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Somewhere bigger and brighter? Ambivalence and desire in memories of leaving the north of Ireland during the Troubles

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ABSTRACT

This article examines oral history interviews of migrants from Northern Ireland to Britain, specifically a group of ten people who left the North during the Troubles. It reads their interviews for, on the one hand, accounts of migration as liberatory or as generative of new subjectivities and new possibilities; and on the other hand, expressions of nostalgia, ambivalence or uncertainty which exist alongside those more optimistic narratives. In doing so, it highlights a specific form of dichotomised composure within this selection of oral histories and argues that the specificities of this composure are suggestive of some of the discourses that operate around the relationship between Northern Ireland and Britain, as well as of the contested memory of the Troubles. They also reveal aspects of the complicated history of multiculturalism in Britain, and of various forms of social repression in the North, showing how our interviewees navigated their movement between those two places.

KEYWORDS

Migration; the Troubles; oral history; composure; Britain

Introduction

The following analysis is based on a corpus of over seventy oral history interviews conducted with individuals who left Northern Ireland to work, study or settle in three British city regions – London, Manchester and Glasgow – in the period before, during and after the Troubles (c.1969–1998).¹ These interviews were undertaken as part of a three-year AHRC-funded research project led by a team of five researchers from the universities of Manchester, Brighton and Liverpool, which began in April 2019. Entitled “Conflict, Memory and Migration: Northern Irish Migrants and the Troubles in Great Britain,” the project examines the interrelationship between the political conflict in the North of Ireland, the formation of Northern Irish migrant subjectivities in the three regions mentioned above and the history and memory of the Troubles in Great Britain.²

Interviewees were recruited through newspaper advertisements, websites and word of mouth. Dr Barry Hazley conducted the Manchester-based interviews, Dr Fearghus Roulston conducted the London-based interviews and Dr Jack Crangle conducted the Glasgow-based interviews. Around half of the Manchester and London interviews were conducted in-person, and the rest online after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic; all of the Glasgow interviews, which started slightly later, were conducted online. We

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interviewed roughly the same number of people from Protestant/unionist/loyalist and Catholics/nationalist/republican backgrounds, and roughly the same number of men and women, a split which is also reflected in the interviews engaged with in this paper; in terms of departure dates, we spoke to people who had migrated from the late '60s through to the early '00s, as well as to some children of migrants, who had mostly been born in England and Scotland. The interviews themselves were loosely structured along a linear temporal line (childhood and growing up in the North; departure and settlement; reflections from the perspective of the present) and around the project's specific interest in the Troubles in Britain and Ireland, although the form of each interview varied as interviewees attempted to follow the track of the interviewees' narrative as well as these external imperatives. This article draws on ten of these interviews to examine one particular strand of this complex nexus: the ambivalent and multifaceted ways in which Northern Irish people compose and narrate their memories of their migration journeys and experiences in their oral accounts.

Specifically, we read a series of narratives that present leaving the North as opening new possibilities or alternative modes of living for the person who moved, often evoked or described in terms of a putative British multiculturalism, diversity or tolerance. One of the ways interviewees expressed this alternative structure of feeling was through the dichotomous or contrasting presentation of Northern Ireland and Britain. Many, for instance, contrasted the cultural diversity of London with the perceived absence of this diversity in Ireland, suggested that it was easier to "be yourself" in Britain due to the relative anonymity and cosmopolitanism of urban life, or described their university lives as providing new opportunities for self-fashioning and new relationships. These dichotomous representations are importantly unstable, however; they coexist in the interviews with divergent or dissonant ways of talking about the past, and with feelings of nostalgia or loss. Interviewees simultaneously evoked the solidarities and connections of life in Northern Ireland while bemoaning the repression these intimacies allowed for. They both lamented the everyday militarisation brought about by the Troubles while maintaining a romantic, place-based attachment to home. They described the pleasure of living in multicultural neighbourhoods while also critiquing the racism or imperialism of the British state.

In oral history, composure refers to the methods and techniques interviewees employ in trying to tell a story about the past that is both comprehensible to interviewers and subjectively or psychically comfortable for themselves.³ Forms of composure that move temporally and spatially between the "sending" and the "receiving" society are features of geographically-disparate migrant narratives, from the post-war Irish migrants to Britain interviewed by Barry Hazley, to the Barbadians interviewed by Mary Chamberlain or the English migrants to Australia interviewed by Alistair Thomson.⁴ What we are interested in here are the specificities of that dynamic as it occurs in the narratives of people who moved from Northern Ireland to Britain during the Troubles. In that sense, we build on recent life history and oral history work on migration from Ireland and the Irish diaspora to consider the experience of moving and the affective, discursive and cultural contexts of that experience by focusing on the specificities of these contexts for migrants from the North, a notable absence in the existing literature.⁵ In doing so, we are developing the arguments made by Johanne Devlin Trew on the complicated subjective problems of identity and belonging among this cohort of migrants, particularly for those who did not

feel emotionally or materially part of Irish diasporic culture.⁶ Finally, we are also responding to a relative absence of historical work that considers the Troubles in Britain, and to the discursive and affective interconnections between Britain and Northern Ireland that our interviewees make visible.⁷

Barry Hazley, in his 2020 oral history of post-war Irish migration to Britain, highlights the fact that migrants had a range of competing discourses, myths and narratives to draw on when talking about their decision to leave Ireland.⁸ “What emerges [from a consideration of these discourses and the ways in which migrants draw on them] is an account of the re/formation of gendered migrant subjectivities as the unstable and incomplete product of competing discourses and conflictual desires,” he adds.⁹ Migrants do not invest wholly in either the “sending” or the “receiving” society in how they construct and narrate their identities; they do not wholly repudiate Ireland as backwards while uncomplicatedly embracing the “modernity” of Britain, for instance. Instead, they “often sustain, in variable and graduated ways, both forms of attachment, modulating between one and the other at different times, in different spaces, for different reasons.”¹⁰ Our intervention here builds on this insightful account by considering the specific freight of that oscillation or modulation in the context of migration from the North of Ireland to Britain during the Troubles.

