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## “Rory played the greens, not the blues”: expressions of Irishness on the Rory Gallagher YouTube channel

Lauren Alex O’Hagan

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## “Rory played the greens, not the blues”: expressions of Irishness on the Rory Gallagher YouTube channel

Lauren Alex O’Hagan

Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

### ABSTRACT

This study explores expressions of Irishness by fans on the official YouTube channel of the Irish blues/rock singer and guitarist Rory Gallagher. Drawing upon a dataset of some 500 comments, I note the various strategies that fans, both Irish and non-Irish, adopt to engage in public displays of Irishness and explore the personal links that they make with Ireland and Irish culture to situate themselves as “authentic.” I demonstrate how, for Rory Gallagher fans, Irishness is an unstable, malleable concept that can simultaneously express regionalist, nationalist and transnationalist identity, yet it tends to be non-sectarian and rooted in a shared love for music rather than any political/religious differences. Moreover, it is essential in determining internal hierarchies and status within the fan group, with those asserting the most Irishness seen as most authentic. Overall, its findings contribute to an important growing body of work on Irish musicology and national identity.

### KEYWORDS

Rory Gallagher; Irishness; YouTube; fandom; identity; authenticity

## Introduction

The emergence of online video-sharing platforms, such as YouTube and Vimeo, has provided instantaneous global distribution of user-generated content, while its comment-sharing feature has fostered global public forums that transcend boundaries of local space.<sup>1</sup> Comment sections on videos encourage a participatory culture that brings together heterogeneous groups and invites them to take an active role in the production and transmission of cultural goods.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly the case for music videos, which enable individuals to express their fandom and develop a sense of group membership and identity based on their shared appreciation for the musician.<sup>3</sup>

When musicians come from small countries or countries with complex political histories, expressions of national identity become especially important for fans.<sup>4</sup> These expressions are not necessarily politically motivated; rather, they reflect a desire to draw attention to a nation that is often overshadowed by more dominant powers on the world stage. Whether fans come from the same country as the musician or not, drawing attention to national identity enables them to engage in public identity displays, communicate national pride (even if by proxy) and perform a sense of belonging associated with authentic fandom.

This study explores the importance of such expressions of national identity for fans in the context of Ireland. As a case study, I use the official YouTube channel of the Irish blues/rock singer and guitarist Rory Gallagher. Drawing upon a dataset of more than 500 comments, I note the various strategies that fans – both Irish and non-Irish – adopt to engage in public displays of Irishness and explore the personal links that they make with Ireland and Irish culture to situate themselves as “authentic.” I embed the analysis in relevant literature on Irish identity and archival interviews with Gallagher, his brother Dónal and bandmates in order to understand the complexities of Irishness for fans. Overall, I demonstrate how, for Rory Gallagher fans, Irishness is a non-sectarian and unstable concept, rooted in a shared love for music rather than political or religious differences and malleably shaped to express regional, national and transnational identities. Moreover, it is essential in determining internal hierarchies and status within the fan group, with fans who come from Ireland or, more specifically, Cork (Gallagher’s adopted hometown) seen as the most authentic. Its findings contribute to an important growing body of work on Irish musicology and national identity by focusing on an under-researched musician and shedding new light on how music fans interpret, adopt and recontextualise Irishness on online video-sharing platforms.

### **Irishness, music and participatory fandom**

Defining “Irishness” is a centuries-old problem. According to Foster (*Irish Times*, 25 May 1998), questions of Irish identity have traditionally been based on a dichotomy between “good” and “bad.” The “bad” is linked to religion, race and politics – one must be Catholic, Gaelic and republican to be Irish – while the “good” embraces cultural diversity in Ireland and accepts that differences of opinion are part of the island’s reality. Trying to define Irishness on a cultural basis is problematic, however, because it does not cover all natives of the island and, thus, will always create a second type of Irishness that is in conflict with the first.<sup>5</sup> This makes it challenging to reconcile the issue between forcing a cultural identity onto those who do not want it and questioning the legitimacy of their presence.<sup>6</sup>

In recent years, debates have turned to appearance, with scholars challenging the notion that a mixed-raced Irish person is any less Irish than a white Irish person with red hair and freckles.<sup>7</sup> Negra believes that this stereotype of what the Irish should look like grew in the period of Celtic Tigerism (mid-1990s to late-2000s) as Irishness became rapidly transnationalised and turned into an idealised ethnicity.<sup>8</sup> Increasingly associated with St Patrick’s Day, pubs and leprechauns, Irishness gained a sense of cultural romance and was adopted by outsiders as an unthreatening and familiar identity. Today, Irishness has become a “performative and mobile” notion for many.<sup>9</sup>

