

L21-SG4: DANIELLE THOM INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Danielle Thom
Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interview summarisers: Dr Hilary White and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks

L21-SG4: Danielle Thom	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:37:18	Duration: 01:37:18	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in Belfast in 1985 to a Catholic mother from a ‘pretty strongly republican’ family and a Protestant Belfast-born father who grew up in Derry. Her parents intended to marry before she was born, her father having agreed to a Catholic wedding, but the plan fell through. They eventually got married in 1991 in a civil ceremony in England. Her parents lived in Antrim and Dunmurry before moving to London in late 1986 or early 1987, when Danielle was ‘around twoish’. Says their main reasons for leaving NI were to find work and to ‘escape the Troubles’.			
10:00–19:59	Explains that both her parents left school at fifteen, without O-levels. Each of them had previously moved to England and Scotland for work, so their latest move ‘wasn’t a new thing’. Describes the various jobs her father did in the London area and says her mother worked as a supermarket checkout cashier. Family settled in the Blackheath area and eventually bought the council house they were renting. Her sister was born in 1988, so it has always seemed to Danielle that there’s ‘an Irish sister and an English sister’ in the family. Says her sister has a London accent, whereas she has retained her Belfast accent. Feels that her parents’ life ‘wasn’t exactly the life they’d envisaged for themselves’.			
20:00–29:59	Attended a Catholic primary school with children from similar backgrounds, which made her feel there was a ‘little kind of Irish enclave’ in her part of south-east London. She and her sister took Irish dancing lessons and her father played Irish folk music, ‘even though he was the Protestant one’, leaving her with ‘the sneaking suspicion that he had very slight republican sympathies’. Irishness was therefore ‘a very overt and very present’ part of her upbringing and something that was ‘enacted in our lives in [...] multiple ways’. Her frequent visits to NI made Belfast ‘our other home’. Recalls the various security measures her family encountered during trips to and from NI in the late 1980s and early 1990s, noting that these were less intrusive than in the earlier years of the conflict.			
30:00–39:59	Discusses her parents’ experience of the ‘worst phase’ of the Troubles in the 1970s, when they were teenagers. Says her mother ‘refers to it still today as a war’ and sees herself ‘as having grown up in a war zone’. The conflict took a toll on her parents’ mental health, especially her father’s before he passed away. Her late uncle, who was a prison officer in Long Kesh, also had mental health problem and was a chronic alcoholic. Her parents were not overtly political, though her mother still has ‘a spit in her voice when she hears the name Margaret Thatcher’. Danielle assumes they voted Labour in London; ‘certainly they never voted Tory’.			
40:00–49:59	Speaks of her parents as belonging to ‘the aspirational working classes’. Thinks their move to London, though ‘never meant to be permanent’, represented an escape from the ‘Catholic-Protestant divisions’ of NI. Believes that even in today’s NI one’s identity is still ‘stratified and codified’ in relation to one’s religious background. Refers to Northern Irishness as a ‘liminal form of identity’ because ‘you’re legally entitled to consider yourself as Irish or British or both’. Although she has an Irish and a British passport, she has ‘always felt slightly			

	unanchored' when it comes to her nationality, but with this comes a freedom to make up her own mind about things. Thinks there is a 'hangover of parochialism and conservatism' in NI still, seen in attitudes to abortion and gay marriage.
50:00–59:59	The idea of 'going home' to NI often came up when she was younger, usually when her father was experiencing paranoia and anxiety because, she feels, he never fully adapted to life in London. Claims that her upbringing was quite strict, which was in marked contrast to her parents' teenage years. Says that her parents gravitated towards other Irish people for a 'sense of community' and 'solidarity'. Feels that she 'consciously tried to keep' her Irish accent, whereas her sister 'did very consciously try and de-Irishify herself'. At school in the early 1990s, Danielle says she was 'much better at the academic side than the social side'. She notes that this was at a time of heightened IRA activity in England, and while she wasn't bullied, she does recall 'being asked by the other kids things like are you a terrorist, are your parents terrorists'.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Mentions that her mother occasionally experienced anti-Irish hostility at work. Says that 'being Irish and being identified as Irish' enabled her to evade being defined in terms of the English class system. Did her undergraduate degree at Oxford, where she 'felt very out of place', not because she was Irish, but because she was from a less well-off background than most other students. Yet being Irish meant she wasn't 'treated as this kind of working-class oik in the same way'. She now works in the arts and has a more middle-class London life, which she thinks her Irishness allowed her to segue into, partly because she didn't have the same 'class hang-ups' as she might have had if she identified as English. Met her husband, who is from Cork, online, and they got married in Cork.
01:10:00–01:19:59	Recalls being in Belfast at the time of the Omagh bomb in 1998, which 'felt like the possibility of a return to the bad old days'. Recalls her elation at being accepted by Oxford, 'because it felt like a ticket out'. Says her parents were 'incredibly proud' and that she was the first of her family to go to university. Recalls her parents' visits to Oxford and notes that it wasn't easy 'to navigate socially' the gulf between her working-class origins and Oxford's monied milieu. Says she still visited her grandparents in NI while she was a student, until her father's 'mental health crisis' affected the frequency of such trips.
01:20:00–01:29:59	Reveals that her father losing his job left the family 'strapped for cash', at a time when she studied for her masters in Birmingham and her PhD at UCL. Her parents eventually separated and her mother moved back to Belfast, which led Danielle and her sister to resume their regular trips and reconnect with their extended family in NI. Explains that since finishing her studies she has worked as a curator, first at the V&A and now at the Museum of London. She is pleased to call herself a Londoner as 'it kind of transcends nationality because the city is so diverse'. It therefore 'doesn't mean you're English', nor does it negate her Irishness, and she would 'very much' call herself Irish. Thinks today's Belfast has undergone major change, which has made it 'a bit more open to the world than it used to be'.
01:30:00–01:37:18	Describes herself as a left-wing progressive whose politics have been influenced by being born to working-class parents 'who witnessed a great deal of violence, a great deal of injustice, social inequality, sectarianism'. Says she is in favour of a united Ireland and thinks that Brexit has made NI and its long-standing 'quandary of self-identification' more visible to English people. Claims the 'unashamedly vernacular' <i>Derry Girls</i> series has also done much to put NI and its distinctive culture and humour on English people's 'radar'. Interview ends with a brief discussion of the anticipated outputs of this oral history project.