“Backwardness” and multiculturalism

Comparisons between Ireland and Britain or England have a long history attached to English colonial rule. Seamus Deane, charting the antithetical representation of England and Ireland from the 17th century through to the Troubles and the 1980s, says: “The language of politics in Ireland and England, especially when the subject is Northern Ireland, is still dominated by the putative division between barbarism and civilisation.”¹¹ While the dichotomies expressed by our interviewees do not correspond neatly to this pairing, there are echoes of these imperial images in some of their constructions, particularly in the temporal positioning of Ireland as mired in the past and Britain as existing in the present or the future. The continued valence of this comparison is suggestive of the continuing legacies of imperial imaginaries in discourses around Northern Ireland, and in the usefulness of these imaginaries for representing the Troubles, as Deane suggests. But, we argue, it is also a way of talking about the affective atmosphere of the North and indexing difference in attitudes, behaviours, policies and discourses between the North of Ireland and Britain. Legislation provides one starting point for this claim. The Sexual Offences Act 1967, which for the first time partially decriminalised some sexual activity between men in private spaces, was resisted in Northern Ireland both by the Unionist administration and later by the direct rule administration. As Sean Brady points out:

it took a landmark case at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), to force the government finally to overrule the highly vocal opposition of the majority in Northern Ireland, and in 1982 impose the Homosexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 1982 on the unwilling province.¹²

During the 15 years or so between the passing of the act in England and the imposition of the new act in Northern Ireland, the Reverend Ian Paisley and the DUP’s “Save Ulster From Sodomy” campaign against the decriminalisation of gay sexual activity was a highly visible marker of homophobia.

In terms of gendered legislation, abortion reform only took place in Northern Ireland in 2019, although there continue to be concerns about how the Department of Health will implement and fund decriminalised services.¹³ This shift in legislation broadly brought Northern Ireland into line with the legal situation in the rest of the UK, where NHS-funded abortion has been available since 1967. As with the question of homosexuality, this legislative discrepancy was a feature of both pre and post-direct rule governance; one recent account suggests that Westminster's reluctance to intervene on issues of social policy in the North was explicable because Northern Ireland "was seen as a place apart with its own conservative, deeply religious culture and values."¹⁴ In that sense, it is possible to discern a potential difference in attitudes, atmosphere or mood between Northern Ireland and the relatively cosmopolitan urban spaces the interviewees above moved to – although it is also important to be clear that homophobia, misogyny and racism were structural parts of British society and not just Northern Irish society in this period. This complicated dynamic is one way of accounting for the instability or ambivalence of dichotomy as a narrative mode, although it can also be seen as a more general tendency of composure within the oral history interview.

The Troubles, which lasted from 1968 through to 1998 and resulted in more than 3,500 deaths and many more injuries, are another important frame for the evocations of Northern Ireland we analyse here. While the war itself is not the focus of our intervention, it is important to bear in mind the conditions of everyday violence, surveillance and repression that characterised parts of the North during the conflict, particularly when considering narratives that present leaving home as an escape or a relief.

The other side of the dichotomy – the presentation of Britain as liberal, multicultural or tolerant – has its own history. The decades following the Second World War saw Britain reshaped from an overwhelmingly white, Christian country to a place of widespread ethnic and religious diversity. In response to post-war labour shortages, Clement Atlee's government passed the British Nationality Act (1948) which granted automatic right of entry to all citizens of the UK commonwealth. The arrival later that year of the *Empire Windrush* ship, carrying around 500 Black Jamaican immigrants, is now commonly celebrated as "the basis for an open, multicultural society."¹⁵ Commonwealth immigration – particularly from the Caribbean and South Asia – continued apace during the 1950s–1970s. These rapid demographic changes reshaped the meaning of national identity, challenging the synonymisation of Britishness (Englishness in particular) with whiteness.¹⁶ Black and Asian migration was strongly resisted by the political right. The 1958 racist riots in Notting Hill, London, as well as Conservative politician Enoch Powell's infamous speech a decade later – in which he railed against "coloured" immigration – was part of this reactionary backlash. Riots by disaffected Black youths across deprived inner-city communities during the 1980s highlighted the inequality and systemic discrimination that has afflicted migrant and minority communities.

In response to the prejudices and structural hurdles facing people of colour, many Labour-controlled local authorities forged "a new urban-leftist coalition," reshaping their institutions to be more inclusive of those from different ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds.¹⁷ The structural accommodation of minority ethnic people in urban areas was accompanied by what social scientists have portrayed as increasingly convivial cross-ethnic encounters throughout everyday life. These allegedly genial, everyday interactions between white and minority-ethnic people in urban Britain have been increasingly

romanticised within what Anoop Nayak describes as a “convivial turn” in recent scholarship. Such appraisals hailed Britain’s diverse, multi-ethnic cities as places of “familiarity, reciprocity, warmth, friendship and trust.”¹⁸ Celebratory discourse surrounding multiculturalism has been reproduced in the public realm, depicting a Britain that “accepts the diversity of the nation’s past and present.”¹⁹ The construction of British society – especially the inner-city – as a place of vibrant, diverse and inclusive conviviality is an oversimplification that overlooks both the systemic and interpersonal discrimination facing minorities. Yet, a cohort of our interviewees embraced this discourse, deploying it prominently within their oral testimony. Due to their own migrant stories, they identified with the multiculturalist ideal of acceptance and accommodation for all. Since the 1980s, Irish community organisations – especially in London – have pushed for recognition as a recognised minority within urban Britain’s “multicultural paradigm.”²⁰ As John Nagle argues, events such as London’s 2002 St Patrick’s Day festivities were modelled on other minority-ethnic festivals such as Notting Hill Carnival or Chinese New Year, aiming to convey a positive image of Irish culture.²¹ Our Northern Irish emigrants were thus able to identify as *part of*, rather than mere consumers of Britain’s multicultural landscape, blending into urban melting pots where “difference has become the norm.”²² Most crucially for our analysis, interviewees’ embrace and projection of multiculturalist discourse served as a contrasting device to highlight the supposed insular backwardness of Troubles-era Northern Ireland. Depicting large British cities as colourful, welcoming and tolerant heightened images of Northern Ireland as a monochrome, austere and atavistic society, one that they had transcended via emigration.

The oral historian Alistair Thomson suggests that “the experience of migration, which by definition is centred around a process of acute disjuncture, presents both an urgent need for, and particular difficulties in, the construction of coherent identities and life stories, of a past we can live by.”²³ In focusing on the dichotomous representation of Northern Ireland and Britain in some of our interviews, and considering this dichotomy as a way of composing a liveable story about the past, we reveal what their narratives suggest about available public discourses for talking about migration; about the relationship between the North and Britain, both in the past and in the present; and about the specific historical experience of Northern Irish migration, as opposed to Irish migration more broadly.

Growing up in the North

Sara Ahmed, in an important reconceptualisation of home as it is understood in theories of migration, argues that we should not always associate home with familiarity and migration with strangeness.

The problem with such a model of home as familiarity is that it projects strangeness beyond the walls of the home. Instead, we can ask: how does being-at-home already encounter strangeness? How does being at home already engender desire?²⁴

Across the interviews we analyse here, a similar reconceptualisation is at work, whereby interviewees emphasise the strangeness of “home” – Northern Ireland – and of their childhood experiences of the province. In particular, there is a focus on the North as a site where a combination of family and non-family surveillance, religion and respectability

imposed a repressive set of dictates on young people. There was also an ambivalent sense, however, of this tight-knit sense of community as having a positive dimension as opposed to the atomisation or separateness of adult life in Britain.