Music is a key platform for expressions of Irishness and the link between the two is a topic to which Irish musicologists have increasingly turned their attention over the past twenty years.<sup>10</sup> Research has also focused on particular Irish musicians and how Irishness is expressed through their songs and stage personas, including Christy Moore, Horslips, Phil Lynott, The Pogues, U2 and Van Morrison.<sup>11</sup> In his study of how Irish musicians are represented in the British rock press, Campbell found that their nationality tends to be overemphasised, which masks complexities in bands’ religious and geographical backgrounds.<sup>12</sup> McLaughlin and McLoone believe that for most Irish musicians, Irishness

is, in fact, deeply hybrid and that Irish popular music often operates in tensions with, and can even be critical of, dominant notions of national identity.<sup>13</sup> More recently, O'Flynn has argued that, when exploring individual identifications or negations of Irishness in music, more attention should be paid to settings, genres, social groups and values as these tend to foster insider/outsider dialectics of national identity.<sup>14</sup> He suggests that shifting focus to listeners rather than musicians may help develop a better understanding of the complex nature of Irishness and how it is interpreted, adopted and recontextualised by fans, whether Irish or not.

Given O'Flynn's remarks, YouTube provides an ideal setting in which to explore how fans of Irish musicians negotiate their own sense of Irishness. To date, research in this area is extremely scant, the only notable studies being Brown's comparison of how cultural/ethnic identity is communicated through Irish and Tibetan traditional music videos<sup>15</sup> and Dlaske's comparison of ethnic belonging in YouTube comments on two Irish and Sámi music videos.<sup>16</sup> Most studies on YouTube comments and expressions of national identity explore South Korea's K-Pop scene or political protest songs in such countries as Turkey and Hong Kong,<sup>17</sup> as well as videos created in response to police violence in the USA<sup>18</sup> or by prisoners in the Philippines.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the current study breaks new ground in its case study of the Irish musician Rory Gallagher and how fans use comments on his official YouTube channel to construct a sense of Irishness.

### Rory Gallagher's Irishness

Rory Gallagher grew up with a foot in both camps: his father Daniel was from County Derry, a region with strong historical connections to the loyalist tradition, while his mother Monica came from County Cork, one of Ireland's southernmost regions and a stronghold of Irish republicanism.<sup>20</sup> Gallagher himself was born in Ballyshannon, County Donegal in 1948, spent his early childhood years in Derry and moved to Cork with his mother and younger brother Dónal in 1956 following his parents' separation. Thus, from a young age, he was acutely aware of both unionist and nationalist narratives in Ireland that emphasised cultural, religious and political differences between the north and the south.<sup>21</sup>

In many ways, Gallagher's childhood was quintessentially Irish: he attended the local Christian Brothers school, went to mass on Sundays and was exposed to Irish traditions and superstitions. However, through the American Forces Network radio, which had begun broadcasting in 1942, he was also introduced to the music of early blues pioneers like Muddy Waters, Lead Belly and Big Bill Broonzy, which was instrumental in the development of his hybrid musical identity. The blues had an immediate impact on Gallagher who would spend all his free time at the local library, learning about its origins, history and meanings. At the age of nine, Gallagher's parents bought him his first guitar and, according to Dónal, he "lost [his] brother" from that point on (*Music Radar*, 11 June 2019).

When Gallagher turned fifteen, he joined The Fontana Showband (later The Impact), which was instrumental in the early development of his professional career. Although showbands were steeped in conservative Irish culture – performing in alcohol-free ballrooms and obliged not to play during Lent – they offered many young people a form of "liberating hedonism."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, showbands were interprovincial, which meant that

they often travelled across the political border between the south and north of Ireland and were regularly exposed to a wide range of audiences and world views. Therefore, performing with Fontana provided the young Gallagher with further opportunities to develop what Cullen calls his “cosmopolitan sense of Irishness.”<sup>23</sup> It was also around this time that Gallagher purchased his iconic 1961 Fender Stratocaster from Crowley’s Music Store in Cork, which he paid off in instalments earned from touring.

