G07: DON PALMER INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Don Palmer
Interviewer: Dr Jack Crangle
Interview summarisers: Dr Fearghus Roulston and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks

G07: Don Palmer	**Start time: 00:00:00**	**Finish time: 02:12:56**	**Duration: 02:12:56**	**Brief summary of content:**
00:00–09:59	Born in Belfast in 1960, an only child, and grew up in Dundonald, which he calls a largely Protestant middle-class suburb. Recalls it being a relatively peaceful area, although he had 'specific encounters with paramilitary organisations that were quite traumatic' and a sense of danger subsequent to that. His father had been in B-Specials in the 1950s and was a supermarket manager on the Shankill Road. His mother worked in retail and later was an administrator at Stormont. Says his mother, who had a cousin who was injured in an IRA bombing in 1974, was much more politically minded than his father, who 'had no political views at all really'. Recalls his mother expressing 'very, very strong' loyalist views on the conflict and mentions his own youthful engagement with loyalist and Orange culture.			
10:00–19:59	Describes the spectacle of Orange bands on the Twelfth of July, which was 'like going to the circus', but knew little about their political significance at the time. He attended a primary school near to where his maternal grandparents lived and stayed with them during the school term because his parents worked full-time. Explains that he was close to his grandfather, who, as a lay evangelical preacher, inspired Don's own religious faith. Recalls the start of the Troubles in 1968 and attempting, unsuccessfully, to discuss civil rights issues with his mother for a school project. Speaks of the Belfast of his youth as being 'quite a segregated community'.			
20:00–29:59	Continues to discuss this theme of segregation as it affected his experiences of secondary school in Holywood, Co. Down, to where his family relocated, and in relation to NI employment practices in the pre-Troubles era. Describes the structural discrimination against Catholics in the post-partition period, which contributed to the 'closing down' of communities after 1968, when 'you tended to stay in the areas you knew you were safe, so you didn't socialise a lot'. Recalls the large army barracks in Holywood and the targeting by republican groups of businesses that served it, which included his father's supermarket. Remembers his father's routine checking of his car for explosive devices and his own friendly interactions with British soldiers on the way to school.			
30:00–39:59	Describes the differences between middle-class Holywood and more conflict-ridden parts of Belfast. Discusses the importance of his religious faith and membership of the Brethren movement, in which he grew up. Explains that it was a non-political church, unlike the Free Presbyterian church of Ian Paisley, one of whose politically charged services he recalls attending. Speaks about his first encounter with paramilitary violence as a teenager in Belfast, when he witnessed a sniper in a church bell tower shooting at a passing military vehicle.			
40:00–49:59	Describes a 'very vivid memory' of being held hostage at the age of sixteen with his mother in the family home by two masked gunmen intent on robbing the takings from his father's shop. Says that his mother never recovered from this ordeal, even after the family moved to the Bangor area. On learning that the			

	gunmen were probably loyalists – supposedly 'our own people' – Don lost his political and religious faith for a period of time, until his early twenties.
50:00–59:59	Recalls his cousin being injured in a 1974 bombing in Belfast, which fuelled his disillusionment with NI and the Troubles, and was the impetus for his cousin's family to emigrate to Toronto. Criticises the hypocrisy of both sides in the conflict and the secrecy of the Orange Order, before describing slences within his family, including his father's reluctance to discuss his service in the B-Specials. Posits that the population of NI remained static throughout the Troubles because 'the death rate and the emigration rate was balanced out by the birth rate'. Describes his return to Christian faith in his early twenties.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Describes the renewal of his evangelical faith and his decision to become a Christian minister, which led to him moving to Canada in 1982 to study theology, after which he moved to Edinburgh in 1986, where he was a church youth worker for six years. After another stint in Canada, he later returned to Scotland and now lives in Glasgow with his wife and family. Explains that being away from the 'goldfish bowl' of NI changed his perspective on the place and its divisions. Offers his views on the peace process and says that despite living away from NI for many years he still feels connected to it and supports the NI football team. Reflects on changes in NI, especially attempts to integrate the education system.
01:10:00–01:19:59	Offers further hopeful reflections on integration in NI and on the changes he sees in the younger generation. Says his parents still live in NI, so he visits regularly. Confesses to having ambivalent feelings when he sees Orange parades on the Twelfth, saying, 'there's a part of you feels almost, like, a connection with it, but you feel guilty feeling a connection with it'. Compares the history of Orangeism to the history of Irishness. Thinks the NI football team should swap 'God Save the Queen' for an inclusive 'independent anthem' instead. Reflects on some differences between the east and west of Scotland in relation to sectarianism.
01:20:00–01:29:59	Recall moving to Edinburgh in 1986, where he met and married his wife. Explains that they subsequently moved to Yorkshire in 1992 and spent eight years there in a church ministry. They relocated to Toronto in 2011 for another ministry. Discusses his discovery of a diasporic Ulster Protestant community in Toronto and visiting a town called Orangeville. Describes the sectarian geographies of Glasgow and how they are changing as a result of immigration.
01:30:00–01:39:59	Discusses some of his experiences to doing youth work and speaking in schools in Edinburgh and Yorkshire. Reveals that he has a son who was signed by Glasgow Rangers and currently plays for its youth team. Explains that this has made him more aware of the changing nature of sectarianism in Glasgow, where he has noticed 'a greater intolerance that's growing up in the last few years', with new political flags, chants and emblems starting to appear, a phenomenon that he struggles to understand.
01:40:00–01:49:59	Continues to reflect on the origins and menifestations of sectarianism in the west of Scotland and recalls some occasions when he encountered it through his ministry work. Feels that its 'tangible' presence is a concern for many people.
01:50:00–01:59:59	Explains that while he has taken only one of his children back to NI on visits, it remains important to him that they have a 'healthy understanding' of their Ulster Protestant heritage, one that is informed by an ecumenical outlook and shorn of 'any hatred or malice or disrespect for Catholics'. Notes that his footballing son's decision to play for the NI youth team was made for 'pragmatic' reasons and 'not because he identifies as a Northern Irish Protestant'.

02:00:00–02:12:56	Discusses the ways in which Belfast has changed since the peace process, particularly in terms of business investment and infrastructure. Notes the relative absence of violence, but acknowledges the persistence of conflict memory and sectarian animosity. States that he and his family love living in Glasgow and that he has no desire to move back to NI. Describes how emigration has changed him 'quite significantly as a person' by making him more tolerant and more receptive to the perspectives of others, including NI Catholics and nationalists, adding that 'the Troubles have shaped me in ways that I've embraced'. Ends with some reflections on the importance of hearing and showing empathy to those who still live with the complex and painful emotional legacies of the Troubles.