This ambivalence was immediately evident in an interview with Eugene McLaughlin, who emigrated from Derry to Hull in the 1970s. Eugene grew up in the Bogside area of the city, describing it as “a wonderfully holding place when I was growing up.” This striking metaphor is redolent of the ambivalence described above. To be held can be both comforting, connoting a sense of safety and familiarity, or constraining, symbolic of a collective pressure to conform.²⁵ This oscillation was apparent in his elaboration on the initial “holding” metaphor:

It was very much a working-class, was a very working-class area, everybody knew each other, everybody knew each other’s mothers and teachers knew your mother, your father, and there was a sort of a mutuality which was, you know, very obvious, you know, teachers used to send you out for a pound of mince for the mother who lived down in the walk and things like that [laughs].²⁶

Here, mutuality is clearly presented as a good thing (and later in the interview Eugene contrasted it favourably to the more atomised society of contemporary England). However, there is a note of potential friction in the contiguous relationship between authority figures and parents, resulting in a sense that everybody was being monitored. Eugene’s account is instantly relatable to other narratives of working-class life in Northern Ireland, such as Eamon McCann’s classic *War and an Irish Town*; McCann also grew up as a Catholic in the Bogside.²⁷ The close social bonds that sustained working-class Northern Irish communities are both a support and a constraint, in Eugene’s account. Within the interview, a further function of this evocation of mutuality and community was to contrast the Derry of Eugene’s early childhood with the Derry of his adolescence, which coincided with the beginning of the Troubles. In his telling, this generated a shift in what he earlier described as the holding nature of the Bogside. He explained his decision to depart Derry as originating from the idea:

That if you didn’t leave then you ended up, you could end up in a very sad and depressed place I think, sad and depressed because Northern Ireland to me in ‘70, in the early ‘70s was sort of closing down, you know, the ideas of expressing yourself in other ways, you know, the way you expressed yourself, the community that I grew up is about joining the IRA, that’s how you express yourself.²⁸

Here, the holding hand closes into a fist, delimiting the capacity for self-expression outside the proscribed outlet of republicanism. The historical context for this shift is the centrality of the city to the emerging politics of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, from the civil rights marches of the late 1960s to the Battle of the Bogside and the emergence of “free Derry” in 1969, and through to the Bloody Sunday massacre in January 1972. Bloody Sunday, the killing of 14 unarmed people by British soldiers during a protest march against internment without trial, continues to be a focal point for the contested memory of the conflict in the North. Graham Dawson has argued that the compounded impact of this atrocity is partly a feature of the social geography of the Bogside and its neighbouring communities as “densely-populated nationalist communities of large and intertwined Catholic extended families, where virtually every household had members on the march and knew at least one of the dead.”²⁹

For Eugene, Bloody Sunday and the events preceding it entailed some willingness to engage with republican politics, as it did for many Catholics in the North; but along with this came a sense of these republican politics as involving their own forms of policing and repression. Eugene mentioned the practice of tarring and feathering women suspected of sleeping with soldiers as one profoundly gendered aspect of this repression. He was especially clear in a story about deciding to leave the North at the age of seventeen or eighteen.³⁰ He said:

I was quite angry with Ireland I suppose, I was quite angry with the way things worked, I also had a row with a couple of IRA men and it was a wee bit, one of those situations, I wasn't expelled or anything like that but it was one of those situations where I was done over by them.³¹

Essentially, the row came about because Eugene criticised one IRA member while speaking to another, and although the two men were in different factions – one in the Provisional IRA and another in the “Stickies,” or the Official IRA – they put their differences aside in the face of this external criticism from someone formally uninvolved in either organisation. Eugene explained:

So that, in a sense I suppose in retrospect that taught me a bit of a lesson which was about that comradeship was very, very strong and I was at a, you know, that comradeship that they had between them was very, very strong and I didn't want to be necessarily part of that to be honest.

Fearghus Roulston: I guess that's kind of the other side of that intimacy that you were talking about earlier which is that it can be quite tight, it can be quite tightknit.

Eugene McLaughlin: Yeah, and that was the, that was the, that was the, I suppose that was the overwhelming feeling that I had about Derry for years, that that intimacy was, if you stepped above a certain, if you stepped over a certain line then you were slapped down, and irrespective of what the issue was, yeah, you were told how to behave by them, sometimes in a gentle way but sometimes in quite a brutal way as well, you know, deviancy wasn't allowed, yeah?³²

The policing of “deviant” behaviour by various institutions – the family, state and non-state police forces, the church – was a recurring theme in many of the interviews which contrast Northern Ireland to Britain. Joe Lennon, who left Castlewellan in County Down in 1980 for Leeds, said:

I was sick of what I was seeing, I was sick of this narrow-mindedness, I was sick of seeing what was happening, and I felt crushed, I felt and I needed something bigger and brighter and, you know, I had seen hatred on both sides but I also I felt like I was being compressed in and wasn't able to let go, get out and whatever, I wasn't able to do that and, I needed to try something.³³

Strikingly, Joe uses two similar narrative formulations to Eugene, in terms of feeling “crushed” or constrained by the narrow-mindedness and sectarianism of Northern Ireland, and in terms of stressing the ecumenical nature of his critique, with hatred a presence “on both sides.” It is also interesting to note the recurrence of this critique of the province's repressive atmosphere across a quintessentially rural and bucolic area, Castlewellan, and the densely-populated urban space of the Bogside in Derry. Indeed, Joe posits that the specificities of life in a small, majority-nationalist town made surveillance and harassment from the

British Army particularly forceful as it was “easier for the military or police to pick on you, one is the police knew who you were, they knew everything about you, it’s easier to sort of hide in the population of a city or whatever.”³⁴ As Mark McGovern suggests in his analysis of collusion between state and loyalist forces during the Troubles, sectarian division (and surveillance) are commonly understood as urban phenomena, but “divisions, deeply rooted in a history of colonial conquest, appropriation and settlement, have always been just as stark and real in many rural areas of the North.”³⁵ Yet, Joe’s narrative was complicated by his continued attachment to the spatial and scenic characteristics of Castlewellan, which emphasised the continuing pull of home. Despite feeling “crushed,” early in the interview Joe depicted the town as the setting for “one of the loveliest childhoods that one could ever imagine, you know. It’s a small town, beautiful countryside.” His narrative oscillation between the town’s overbearing social repression and its idyllic rural beauty evidences the duality and contradictions woven through these narratives of the North.