In 1966, feeling musically stifled within the showband, Gallagher left and formed Taste, bridging ethnocultural divides in his choice of Protestant bandmates Norman Damery and Eric Kitteringham (Mark 1) and John Wilson and Richard McCracken (Mark 2).<sup>24</sup> Aware that the band had limited career prospects in Cork, Taste moved to Belfast, immersing themselves directly in the complex political realities of Northern Ireland, and later to London. After Taste disbanded in 1970, Gallagher went solo, quickly developing an international reputation yet still relying on Irish musicians, such as Gerry McAvooy, Wilgar Campbell and Lou Martin, who bridged the north-south, Protestant-Catholic divide to make up his band.

Throughout his career, Gallagher never publicly expressed his opinion on “The Troubles,” nor did he write politically motivated songs, which enabled him to appeal to an ethnically diverse group of fans across Ireland.<sup>25</sup> When asked why he did not mention Ireland in his music, Gallagher stated: “Everyone knows where I’m from and I’m proud of it, but what are you supposed to do to prove it?” (*Hot Press*, 18 December 1981). Gallagher’s identity could, nonetheless, still cause confusion on the international scene, with journalists either overlooking his background and describing him as a “British rockstar” or overemphasising his Irishness in such headlines as “The Flannel Banshee Breaks Out.”<sup>26</sup> Other commentators acknowledged that any criticism that Gallagher was not conscious of his Irish identity was “manifestly undeserved” (*Hot Press*, 18 December 1981) and that he often talked knowledgeably about Irish history and politics, but kept his views to himself on the public stage.

Despite not overtly drawing attention to his Irish identity, Gallagher channelled his Irishness in more subtle ways, the most notable example being his 1974 Irish Tour documentary, which focuses heavily on the geography, architecture and culture of County Cork. Here, Ireland is portrayed as a deeply historical and quasi-mystical nation, made up of small-town communities with traditional Irish values.<sup>27</sup> This sense of tradition was very important to Gallagher: he regularly stressed the fact that he just wanted to play music and live a quiet life, his worse fear being to gain popularity and have a record in the charts (*Sounds*, 6 June 1975). Catholicism was also an important part of Gallagher’s Irishness: he still attended mass regularly throughout his adult life, stating in a 1991 interview with Anil Prasad that he was “too scared not to.”<sup>28</sup> “Corkness” also played a significant role in Gallagher’s identity construction. Despite not moving to Cork until he was eight, Gallagher quickly adopted a strong Cork accent. As an adult, he described returning to Cork as “revitalising” him, stressing that it was there that he wrote his best material and that he was only living in London as an “exile” (*Sunday Tribune*, 16 August 1992).

Ultimately, Gallagher’s sense of Irishness was both cosmopolitan and multi-layered, made up of his experiences in the Republic and Northern Ireland, as well as his deep love and appreciation for the Delta and Chicago blues. Although he did not deliberately emphasise his Irishness in his music and interviews, Irishness has, conversely,

become a core aspect of his fans' identity. As this article will show, these expressions of Irishness are seldom linked to nationalist ideologies; rather, they are about communicating authentic fandom and expressing love for a man who is deeply venerated across the island of Ireland for bringing together politically and religiously divided communities.

## Data and methodology

To explore how music fans exploit the participatory culture of online platforms to express Irishness, I conducted a case study of the official Rory Gallagher YouTube channel. The channel was set up in 2010 and has approximately 35,300 subscribers (as of May 2021). To date, it hosts 233 videos, ranging from individual songs and concert performances to interviews with Gallagher and promotions for new releases. The channel is run by Gallagher's nephew Daniel and overseen by Gallagher's brother Dónal (who was his manager throughout his career). Roughly 80% of the videos on the channel have comments turned on; comments are not moderated or edited before publication, nor are they responded to by the Gallagher family. However, fans regularly reply to each other's comments, repeatedly visiting the channel to keep certain conversations going across time and space. This suggests that the channel serves as an "interactive community"<sup>29</sup> for Gallagher fans, unlike other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, that do not foster interactivity between members in the same way.<sup>30</sup>

Gallagher is often described as the "most underrated guitarist of all time,"<sup>31</sup> but since his death in 1995, both Dónal and Daniel have been active in reissuing his back catalogue in a bid to introduce his music to new fans and ensure that his musical legacy continues. While many Gallagher fans remain those who supported him from the late '60s through to the early '90s, there is a growing number of teenagers and young adults who cite him as a major influence (*RTE*, 24 October 2020). This mixed demographic is apparent from the subscribers and commenters on Gallagher's YouTube channel.

