M04: JOANNE PURCELL INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Joanne Purcell [pseudonym]
Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interview summariser: Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks

M04: Joanne Purcell	**Start time: 00:00:00**	**Finish time: 02:31:27**	**Duration: 02:31:27**	**Brief description of content:**
00:00–09:59	Introduces herself as a retired nurse, married with three children, who moved to England in 1980 and has lived in Cheshire since 2005. Born in 1958 in 'a small market town' in Co. Armagh to Catholic parents who were 'traditional working-class Northern Irish folk' with family links to Scotland. As one of four siblings, she had a 'carefree' childhood on a mainly Protestant housing estate. Enjoyed local Orange parades at first, but became aware of sectarianism when the Troubles began. Recalls an occasion when she was refused sweets at a bonfire, which left her feeling 'really hurt': 'I remember thinking what does that mean, are we different, and I was very crestfallen'.			
10:00–19:59	Discusses the control exerted by the Catholic Church in the NI of her youth: 'Church dominated our lives. […] I would say we were ruled by a minor theocracy'. Explains that her mother, 'whilst being a very devout Catholic, also had her own mind about things' and was prepared to confront clerical power. Notes the class bias of the clergy, explaining that priests would visit the wealthy families often, but the working-class families only for the 'monthly or the weekly offertory collection envelope'. Recalls how central alcohol was to the lives of many men in the town, including GAA followers and those who sometimes worked in England, her father among them. Her mother, who was 'very intolerant of alcohol', felt 'quite ostracised from that side of the community'.			
20:00–29:59	Discusses some 'significant things in […] our life as a family that I think set us aside', including their lack of interest in sport, being Catholic in 'the Protestant part of town' and having atypical Catholic names. Her family was also smaller than other Catholic families and wasn't 'particularly close-knit'. Although nominally 'pro-nationalist', her parents 'had no interest in politics whatsoever' and did not discuss politics in the home. Recalls being called a Fenian by two Protestant boys when she was twelve and not understanding the term.			
30:00–39:59	Describes her 'very first memory' of the Troubles, when she saw a large group of tartan-clad young men who seemed 'aggressive and boorish'. Goes on to recall 'a major incident' of 'ethnic cleansing' that occurred when she was around eleven, when these 'tartan gangs' attacked Catholic families' homes on the estate, including hers. Voices her dismay at the failure of the RUC and British Army to intervene, and recalls 'being absolutely confused, terrified and latterly very disappointed that none of our Protestant neighbours came out to defend us'. Her family was moved to a new housing estate, where they found themselves 'cheek by jowl with people that we wouldn't really have associated with', who were staunch nationalists. This episode was 'airbrushed' by the nuns at her school because, she believes, they 'did not want their reputation sullied'.			
40:00–49:59	Emphasises the 'cultural shock' of being thrust into this 'very monoethnic' new milieu, which she compares to being 'transplanted to a foreign country'. When those who could afford to move began to leave, she and her family felt 'abandoned in what we saw was a nationalist enclave'. Speaks of the many losses			

	she and her family experienced as a result of their displacement, and the lasting hurt and anger it occasioned. As ‘a very, very intense and anxious child’ at this time, her fear of being sent to the comprehensive school in her new locality motivated her to pass the eleven-plus, after which she excelled in her GCSEs, but then chose to become a nurse instead of doing her A-levels. This ‘horrified’ her mother and teachers, who tried in vain to dissuade her. She was, she says ‘very headstrong’ and ‘felt it was my escape route’.
50:00–59:59	Explains that she was offered a place at a teaching hospital in England, but chose to stay in NI, even though she wasn’t ‘getting fully away’ from her difficult home life. Describes beginning her nursing studies in 1976 with the Troubles ‘in full flow’, yet happily living at the nurses’ home and having her own bedroom for the first time. Recalls the non-sectarian tenor of the home – ‘you mixed and it was like a whole new world opening up again’ – and the non-discriminatory ethos of the hospital, where she encountered patients with ‘terrible injuries, young men with life-changing injuries’.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Recalls unwittingly going to an RUC-run disco near Stormont and how her fear at being found out made her realise that ‘we were segregated’, which affected her future socialising with Protestant friends. Discusses how the Troubles affected her home town, describing attitudes towards British soldiers, Catholic girls who married soldiers and instances of girls being ‘tarred and feathered in the town centre’. Recalls completing her training and then describes an incident that ‘really crystallised for me that I can’t stay in this place anymore’, which involved her being jostled by a crowd of Orangemen while trying to get to work one Twelfth of July. Family acrimony over her relationship with her Protestant boyfriend further convinced her that the time had come to depart NI: ‘I thought no, […] I can’t live here, I can’t be myself, so I decided to come to one of the major teaching hospitals on the mainland to train as a midwife’.
01:10:00–01:19:59	Describes how a policeman and a Sinn Féin member had been shot dead in their beds in the hospital where she worked. Recalls her weariness at the unrelenting bloodshed and disruption of the conflict and her desire to get away. Moved to Liverpool with a Protestant friend to study midwifery. Felt ‘dreadfully homesick’ and found Liverpool to be ‘a completely foreign country’ at first, although its Thatcher-era deprivation meant ‘it was a wee bit like Belfast in some ways, but without the Troubles’. Stayed in a nurses’ home near the Metropolitan Cathedral and the Liverpool Irish Centre, which became a ‘safety net’. Her friends included girls from NI and the ROI, one of whom introduced her to her future husband.
01:20:00–01:29:59	Recalls her convivial relations with nurses from the ROI, but also her sense that ‘they were different to me and that’s when my sense of kind of Northern Irishness started to come up’, which led her to assert her NI identity and remind people that NI and the ROI are ‘different countries’. States that while she holds an Irish passport, she still sees herself as Northern Irish. Recalls the Toxteth riots of 1980-81 and her feeling of having ‘gone from one city of despair to another one’. Mentions seeing much inner city deprivation during the community placement part of her midwifery training. Circles back to the reasons behind her homesickness and how her NI accent could sometimes impede communication.
01:30:00–01:39:59	Recalls being ‘very aware of the Troubles’ during the 1980s, when she was ‘going back home a lot’. Explains the difficulty of visiting NI with her English partner, whose accent could engender scrutiny and suspicion. Such visits served as ‘a great reminder’ of why she originally left NI, although she and her husband later considered moving there to work. Reveals that they got married in Liverpool because his family did not feel safe travelling to NI. Mentions that her in-laws’