Eugene and Joe both described specific ways in which the advent of the conflict in the North generated forms of surveillance, policing and violence that constrained their behaviour. But interviewees who did not experience the start of the Troubles also evoked a similar affective atmosphere of constraint and parochialism, underpinned by religious and social conservatism. Jane Baird, who left Belfast in the early 1980s for London, described her childhood and adolescence as reasonably happy – despite her grandfather being injured in a PIRA bombing – but nonetheless remembered a desire for “an independent life” in England:

So yes looking back you know it was happy and a laugh and we had a laugh and stuff but, um, once it was so nice to go somewhere bigger and also because the small world - I mean [as someone from] Ballymena you’d know that even more - there’s really, as a young person, you can’t go anywhere without everybody knowing where you’re going, who you’re with, you’ve got no privacy, you’ve got no sense of sort of having an independent life.³⁶

This construction of Northern Ireland as policed, surveilled and conservative moves across both space, in that it is a feature of rural and urban narratives, and time. Indeed, Judith suggests this temporal wideness in a small intersubjective moment at the start of the quote where she posits that the interviewer – a man in his early thirties from the notoriously Presbyterian north Antrim town of Ballymena – will understand her description of the constraints of Northern Irish adolescence.

A sense of this atmosphere’s longevity was also apparent in the narrative of Tina McCloskey, who left Belfast for London in the mid-2000s. She said of growing up in Northern Ireland:

You don’t show anything else and you don’t talk about issues, nothing is talked about, like my, like I’m, can only presume my family is quite typical, nobody talks about anything, everything is just brushed under the carpet and, and also you don’t show emotion, you don’t talk about emotional things, you know, you could have big life events and you’d just be like “yeah, yeah, fine” and everything is, nothing is talked about, it’s only through friends here in London that I’ve learnt to, how to talk about anything, you know, ‘cause you certainly never did before, you just bottled everything up.³⁷

For Tina, the policing of behaviour that is apparent across all the narratives analysed so far is internalised, moving to the subcutaneous terrain of the body and the *habitus*; emotions are left unexpressed and “big life events” are underplayed, and difficult memories or

experiences are “bottled up.” As with Eugene, Joe, and Judith, constraint is the primary affect associated with life in the North, even though Tina is talking about “post-conflict” or at least post-peace process Northern Ireland.

Tina’s evocation of Northern Ireland as a staid, parochial society extended beyond mere abstract notions of repression. Like other interviewees, Tina discussed more concrete social issues to exemplify Northern Ireland’s conservatism, most prominently debates around same-sex marriage and abortion. Tina therefore made a direct correlation with what she described as “backward” social attitudes and a more general atmosphere of repression. She felt similarly disillusioned with attitudes towards race and immigration in Northern Ireland, which she felt were dismissive towards minority ethnic communities.

Moving to Britain

These social issues often served as a proxy for a broader perceived dichotomy between traditional, puritanical Northern Ireland and progressive, enlightened urban Great Britain. Eugene, for instance, described his early experiences of Hull as liberatory, despite an initial wobble upon encountering the stark landscape of post-industrial northern England:

I didn’t have to be down in Hull until the Sunday, right, so I go and explore Leeds, Bradford, so what’ll I do, I’ll call it Bradford, there’s a bus outside the station saying Bradford, I jumped on it, went to Bradford, I looked round Bradford, mmm, fuck [laughs], it was grey and Yorkshire, you know what I mean?³⁸

He remembered the train journey from Leeds to Hull, moving from hilly to flat ground, and the smell of the fish processing plants.

Hull itself was, how would you say, Hull was, it was very orderly, very orderly, I mean you’ve got to bear in mind I come from Derry where there’s chaos everywhere, where there’s family chaos, where there’s street chaos, barricades all over everything, but Hull was, had been flattened during the Second World War, so they had rebuilt a lot of it so the streets were very, very, very straight, long and straight.³⁹

This suggestive comparison highlights the material differences between the two cityscapes and alludes to the historical reasons for these differences, particularly in terms of the different experiences of war that have shaped the two places. But it also seems to indicate a more conceptual, or imaginative, distinction between Hull and Derry, where one is ordered and the other disordered.⁴⁰ England is orderly, in this account, but it is not a sterile or a cold orderliness. Despite an initial impression of reservedness, Eugene went on to suggest that he was struck by the democratic, open emotionality of English people, especially in the North, which he compared with his experience of Derry in language that recalls the “holding” metaphor discussed earlier:

And I suppose that’s the contrast with Derry, those sort of things in Derry, the artists and musicians and liberals and stuff like that were declining in Derry to me, whereas in Hull there was this opening up of things and that’s what I was looking for, and the people from Hull who were involved with that I found very open and welcoming to be honest.⁴¹

Several interviewees expressed this sense of conviviality through an engagement with discourses of multiculturalism. Growing up in Belfast between the 1960s and the 1980s, Martin Seeds recalled the city’s overwhelming whiteness. During this period, Belfast “was

not very culturally rich,” rendering it “very difficult to see a Black face or an Asian face.” After moving to London in 1986, Martin was overawed at being “thrown into a community with an enormous cultural mix.”⁴² Although initially overwhelmed by London’s diversity of accents, foods and cultures, Martin quickly embraced such pluralism as something to “celebrate,” a welcome contrast to what he perceived as Belfast’s insular monoculture. Siobhán O’Neill, another 1980s emigrant, similarly recalled that the first time she saw a Black person in Belfast was when encountering a Black-British soldier on the streets.⁴³ Martin and Siobhán were typical of many interviewees who cited Belfast’s lack of ethnic diversity to convey an absence of vibrancy. Their recollections also, to a large extent, reflected reality. While twentieth-century Northern Ireland was home to substantial migrant populations, most prominently the Indian and Chinese communities, 1995 estimates gauged the region’s ethnic minority population at between 4,000 and 6,000, figures dwarfed in British cities.⁴⁴ Many people of colour in Northern Ireland suffered from economic and social segregation. Martin Seeds described only ever seeing Chinese people behind takeaway counters, reflecting the fleeting way in which most Northern Irish people encountered minorities. As Buettner argues, such transactional contact can serve as “an easy substitute for a deeper accommodation of cultural and ethnic diversity,” limiting meaningful crossover.⁴⁵ Migrants in Northern Ireland were often portrayed in wider culture as one-dimensional stereotypes and caricatures relating to their profession.⁴⁶ Despite the presence of several migrant communities, twentieth-century Belfast was far from the heterogenous melting pot witnessed in London – although as the various protests in London and elsewhere against the National Front, racism and police violence of the 1970s and 1980s suggest, this “melting pot” was itself of course characterised and shaped by its existence in a racist British society.⁴⁷

Others provided similar accounts to Martin’s. Food was an especially common motif deployed to narrate cultural diversity. Anne Power’s family moved to the Birmingham area from Northern Ireland when she was a child in the mid-1970s. Anne vividly evoked her first encounter with Indian curry to convey her excitement at urban England’s comparative cultural richness. Despite only being aged four, Anne recalled that:

When we moved into our house I can remember I was very little and going outside into the garden and there was a prevailing smell of this very lovely sweet smell I’d never smelt before, and it was curry, and it was our neighbours were cooking, they were from India and I was mesmerised by the colour and the lady came out she was wearing a beautiful sari and I was just spellbound ‘cause it was just like wow, and she introduced herself and handed my mum some food, and I thought gosh isn’t that lovely that was like a, food is the cultural thing? [*sic*]⁴⁸

Anne explicitly contrasted this formative experience with the comparative blandness of Northern Ireland’s parochial, binary society, where “you were either Catholic or Protestant.” Having moved from a “predominantly white community,” meeting Asian neighbours was a colourful contrast. The smell and appearance of curry, the bright colours of a sari, as well as the welcome extended by her neighbour, connoted pluralism and conviviality, a marked departure from the suspicion and insularity of Troubles-era Northern Ireland.