For the purposes of this study, I used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to download all user comments on the channel. This yielded a total of 1,945 comments. At first, I manually examined the comments and grouped them into six core themes: Gallagher's musicality, oeuvre and song lyrics, personality, appearance, tribute messages and fan memories. However, it quickly became apparent that references to Ireland, Irishness or any other aspect of Irish culture and identity frequently cut across all six themes and were the most dominant code across all comments. Furthermore, these references to Ireland and Irishness were not unique to one type of video on the channel, appearing in equal measure across interviews, concert footage and unboxing. This initial finding suggested that, unlike other fan communities, Rory Gallagher fans primarily perform their fandom through expressions of national identity rather than knowledge or longevity.

Based on this hypothesis, I decided to focus specifically on comments related to Irishness and identified 532 comments in total. YouTube's terms of service explicitly state that users should not expect their content to be kept confidential, given its publication on a publicly open platform. However, in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers, I resolved to take all possible steps to protect participants from any harm. As it was not feasible to obtain informed consent

from commenters, I followed the example of previous studies and removed all usernames to protect identities and deal only with anonymous comments.<sup>32</sup>

Next, I carried out a qualitative content analysis on each comment to identify themes. First, I focused on manifest content, highlighting important words throughout the comments. Then, I revisited the highlighted words to identify latent content and derived codes that helped organise them into meaningful clusters. The advantage of this approach is that knowledge generated from the analysis comes directly from the participants' data without imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives. This method revealed a number of important features that I grouped under three themes: Irish (trans)nationalism and regionalism, politico-religious memories and mythology, and tokens of Irishness. Each theme will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this paper, using YouTube comments, relevant literature and archival interviews to provide an overview of the importance of Irishness as a feature of authentic fandom. Markham notes that, even when usernames are omitted, individuals may still be identified through direct quotes, which allow readers to locate the original comments using search engines.<sup>33</sup> To mitigate this risk, I paraphrased comments to provide the "maximum level of disguise possible" and conform to the "do no harm" principle implicit in ethical frameworks.<sup>34</sup> Thus, a comment like "We've got a national treasure: Rory" was changed to "Rory is our national treasure," which maintained the same meaning, yet protected the commenter's anonymity. All comments analysed were taken at face value as I was unable to confirm commenters' actual nationalities, citizenship or regional location. Thus, when interpreting comments, it was done so with an understanding that they reveal a performance or presentation of identity rather than any confirmed nationality or regionality.

### Between Irish (trans)nationalism and regionalism

In his study of professional wrestling audiences, Burke drew a distinction between "social users" who watch videos and "fans" who collectively interpret the videos in creative ways.<sup>35</sup> Fiske describes the latter as a process of "semiotic productivity" as fans use videos to make their own meanings and internalise their social identities and experiences.<sup>36</sup> When this process is externalised through comments shared with others, it transforms into "enunciative productivity" as fans negotiate what it means to be a truly devoted member of a group. In fan communities, structures of hierarchy and power are inevitable, with members typically afforded "fan cultural capital" from peers through knowledge and longevity, which are heavily tied to authenticity.<sup>37</sup> However, in the case of the Rory Gallagher YouTube channel, fan cultural capital and authenticity are primarily established and determined by Irishness, which embodies the central understandings of the group and acts as a common cultural resource by which members are called to order.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the presentation of being born Irish or having some connection with Ireland automatically gives certain fans an upper hand over those who are not Irish or claim Irishness by proxy.

The significance of locality is apparent in comments by Irish fans who evoke Gallagher's nationality, accompanied by "we," "our" or "us" pronouns: "Rory, our national treasure"; "There's not one field that us Irish have not heavily influenced"; "our finest talent"; "our cream of the crop"; "that solo is part of our UNESCO world heritage." In foregrounding their national identity, Irish fans portray a sense of commonality and rapport between

themselves and Gallagher, while simultaneously distinguishing themselves from non-Irish fans and therefore gaining status within the community. These national identity displays, however, are not politically motivated or deliberately antagonistic; instead, they can be viewed as what Kyriakidou et al. term “playful nationalism” because they go beyond its traditional associations and allow fans to express pride in their home country as the birthplace of a talented musician.<sup>39</sup> Both Dlaske and Mangaoang found similar examples of “playful nationalism” in their studies of YouTube comments in the context of Ireland and the Philippines, respectively, arguing that they serve to build a shared sense of national belonging rather than forms of extremism associated with being Irish or Filipino.<sup>40</sup>

