

## L26-SG7: RACHEL LEWIS INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Rachel Lewis
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

L26-SG7: Rachel Lewis	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:03:28	Duration: 01:03:28	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Begins by outlining how she came to hear about this oral history project, describing herself as a poet who is currently writing about her family history. Explains that she was born in 1995 in the Swiss Cottage area of London and now lives in Kentish Town. Says she loves London, where she has a strong network of friends, and feels she gets ‘to see the world’ without leaving the city. Its being ‘a world centre for poetry’ also pleases her. Her mother, a doctor, is also a Londoner, while her father, who died when she was sixteen, was born into a Belfast Jewish family in 1955 and ‘left when he was in his twenties and never really went back’. After his hopes of becoming a musician faded, he developed an IT proficiency that led to a successful career in finance in the city of London.			
10:00–19:59	Recalls how when her father met other NI people in London they would speak as if they belonged to ‘a secret club’. Describes going on ‘a memory lane trip’ to Belfast with him, during which he tried to explain the Troubles to her, but ‘it didn’t make any sense’ because he never willingly discussed the conflict during her upbringing, nor did her other NI relations who moved to England to escape the violence. Describes her family as more ‘culturally Jewish’ than religiously observant, and that her grandparents chose to assimilate rather than cleave to the orthodox Jewish community in Belfast. Speaks of her Jewish and NI heritages as being ‘like a thing that’s not a thing’, in that she doesn’t feel in full possession of either of them. Says her grandmother once told her they were ‘Protestant Jews’ because they lived in a Protestant area and attended Protestant schools.			
20:00–29:59	Reveals that her father’s brother also felt ‘Protestant Jewish’ in NI. Discusses the life of her aunt who, as a nurse in 1970s Belfast, endured some ‘very intense’ experiences, after which she moved to London, but was so ‘burned out’ that she retired in her early fifties. Reveals that her father felt he lacked ‘the right background to do well’ in England. He and her mother were, she says, ‘really pushy’ in sending their children to ‘the best private schools’ and universities in order to make them ‘come out like perfect English people’. Says her father’s siblings are similarly ambitious for their children, and notes that they too ‘never tell any of these Troubles stories’ or ‘stories about their history’.			
30:00–39:59	Describes her parents’ desire that their children assimilate and achieve as ‘a Jewish thing’. Lists the schools she attended. Mentions growing up with the children of two close friends of her father from the ROI. Reveals that she has two younger brothers who don’t share her interest in investigating their NI heritage. Studied English at Cambridge, much to the pleasure of her family, although her father did not live to witness this achievement. Cambridge was both ‘an amazing place to learn’ and an extension of the ‘extremely pressurised private schools’ she had previously attended, which meant that she ‘found it very comfortable as an environment’. She met her partner there and forged a close bond with a fellow student from NI, whose family she visited in Belfast. Such visits had a ‘weird’ and ‘emotional’ quality about them, making Rachel feel that she ‘should			

	feel some kind of connection to this place', but didn't, thus reviving in her 'that feeling of a thing that's not a thing'. Says that after university she didn't want to follow her father's career path, which, although lucrative, was also stressful and lacking in job satisfaction.
40:00–49:59	After completing an 'awful' graduation scheme with a Cambridge publisher, she moved back to London and now works in management consultancy, where her work-life balance allows her time to write poetry. States that her current creative project was inspired by her discovering that her grandparents in England still subscribe to the <i>Belfast Jewish Record</i> after all these years. Explains that her Jewish ancestors came to Belfast from Poland in the late 1800s or early 1900s, and that her recent research has led her to contact members of the Belfast Jewish community for information. Says that it is her intention to write poems about the process of trying to connect with her occluded Belfast origins and about 'this experience of [...] the thing that is not a thing'.
50:00–01:03:28	Discusses her grandparents occupations in Belfast and their reasons for leaving the city. Says her poetry project has made her more informed about current events in NI, especially in light of the Brexit vote. Deplores her peers' 'lack of outrage' about the potential of Brexit to destabilise peace in NI. Speculates that while her mother may have been a Conservative voter, her opposition Brexit has made her more left-leaning. Reveals that her NI relations are all 'very anti-IRA' and 'very pro-Union', and that her grandparents are also 'quite Zionist'. Interview concludes with some discussion of the sense of 'ambivalent attachment' to NI that people in situations similar to Rachel sometimes possess, and with her describing how far advanced she is with her poetry collection, which she suggests is 'two or three years away from publication'.