Linda Cassidy was similarly enthralled by the variety of ethnic food on offer when she moved to the diverse neighbourhood of Wood Green, north London. Having grown up in a republican heartland of west Belfast, Wood Green:

Had like loads of shops where you would have like Turkish produce, and, you know, Indian produce and that kind of thing and I like cooking and experimenting with food so I was kind of loving this, I loved buying olives that were just like sitting soaking in brine in the shops so for me it was like massively ethnically diverse.⁴⁹

Like Anne, Linda presents new cuisines as alluring, similarly contrasting London's vibrancy with her upbringing in Belfast, where "everybody was white and Catholic." Linda also feels that London's widespread ethnic diversity lessened her own sense of otherness because, in her words, "everyone was from somewhere." As a migrant from Northern Ireland, Linda found it easier to acclimatise within what Mary Hickman and Louise Ryan describe as urban Britain's "complex and vibrant multicultural."⁵⁰ Food has commonly been referenced across the western world to locate ethnic diversity as it constitutes one of the most obvious and accessible means to experience other cultures. The synonymisation of ethnic minority cultures with food has proven problematic. According to Lars Amenda, food can be a means of highlighting or reinforcing difference, with the exoticism of foreign cuisine serving as a marker of "otherness."⁵¹ Parker is still more critical of framing diversity through food, suggesting that white fixation with ethnic food amounts to clear cultural appropriation.⁵² Yet, our respondents were generally more nuanced. Rather than framing cuisine as the totality of ethnic minority cultures, most discussed food as merely one aspect of the rich tapestry of ethnicities and backgrounds that defined London and other English cities.

While culinary multiculturalism constitutes, on its own, only "a limited form of tolerance," many interviewees were clear about their desire to engage more deeply.⁵³ Particularly striking were those who described actively learning about and understanding new cultures in their midst. Some lamented that Northern Ireland deprived them of a rounded cultural education. Martin Seeds, for example, felt "quite cross" when reflecting on the lack of diversity he experienced growing up, feeling "that opportunity and possibility, that kind of culture was just not there for me and it was never going to be there for me and it's never going to be there for any of my friends who grew up around me."⁵⁴ Instead, Martin stated that he became "culturally experienced" of his own accord by leaving Northern Ireland and seeking out people from new backgrounds. Tina McCloskey, who swapped Belfast for London in 2004, was similarly determined to learn, motivated primarily through fear of being seen as ignorant. Tina quickly befriended a Muslim colleague, but worried that her lack of prior exposure to Islam would cause embarrassment or offence. Commenting that Belfast "wasn't multi-cultural at all," and that she had never previously met a Muslim, Tina would frequently ask her friend questions about the meaning of Ramadan or other cultural practices.⁵⁵ In a telling passage, Tina discussed how:

I want to not offend people by saying the wrong things and, and I'd started reading up on stuff, so I could not be a, an ignorant, you know, dick about things, and not I suppose what you would come, do micro-aggressions, which I didn't know that, that's what, wouldn't have known it was that then, but I just wanted to be culturally aware so that I wasn't caught, you know, making big blunders.⁵⁶

Asking questions and reading up on Islam was part of Tina's broader ambition to "open up things to yourself culturally"; she described London as having "totally opened up and it like a whole literal whole new world."⁵⁷

The workplace was one of the easiest and most practical forums in which interviewees met and befriended people from other countries. Anna MacCafferty moved to London from Derry, a city with even fewer ethnic minority residents than Belfast, and was hugely positive about the cosmopolitanism of her workplace in the banking industry. Now retired, Anna described her office as “league of nations, that was the other thing, Austrian, Ghanaian, ah where was, can’t remember, think he was West Indian, German, you know it would’ve been, South African, English of course, Irish, all over the place, it was great.”⁵⁸ This was a marked change from the employment situation in Northern Ireland, where workplaces were almost exclusively white and where job discrimination facilitated sectarian working patterns. For others, their local neighbourhood was the primary site for experiencing diversity. Joe Lennon, from the small town of Castletwellan in County Down, moved to the predominantly Black area of Chapeltown in Leeds, describing the suburb as “one of the best places I’ve ever lived in my life.”⁵⁹ Joe referenced the “richness of cultures” in Leeds as a core difference between the city and his home in Northern Ireland.⁶⁰ For John Mitchell, who grew up in Belfast and now lives in the home counties, church provided an opportunity for mixing. As John explained, “we’ve people from Nigeria and Ghana who are often actually quite well off to come, directly come, you know, they so there’s a whole spectrum of people in the church which is brilliant.”⁶¹ Encounters in the workplace, in the neighbourhood and in social settings arguably reflected a more meaningful and embedded form of diversity and multiculturalism than emigrants would have experienced at home. These interactions reflected the type of urban British cosmopolitan conviviality described by Paul Gilroy, where he asserts that “just living together . . . living with difference without being overcome by xenophobia and hostility” represents a distinctive pluralistic, urban and liberal form of multiculturalism than places with greater ethnic segregation.⁶²

These convivial interactions distinguished large British metropolises from cities, towns and villages across Northern Ireland. While people of colour undoubtedly lived in these latter places, economic and social segregation was more pronounced. Another factor that inhibited multiculturalist discourse in Northern Ireland was the region’s sectarian divide. Ethnic “others” struggled to find a place within Northern Ireland’s Catholic-Protestant, nationalist-unionist binary. Northern Ireland remained a zero-sum place defined by “two traditions,” leaving little room to accommodate cultural plurality.⁶³ The divergence between how Great Britain and Northern Ireland experienced and confronted multiculturalism was reflected in interview narratives. When discussing their early lives in Northern Ireland, participants described occasionally “seeing” Black or minority-ethnic people in their environment but did not discuss any deeper relationship. Participants presented “Black faces” as a relative novelty in Northern Ireland, something unusual rather than part and parcel of society. In England, interviewees more commonly referenced people of colour as friends and neighbours.

