

M12-SG1: NIALL GALLAGHER INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Niall Gallagher [pseudonym]
Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interview summariser: Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded across two audio files that were spliced together to create a single audio file.

M12-SG1: Niall Gallagher	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:52:10	Duration: 01:52:10	Brief description of content:
00:00–02:40	Introduces himself as having been born and raised in London by a father from Co. Donegal and a mother from Co. Fermanagh. Now lives in Manchester. Expresses his interest in having ‘the rather unique experiences of people from the North, and also the experiences of second-generation from the North’ included in this oral history project. Explains that his mother moved from her native village of Derrylin, which is on the Cavan-Fermanagh border, to Brixton in London the late 1950s or early 1960s. Audio abruptly cuts out. The two interview audio files were spliced together here.			
02:41–12:40	Discusses his mother’s varied working life in London and her enjoyment of Irish dancehalls in the city. Mentions her support for the Palestinian cause and notes her ‘very bizarre Northern Catholic outlook on life’, which comprised sincere religious devotion and ‘a great distrust of the Catholic hierarchy’ on account of their perceived reluctance to speak out against ‘the excesses of the unionist state’ in NI. Says that his father attended mass on Sundays but ‘never really discussed his faith’, although he did become ‘a lot more devout’ in his later years.			
12:41–22:40	Discusses his mother’s view that, in relation to NI and the Troubles, some ROI people were ignorant, uncaring and hypocritical. States that she was ‘a fervent supporter of a united Ireland’, in contrast to her ‘incredibly anti-republican’ brother. Niall himself was born in Islington in 1974 and attended schools in Highbury and Wood Green. Annual summer vacations in Fermanagh with his parents and two older sisters were a staple of his ‘relatively happy’ childhood. Affirms that Irishness was ‘a central part’ of his identity when growing up.			
22:41–32:40	Explains that he grew up supporting Arsenal, Celtic and the ROI football team. Notes that he and his friends viewed their Celtic fandom as ‘a genuine part of the identity’. Recalls that he was ‘quite a pious kid’ and that he still attends mass ‘pretty much every week’. Recalls a British Army helicopter landing on his uncle’s farm in Derrylin while he was playing with toy soldiers there, and the long wait while soldiers searched the farm. Mentions that soldiers manning border crossings were often ‘quite pleased to hear an English accent’, though his mother was ever wary: ‘she hated them [...] She always said that when I was young one of them did stick a gun up near my head when we were stopped at a checkpoint’.			
32:41–42:40	Explains that whereas his English accent was seldom mentioned in Fermanagh, he would often hear ‘a wee bit of talk about plastics’ when he attended ROI football matches across the border. Speaks of growing up in ‘a quite sealed society’ in London, where discussion of the Troubles was infrequent and muted. Says that his earliest memories of the conflict are of the 1981 Maze hunger strikes and the death of Bobby Sands. Recalls forming ‘embryonic opinions at the time’, almost by osmosis. Identifies the 1984-85 miners’ strike in GB as the most politically impactful event of his youth, which quickened his interest in socialism.			

42:41–52:40	Affirms his long-standing interest in Irish politics and history. Recalls being taken by his parents when he was five to hear the Donegal-born republican socialist Peadar O'Donnell speak at the Camden Irish Centre in 1979. Speaks of his mother veering on 'a weekly or daily basis between a social conservatism and radical socialism', whereas Niall himself formed his left-wing views and values as a teenager and has not had cause to reassess them since then.
52:41–01:02:40	After not visiting NI 'for a good long while' in the 1980s, he returned in 1990 with a trip to Arranmore island off the Donegal coast, where his father is from. He also went to Sixmilecross and Belfast, and has been visiting NI regularly since then. Discusses dropping out of university in London at an early stage in his history degree studies and then doing voluntary work in Kilburn for an Irish housing charity. Reveals that most of his friends at this time were second-generation Irish young men, with whom he would discuss events in NI, including 'some of the most shocking incidents, so your Shankill bombings, your Warringtons, Greysteels and things like that were occurring at the time'.
01:02:41–01:12:40	Describes himself as a 'Catholic communist' who has 'never really felt any sort of English identity'. Instead, he regards his identity as having been 'pretty much defined by [...] where my parents are from and a romanticisation [...] of Ireland'. Speculates on whether being a socialist and anti-imperialist makes one less nationalistic. Recalls encountering anti-Irish sentiment in London and receiving 'a smack in the chops for having a tricolour occasionally'. Reveals that one of his closest schoolfriends was 'extremely right wing' and 'incredibly pro-British', yet their political differences did not prevent them from socialising together.
01:12:41–01:22:40	Recalls forming common bonds with other second-generation Irish people in different workplaces. Explains that his wife, whom he met through work, is from Stoke and has no Irish ancestry. Discusses the Irish strand in his employment history, from 1998 to his present post with Irish Community Care in Manchester. Concedes that having an Irish diasporic identity has been a defining feature of his life, yet also insists that being a Londoner has had a 'seminal effect' on him, and affirms the abiding influence of being raised in a city of cosmopolitan diversity.
01:22:41–01:32:40	Identifies London's capacity to absorb and 'radiate' a multiplicity of cultures as one reason why 'being London Irish is such a big thing for me'. Explains that whereas he was once a staunch Irish republican, his outlook is now 'a lot more radically left wing', but he still supports Irish reunification as means of addressing 'the toxicity of sectarianism'. Expresses incredulity that second-generation NI people who grew up in Britain since the 1960s could remain uninfluenced by, or politically neutral about, the Troubles. Ponders the influence of his being a Celtic fan on his political outlook and expresses a wish to protect his children from the crude sectarianism of some of the club's supporters.
01:32:41–01:42:40	Considers how his two sons' sense of national and cultural identity might be affected by their growing up against a backdrop of a post-conflict NI. Suggests that the Troubles 'probably won't define them in exactly the same way' that it defined him, and that their view of Ireland will not be dominated by images of paramilitaries and British soldiers. Discusses the global commodification of Irish culture in the 1990s and more recent attempts to package NI cultural heritage for touristic consumption, aspects of which he finds baffling and incongruous.
01:42:41–01:52:10	Reflects on his relationship with his wife's parents, particularly his father-in-law, whom he describes as 'quite Victorian' in outlook, though not 'virulently' nationalistic. Explains that, to avoid arguments, they have an unspoken contract not to talk about politics in each other's company, which helps to explain why his father-in-law has never discussed NI or the Troubles with him.