	perceptions of NI were not always well informed. Reveals her lifelong reluctance to discuss her family being forced out their home when she was young, because of a sense of shame and because 'it marked you out as being working class'.
01:40:00–01:49:59	Explains how violence and death became normalised during the Troubles. Recalls negative English views of the NI conflict, the ignorance she encountered and how she wanted English people 'to recognise the validity of the place I came from' and know that it 'it wasn't just a problem' or 'ruled from Dublin'. Points out that her schooling made her more similar to her English than her ROI peers: 'you felt as if you were a bit of that and a bit of that'. Struggles to express her divided emotions – 'you've got this conflict and you've got almost two different thought processes running parallel with each other' – but says the ending of the Troubles 'has helped enormously'. Notes that 'being Northern Irish is not without its difficulties' in the 'quintessentially English' town where she now lives. Claims that some Irish immigrants 'become more English than the English themselves […] because back in the day people from Ireland were seen as Paddies or Micks'.
01:50:00–01:59:59	Reveals that all three of her sons have Irish passports and that one 'could be potentially more Irish than me'. She actively instilled a sense of Irish identity in them when they were young, but withheld her memories of the Troubles until they were older. Recalls pleasant visits to NI with her family during the conflict. Says that her Catholicism remained very important to her after moving to England. Comments briefly on her experiences of working in hospitals in Manchester, which she found very ethnically mixed, and rural Leicestershire, where she felt 'very out of it because of my accent'.
02:00:00–02:09:59	Explains that she sometimes felt as if she was 'going English, […] going native in a way', which would prompt her to 'get my history books out again' and say 'little things in Irish to the boys'. Speaks of 'keeping my identity going' by retaining her NI accent and listening Radio Ulster. She has considered moving back to NI, but doesn't want to be apart from her children and future grandchildren as her mother was, and is worried about the effects of Brexit. She has become much more politically conscious over time, but has never been an activist in NI or GB.
02:10:00–02:19:59	Discusses her new-found confidence in recommending people visit NI now that the Troubles are over, but recognises that political tensions persist. Says she has lived a very full life in England, yet still feels 'to a certain extent, an outsider', as she would in NI were she to move back, which leaves her with 'a sense of not feeling totally belonging anywhere'. Notes that she has modified her speech and accent to be more easily understood in England. Her values have stayed the same, but she is no longer a practising Catholic. She still thinks about NI every day and does not fully regard England as home, but has reached 'a very complex kind of mental accommodation', whereby a sense of 'belonging to that other place' coexists with 'where you function on a day-to-day basis'.
02:20:00–02:29:59	Expresses nostalgia for her early life in NI and sorrow at the losses of migration, such as the absence of grandparental support with childcare and 'just hearing people talking the same as you'. Voices her dislike of Irish stereotypes. Explains that she has two types of home, one 'physical', the other 'emotional'. Says that the NI conflict has had a 'massive impact' on her life and that she sees herself as 'a child of the Troubles', which has made her both a 'fairly undauntable' and a 'slightly fractured' person.
02:30:00–02:31:27	Ends by stating that she feels strongly and unapologetically Northern Irish as opposed to Irish, and has no wish to be part of a future united Ireland.