Escaping “backwardness”: migration as a socio-cultural journey

These dichotomous characterisations of urban Great Britain and Northern Ireland are not absolute and they are not the only narrative structure or emotional language that is visible in the interviews. Eugene McLaughlin, for instance, clearly retained a strong connection to the sense of working-class solidarity he describes as characterising the Bogside of his

childhood and of the early Troubles as well as feeling happy that he escaped some of the more restrictive elements of that solidarity.⁶⁴ Joe Lennon was unequivocal in describing his desire to escape the “crushing” narrow-mindedness of Northern Ireland but equally unequivocal in his immediate, two-word answer to the question of where he considered to be home: “Home’s Castlewellaan.”⁶⁵ But considering the mobilisation of this dichotomy where it does emerge may be helpful for developing a sense of the discourses being engaged with in the interviews. In this dichotomy, Northern Ireland – or perhaps more often in the interviews, elements of Northern Irish society or politics – are parochial, backward and conservative, while urban Britain is diverse, progressive and liberating. While the reality of these two societies is far more complicated, as the interviewees made clear elsewhere in their narratives, this binary suggests a broader collective construction of Northern Ireland as anomalous. The characterisation of Northern Ireland as a “place apart” is nothing new.⁶⁶ Politically, successive UK governments have approached the region with trepidation, viewing Northern Ireland as a problem to be solved. The region’s socio-political segregation from the rest of the UK has largely revolved around the conflict; it was relatively easy to characterise Northern Ireland as a strange and unfamiliar place “over there” when images of army checkpoints and bomb destruction were broadcast daily.

What is striking about our narratives is that they present Northern Ireland as aberrant not just in relation to the conflict, but in broader social, cultural and societal terms. These interviews were conducted at a time when social and ethical questions were high on the Northern Irish political agenda. The 2017 UK general election resulted in a hung parliament, during which a minority Conservative government were forced to rely upon the support of Northern Ireland’s Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) to retain a slim majority. The DUP, a small regional party with a strong evangelical Christian base, suddenly found itself holding the balance of power and the focus of nationwide media attention. Media coverage focused especially on the party’s opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion rights, stances that positioned them significantly to the right of mainstream British politics.⁶⁷ The party’s newfound prominence also highlighted the fact that, despite being available in Britain, abortion and same-sex marriage were illegal in Northern Ireland. These social inequalities between Northern Ireland and Great Britain prompted campaigns for the extension of these rights to Northern Irish people, fronted by British Labour Party MPs Stella Creasy and Conor McGinn, both building on decades of activism by Irish feminist activists on both sides of the border. These campaigns were ultimately successful, with same-sex marriage and abortion rights extended to Northern Ireland in 2019.⁶⁸ However, the perception of the DUP – and, by extension, Northern Ireland as a whole – as the home of socially conservative, religious “crackpots” had been reinforced.⁶⁹

It was to this backdrop that many interviewees explicitly referenced Northern Ireland’s comparatively regressive social policies, citing these as evidence of the region’s “backward” outlook and a justification for migration. Tina McCloskey directly referenced the DUP’s policies and attitudes as a reason to be grateful for leaving Northern Ireland:

The likes of the DUP and their attitudes and equal marriage, and, you know, abortion, all those type of things like, you know, I, I just found it like that constantly having to bite your tongue all the time with people, that so, [pause] yeah so, I basically was, I left very, very happy to be out of there.⁷⁰

However, Tina's narrative was also profoundly aware of divergent strands of political thought and gendered expression in the North, and her account of taking part in the Repeal movement to legalise abortion in the Republic of Ireland was suggestive of transnational connections between England and Ireland, and of the significance of the repeal campaign to activists in the North as well as those in the South.⁷¹

FR:And it must have been a kind of a euphoric thing when the abortion legislation passed.

TM:Oh, yeah that was amazing like just couldn't believe it, 'cause we kind of hoped it would go through but thought it might be close, so then when it was like a landslide, and because I'd already booked, I was at a [gig] in Belfast [. . .] that was all booked long before the [pause] referendum was announced so I was kind of like, I would have loved to have been in London with all the crew, but then being out 'cause, I was wearing my Repeal jumper everyone was coming running up to you, and you would have seen other people with Repeal jumpers and everyone is just running up to each other in the, in the concert and just being like "argh" you know.⁷²

Although she did not mention the DUP by name, Linda Cassidy was also critical about Northern Irish attitudes:

I still think that Northern Ireland's like, it's like going back to the 1950s sometimes in terms of people's attitudes and, you know, all of the, all of the kind of the national debate around things like abortion and, you know, gay rights, you know, the kind of Asher's Bakery storm⁷³ and all the rest of it and, you know, some of the politicians who'll, you know, I think one of them denounced gay people as an abomination a few years ago, you know, it's like, it is like fire and brimstone stuff still and a lot of people are in my opinion quite closed minded.⁷⁴

These passages exemplify the narrative dichotomy between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. By suggesting that returning to Northern Ireland constitutes "going back to the 1950s," Linda implies mainland Britain to be several decades ahead in terms of social progressiveness, particularly in relation to questions of gender and sexuality.

These narrative contrasts also serve as metaphors for interviewees' personal migration journeys. They framed their embrace of multiculturalism or progressive causes as part of a broader journey of self-realisation and discovery. Martin Seeds, for instance, said: "London was just this like big wide explosion for me of, like, stuff and like I had crazy hedonistic times there and that was that, you know, and you go back to Belfast and everything seems so repressed and like undeveloped."⁷⁵ But this narrative was tinged with ambivalence, for Martin and others; he described feeling "guilty" for a long time about his initial response to this nicely-described explosion of possibilities and personal development, which in his retrospective reading entailed a degree of "arrogance" about feeling "that I was now better than everybody else."⁷⁶

For some, presenting migration as a rejection of an atavistic society formed part of a deeply personal journey. Siobhán O'Neill grew up in the republican heartland of west Belfast during the early Troubles period. From a young age, Siobhán realised that she was a lesbian, but did not have the language to express or realise her sexuality. Within a deeply Catholic family and a close-knit working-class Belfast community, Siobhán was forced to keep her long-term adolescent relationship with a girlfriend secret. Unable to fully discover herself within the "wee bubble of West Belfast," Siobhán presented her journey to London, and subsequently Leeds, as one of

liberation and self-realisation.⁷⁷ She described London as somewhere she could freely express her sexuality, with the city's vibrant gay scene a stark contrast to Belfast. In one passage, Siobhán linked London's open-mindedness to a broader culture of tolerance and diversity:

It was a different way of life and a way to find me I suppose and explore me and my sexuality, and what my abilities are and embrace something new, you know, like to eat bloody different food, you know, to taste food that's so different, to talk to people who are from different countries, different accents, you know and I'm still like that to this day, like most of my friends are not white.⁷⁸

Siobhán therefore fused her own personal liberation, through the discovery of her sexuality, with a broader culture of acceptance, diversity and openness in London, all of which stood in direct contrast to her "strict" Belfast upbringing. Siobhán narrated her transition from a conservative Catholic childhood, with no language to discuss her sexuality, into a confident, self-professed "butch dyke" as part of a journey of personal development. The prevalence of people of colour within her circle of friends and subsequent exposure to new cultures formed an integral part of Siobhán's journey. Again, however, we must be conscious of the ambivalence that characterised such depictions of Northern Ireland. While Siobhán was critical of the morality that prevailed in her west Belfast "bubble," like Joe Lennon, she remained deeply attached to the scenic beauty of Northern Ireland. From an early age, Siobhán stated that "I fell in love with the Mourne Mountains, that's my absolute love affair, every time I go home, you know, in a couple of days you'll find me up in the Mournes," describing the mountains as her "place of sanctuary." Despite her strident critique of its social repression, we cannot interpret Siobhán's narrative as a wholesale rejection of Northern Ireland.

