equality, “Rwanda Deportation Flights Fly in the Face of Jewish Values,” June 14, 2022, <https://www.jcore.org.uk/single-post/rwanda-deportation-flights-fly-in-the-face-of-jewish-values>.

<sup>68</sup> See Harriet Sherwood and Michael Savage, “Illegal Migration Bill is ‘Cruelty without Purpose,’ says Archbishop of York,” *Guardian* (UK), March 12, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/12/migration-bill-is-cruelty-without-purpose-says-archbishop-of-york>; and, Muslim Council of Britain, “MCB Calls upon UK Government to Scrap Cruel Anti-Refugee Bill,” March 13, 2023, <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-calls-upon-uk-government-to-scrap-cruel-anti-refugee-bill>.

<sup>69</sup> Orlando Fraser, speech at #ACEVOFest, March 22, 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/orlando-fraser-kcs-speech-at-acevofest>.

<sup>70</sup> Orlando Fraser, “Migration and Refugee Crisis: Charities Can Model a Better Kind of Discourse,” March 10, 2023, <https://charitycommission.blog.gov.uk/2023/03/10/migration-and-refugee-crisis-charities-can-model-a-better-kind-of-discourse>.

<sup>71</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, “Muslim Council of Britain Speaks Out Against Proposed Plans to Deport Migrants to Rwanda,” Press Release, April 20, 2022, <https://mcb.org.uk/muslim-council-of-britain-speaks-out-against-proposed-plans-to-deport-migrants-to-rwanda>.

## Conclusion

The article explored the ways in which Muslim and Jewish organizations in Britain have engaged in mediating multicultural forms of hospitality and welcome in public spaces with reference to William Temple's approach to intermediate groupings and religious participation in public life. Multiple forms of hospitality and welcome, based on community-specific experiences but also converging values and motivations, indicate a certain fluidity between religious and secular forms of activism and between those "in charge" of welcoming and those "being" welcomed. At the same time, hospitality is a poor substitute for long-term integration. It is a kind of "integration-lite" whose temporary dimension and power asymmetries need to be addressed. In my research, I found some Muslim and Jewish groups which sought to transform power imbalance of these time-contingent acts of kindness into more tangible practices of refugee empowerment and belonging.

The ways in which minority faith groups engaged in offering support and hospitality to refugees and asylum seekers were shaped by three modes of state-religion engagement: co-option, contention, and collaboration. The first mode entailed religious minorities acting as agents of integration and state partners. Similar to other faith and secular groups, Muslim and Jewish organizations facilitated hospitality and papered over the cracks in refugee services by offering their values and resources to co-produce practices of refugee support. While the state promoted opportunities for them to develop welfare support services in line with religious and humanitarian values, their activities were subject to oversight and restrictions, including the securitized aspects of the Community Sponsorship scheme. The second pattern of engagement consisted of resisting the hostile aspects of the asylum provision and openly engaging in "contentious hospitality." The development and curating of "spaces of care" was welcomed, particularly in local communities. However, some aspects of campaigning against injustices of the asylum system on the national level were not. Rather than acknowledging "public benefit" of such work, some of this activism was seen as unwanted interference in political affairs.

The third mode of engagement involved developing collaborative forms of hospitality by creating pathways for interfaith and intercommunal provisions of food, accommodation, and social interactions. By focusing on shared values and practices of welcome, particularly during the pandemic, some groups developed dialogical forms of hospitality in collaboration with each other and with local authorities. Such institutional collaborations between minority faith organizations (rather than only between their individual members) perhaps somewhat resemble mutually beneficial interactions envisaged by William Temple in his notion of intermediate groupings. A further affinity can be suggested between Temple's thinking about state engagement with groups and associations as "community of communities" and collective forms of community representation developed by some multiculturalists and applied here to better understand the dynamics of civil society.

The data about Muslim and Jewish organizations as critical agents of refugee hospitality and integration highlights a complex set of entanglements between state and minority faith interests, with both parties sometimes facilitating and sometimes "interfering" in each other's spheres of influence. Both resort to framing their different approaches to integration in the context of equality, so that not to undermine the flourishing of other groups and organizations. A tension arises between opportunities for minority faith groups to engage in collaborative social action in local settings and difficulties involved in raising their concerns about asylum and integration on the national level. When the latter is fraught with challenges, more inclusive provisions for developing faith partnerships with local authorities encourage faith groups to "raise their voice in public debate and to be respected."<sup>72</sup>

## Author Biography

EKATERINA BRAGINSKAIA (BA, University of Oxford; MSc, University of Edinburgh; PhD, University of Edinburgh) is Digital Learning Lead and Researcher at Goldsmiths College, University of London. She is the author of "Muslim and Jewish Responses to Safeguarding Refugees and Asylum Seekers in England before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic," in *Contemporary Challenges to the Regulation of Religions in Europe*, ed. by Helena Vilaça, Maria João Oliveira, and Anne-

<sup>72</sup> APPG on Faith and Society, "Faith Covenant in Full," <https://www.faithandsociety.org/covenant/full/#:~:text=The%20Faith%20Covenant%20is%20built,the%20framework%20of%20UK%20law.>

Laure Zwilling (Porto, Portugal: U. Porto Press, forthcoming 2023); with Keri Facer, *Universities, Cities & Communities: Co-Creating Urban Living*. Report (Bristol: University of Bristol and AHRC/ESRC Connected Communities, 2017); “The Muslim Council of Britain and Its Engagement with the British Political Establishment,” in *Muslims and Political Participation in Britain*, ed. by Timothy Peace (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); and “‘Domestication’ or ‘Representation’? Russia and the Institutionalization of Islam in Comparative Perspective,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 3 (2012). Her primary research interests include religious minorities, refugee activism and integration, and state-religion relations. The author wishes to acknowledge the support of the Leverhulme Trust which enabled her to undertake this research. The work was funded by Early Career Fellowship (ECF-2018-224).