Siobhán's overarching narrative, though, was one of self-discovery and growth. This theme of emigration as a means of self-discovery has been a common motif, both within our interview cohort and in other research. In his 2008 study of EU migrants in Manchester, Paul Kennedy found that almost half of his respondents felt that they had "had attained a degree of self-development and autonomy that would have been less possible had they remained at home."⁷⁹ Kennedy's interviewees also directly referenced exposure to other cultures as part of this journey. Presenting migration as a journey of growth and attainment is common across nations and contexts. However, what distinguished many of our interviewees was the fact that they presented these journeys in relation to personal character building and self-development rather than economic necessity. At the time of interview, most of our interviewees worked in professional jobs and occupied a position that could be described (either through upbringing or social mobility) as middle-class. Our participants thus tended not to cite financial necessity or economic "tropes of survival" as their primary motivation to migrate.⁸⁰ Instead, they framed migration as an adventure, an opportunity to escape the claustrophobic, stifling confines of home and, in the words of Martin Seeds, become more "worldly-wise" than their peers who had remained in Northern Ireland.⁸¹ . Theirs were largely individualistic stories describing personal journeys rather than collective memories. Rather than retaining a strong identification with their place of origin, many of these migrants attempted to project a sense of cultural distance.

The narrators featured here grew up in a diverse range of social and economic contexts, from affluent middle-class to firmly working-class. Many of our cohort overtly highlighted their working-class roots as central to their journey of self-betterment and discovery. Sinéad, for example, discussed the financial struggles of her upbringing, noting that her father was “mean and tight-fisted and my mum didn’t really work.”⁸² However, what united most of the interviewees featured here was their high education levels, with the vast majority possessing university education, sometimes to postgraduate level. Despite often coming from working-class backgrounds, social mobility had imbued our narrators with the social and cultural capital to immerse themselves in the cosmopolitanism and diversity of English cities. More educated and better paid migrants had far more freedom to attain cultural enrichment, liberated by their greater sociocultural capital. Our narrators therefore corroborate Kennedy’s argument that middle-class migrants often migrate not out of economic necessity but by “a desire to find adventure and cultural diversity.”⁸³

Migrants with higher qualifications are also more likely to work in professions that involve frequent travel, exposing them more readily to globalisation and a range of cultures. For this project, several interviewees cited the cosmopolitanism and diversity of their workplace as crucial to encountering people from new backgrounds. The relative privilege of such migrants also inspired the “social confidence” to migrate in a “freewheeling and experimental” manner.⁸⁴ This is reflected in our interview cohort by the fact that so many presented migration as a rejection of Northern Ireland’s traditional conservative binary society. In her research on emigration from Northern Ireland, Trew similarly found that people who questioned or rejected traditional social and religious values were more likely to emigrate. People from such backgrounds also more frequently cited a longing for adventure as their primary motivation for leaving, as opposed to economic factors.⁸⁵ Therefore, the narratives presented here of a journey from a conservative monoculture to a diverse melting pot are representative of only a certain class of migrant, a trend exacerbated by the inevitably self-selective nature of oral history studies.

Conclusion

Three main conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. First, there is an empirical dimension to the claims being made by the interviewees here, one which refers to or indexes difference in attitudes, behaviours, policies and discourses between the North of Ireland and Britain, and to the effects of the Troubles on everyday life in the North. These empirical differences (in legislation, for instance) map onto a longer cultural history of differentiation between Ireland and Britain and are one of the ways in which our interviewees compose their narratives.

Second, interviewees are expressing their memories via several popular discourses about the past and the present. The first one is that of the North as backwards, ante-diluvian, regressive and so on; this is a narrative that was popular in sections of the British media as a way of “explaining” the Troubles, and which found an afterlife in representations of the DUP in the period following the 2017 election and Brexit shortly before our interviewing began.⁸⁶ Another popular discourse that colours the narratives here, arguably, is that of British liberal multiculturalism, which interviewees draw on in various ways

even while sometimes critiquing this framework or recognising its limits. Tina, for instance, talked about her desire to befriend her Muslim colleagues and the pleasure she gleaned from these engagements, which would have been less possible in Belfast. She also made sense of their friendship as in part formed of a mutual experience of “otherness” and of racialisation. As Hickman and Ryan argue, although sociologists of race have often ignored Irish migrants due to their whiteness, the Irish experience of discrimination and profiling mirrors that of other minority-ethnic groups, especially Muslims.⁸⁷ Tina was clearly conscious of this shared experience, adding:

[I]t was a way of, you kind of had that common ground with, you know, say Muslim people in work, where they're kind of like “oh because I've got the hijab on people are thinking I'm a terrorist”, that I can, not that I can understand because it's a lot more visible for them, but I can at least, I can empathise a bit more than maybe some other people.⁸⁸

Third, to return to the work of Sara Ahmed and Alistair Thomson discussed in the opening of the article, our analysis suggests that the composure of “stories to live by” in the narratives of Northern Irish migrants entails a complex engagement with the meanings attached to home, one that is shaped by the fact that (as Enda Delaney suggests in his work on Irish migration to Britain) “there was no universal historical experience” of departure, arrival or settlement.⁸⁹ The experience of movement makes new perspectives on Northern Ireland possible; these perspectives are not fixed but fluid and changing, and dependent on various aspects of migration trajectory (such as class or sexuality) but also on the contingencies and discourses of the moment of composure and articulation. Similarly, the constructions of Britain that complement the constructions of Northern Ireland are part of a strategy of composure in which comparison and dichotomy create the grounds for a performance of the migrant self.

Notes

1. The nomenclature used to refer to Northern Ireland or the North of Ireland is not neutral and can imply (or be understood to imply) a political or historiographical position on the conflict and on Irish history. In recognition of this difficulty the authors have used a variety of formulations throughout the piece.
2. The research team comprised Professor Liam Harte (principal investigator; University of Manchester); Professor Graham Dawson (co-investigator; University of Brighton); Dr Barry Hazley (research fellow; University of Liverpool); Dr Fearghus Roulston (research fellow; University of Brighton) and Dr Jack Crangle (research associate; University of Manchester). The project administrator was Naomi Wells. The primary authors of this piece were Dr Crangle and Dr Roulston, with invaluable input provided by the rest of the team across the various drafts.
3. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*; Thomson, *Anzac Memories*; Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*.
4. Hazley, *Life History*, especially the introduction; Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile*, especially Chapter Four; Hammerton and Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms*.
5. Ryan, “It's Different Now”; Ní Laoire, “The ‘Green Green Grass’”; Gray, *Women and the Irish Diaspora*.
6. Trew, *Leaving the North*; see also Trew, “Negotiating Identity”.
7. Dawson, Dover and Hopkins, eds., *The Northern Ireland Troubles*.
8. Hazley, *Life History*, 70.
9. *Ibid.*, 78.

10. *Ibid.*, 108.
11. Deane, "Civilians and Barbarians", 128.
12. Brady, "'Save Ulster from Sodomy!'".
13. Anon., "Bid to repeal aspect of North's abortion laws tabled at Stormont", *Irish Times* (16/2/21), accessed online here: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/bid-to-repeal-aspect-of-north-s-abortion-laws-tabled-at-stormont-1.4486483>
14. Sheldon et al., "'Too Much'", 767.
15. Kushner, *The Battle of Britishness*, 182.
16. Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 153.
17. Becky Taylor, *Refugees in Twentieth-Century Britain: a History*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021, 224.
18. Nayak, "Purging the Nation", 290–1.
19. See note 15 above.
20. Nagle, *Multiculturalism's double-bind*, 61. See also Gray, *Women and the Irish Diaspora*; Walter and Hickman, *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain*, both of which consider the position of Irish people within "multicultural" discourses of British identity, but do not differentiate between people from the North and the South of Ireland within their analysis.
21. *Ibid.*, 101.
22. Panayi, *Migrant City*, 26.
23. Thomson, "Moving Stories", 34.
24. Ahmed, "Home and Away", 340.
25. Interview with Eugene McLaughlin, recorded by Fearghus Roulston, 10 March 2020, 1.
26. *Ibid.*
27. McCann, *War and an Irish Town*.
28. EM interview, 2020, 2.
29. Dawson, "Trauma", 163.
30. On tarring and feathering see McDowell, "Commemorating Dead 'Men'", 335–54.
31. EM interview, 2020, 9.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Interview with Joe Lennon, recorded by Barry Hazley, 26 November 2019, 14.
34. *Ibid.*, 6.
35. McGovern, "'See No Evil'", 55.
36. Interview with Jane Baird, recorded by Fearghus Roulston, 21 November 2019, 8. The reference to the interviewer (Fearghus Roulston) being from Ballymena here is an important reminder of the intersubjective construction of the interviews and the way in which this shapes what is and is not discussed within them; for a recent reflection on the importance of intersubjectivity in the context of oral history work on the Troubles see Reinisch, 2021.
37. Interview with Tina McCloskey, recorded by Fearghus Roulston, 18 January 2020, 45.
38. EM interview, 2020, 18.
39. *Ibid.*, 19.
40. *Ibid.* In part this comparison was reminiscent of the 19th century English critique of Irish *clachan* farming practices as disorderly, identified by Lloyd, *Irish Times*, especially Chapter Three. As the previous section makes obvious, however, Eugene's mobilisation of the orderly/disorderly distinction is much more ambivalent than that of the political economists Lloyd is indicting.
41. EM interview, 2020, 27.
42. Interview with Martin Seeds, recorded by Fearghus Roulston, 30 August 2019, 6.
43. Interview with Siobhán O'Neill, recorded by Barry Hazley, 26 November 2019, 13.
44. Irwin and Dunn, *Ethnic minorities*, 58.
45. Buettner, "'Going for an Indian'", 869.
46. Crangle, "'Left to fend for themselves'", 28–9.
47. See for instance Bhattacharyya et al., *Empire's Endgame*.
48. Interview with Anne Power, recorded by Fearghus Roulston, 5 November 2019, 3.
49. Interview with Linda Cassidy, recorded by Jack Crangle, 2 June 2020, 15.

50. Hickman and Ryan, "The Irish question", 105.
51. Amenda, "Food and otherness", 158.
52. Parker, *Through different eyes*, 68.
53. Buettner, "Going for an Indian", 869.
54. MS interview, 2019, 4.
55. TM interview, 2020, 20.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid, 21.
58. Interview with Anna McCafferty, recorded by Fearghus Roulston, 22 January 2020, 30.
59. JL interview, 2019, 18–19.
60. Ibid., 30.
61. Interview with John Mitchell, recorded by Fearghus Roulston, 15 November 2019, 18.
62. Gilroy, "Colonial Crimes", 7.
63. Watson, "Language, discrimination", 98.
64. EM interview, 2020, 2.
65. JL interview, 2019, 29.
66. Aveyard, "The "English disease"", 544.
67. Tonge, "Supplying confidence", 413.
68. Susan McKay, "A tale of two MPs: Stella Creasy and Conor McGinn" in *Irish Times*, 27 July 2019 (<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/a-tale-of-two-mps-stella-creasy-and-conor-mcginn-1.3966163>).
69. Jack Blanchard, "Coalition of crackpots: Theresa May's desperate deal with terror-linked DUP who oppose abortion and same sex marriage" in *Daily Mirror*, 9 June 2017 (<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/coalition-crackpots-theresa-mays-desperate-10595989>).
70. TM interview, 2020, 22.
71. See for instance Melissa Davey, "North is next: fresh fight for grassroots power that beat Ireland abortion ban", *The Guardian*, 1 June 2018 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/02/north-is-next-fresh-fight-for-grassroots-power-that-beat-ireland-abortion-ban>).
72. Ibid.
73. The "Asher's Bakery Storm" refers to a controversy that arose when Asher's, a Northern Irish bakery whose owners opposed to same-sex marriage, refused to bake a cake with a slogan promoting same-sex marriage.
74. LC interview, 2020, 25.
75. MS interview, 2019, 13.
76. Ibid, 12.
77. SC interview, 2019, 7.
78. Ibid, 24.
79. Kennedy, "The middle class cosmopolitan journey", 33.
80. Burrell and Panayi, "Immigration, history and memory", 16.
81. MS interview, 2019, 11.
82. SC interview, 2019, 3.
83. Kennedy, "The middle class cosmopolitan journey", 21.
84. Ibid., 22–3.
85. Trew, *Leaving the North*, 96–8.
86. See Miller, ed., *Rethinking Northern Ireland* and Bourke, *Peace in Ireland*, especially the introduction, for two critiques of the tendency to explain the Troubles via notions of tribalism or atavism. On the DUP's position within this imaginary see McCauley, *Very British Rebels?*, especially chapter four.
87. Hickman and Ryan, "The Irish question", 104–5.
88. TM interview, 2020, 25.
89. Delaney, *The Irish in Post-War Britain*, 5.

Acknowledgement

This work was enabled by an award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), grant reference AH/R008426/1. We thank our interviewees for the participation in this study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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