Rather than respond negatively to these exclusionary comments, non-Irish fans often reply by making claims for Gallagher’s transnational identity, given his huge international impact: “Rory was actually a global treasure”; “Rory made us all Irish”; “Rory was a Canadian Irishman.” Others acknowledge that they are not Irish, but credit fans who are: “We Greeks adore your National Treasure”; “You Irish should be very proud”; “You Irish have a real troubadour.” Here, nationality is not a source of conflict for non-Irish fans; instead, they value the comments section as a space of cosmopolitan engagement and an opportunity to talk to “authentic” fans who have first-hand experience and knowledge of Ireland.<sup>41</sup> Other comments are written by both Irish and non-Irish fans, who use “the Irish” plus a noun to encapsulate Gallagher’s qualities: “the Irish wizard”; “the Irish earthquake”; “the Irish gem”; “the Irish genius”; “the Irish titan”; “the Irish hurricane.” As these comments are full of powerful attributes that frame Ireland positively, they serve to create transnational bonds across the fan community that centre around an idealised and romanticised notion of Irishness.<sup>42</sup>

While 99% of Irish people today speak English vis-à-vis 39.8% who speak Irish (2016 Census of Ireland), some Gallagher fans deliberately write their comments in Irish as a form of “linguistic resistance” to distinguish themselves from non-Irish fans and accentuate their authenticity. The most frequently occurring comments are set phrases, such as “Slán go Fóill a Rory” (goodbye for now, Rory), “go raibh maith agat Rory” (thank you, Rory), “Grá agut Rory” (love you, Rory) and “Éirinn go Brách” (Ireland forever). Dlaske found similar expressions in her study of Irish in YouTube comments, arguing that these “school Irish” phrases are used by commenters for self-legitimising and authenticating purposes to “prove their Irishness,” even if they do not speak the language fluently.<sup>43</sup> In other cases, however, comments in Irish are longer and more personal, expressing particular emotions or memories evoked by Gallagher’s music. Here, users appear to hide behind Irish’s status as a minority language to say things that they would be too embarrassed to reveal to a wider audience in English. This is in line with studies on code-switching, which have found that speakers often switch languages to regulate the intensity of their emotions.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to using the Irish language, some writers include Irish cultural references in their comments: “May the road rise up to meet you” (old Irish blessing); “When Irish eyes are smiling” (traditional song); “The innocent and the beautiful have no enemy but time” (William Butler Yeats); “Let grief be a fallen leaf at the dawning of the day” (Patrick Kavanagh, “Raglan Road”). Others instead recontextualise well-known popular culture references, drawing upon Irish symbology: “Rory played the greens, not the blues”; “Shine on you crazy emerald” (Pink Floyd, “Shine On You Crazy Diamond”); “It’s not easy being green!” (popularised by Kermit the Frog). Here, users are involved in

a process of “entextualisation” as they extract a phrase from one context and resignify it in another, transforming its meaning to fit their own specific communicative intentions.<sup>45</sup> The success of these resignifications hinges upon other fans appropriately interpreting their original and new connotations. In other cases, fans play with this entextualisation process, making up new sayings that they claim to be Irish: “We have a saying here in Ireland: first there was Jesus, then there was Rory”; “As we say here in Ireland, Rory could make his guitar talk.” Similar intertextual references were found by Mangaoang in her study of the “Philippine Prison Thriller” video that went viral in 2007,<sup>46</sup> showing how fans produce meaning by drawing on existing cultural structures but develop them to reproduce knowledge, humour and authenticity tied up with national identity.

In other cases, however, tensions are created between Irish and non-Irish fans, particularly when Gallagher is framed as “the Irish version” of other guitar virtuosos, such as Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, Johnny Winter, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Richie Blackmore, Peter Green, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Chuck Berry. Although these comments are intended to be complimentary, Irish fans become very irate in their responses: “NO, I think you’ll find he was the Irish Rory Gallagher”; “Rory Gallagher is Rory Gallagher. Period!”; “Unlike you, us Irish know a brilliant guitarist when we see one;” “Clapton cries himself to sleep every night wishing he could be 10% as good as our Rory.” For Irish fans, these types of comments seem personal attacks, implying that being Irish means to be second-best, underrated or forgotten – traits that O’Donnell notes have been perpetuated by the dominance of Britain in the country’s troubled history.<sup>47</sup> This becomes clear in the repeated tale that when Hendrix was asked what it felt like to be the world’s greatest guitarist, he said “I don’t know. Ask Rory Gallagher.” Irish fans respond angrily to this comment – “Not this shit again!” – arguing that “Rory doesn’t need approval from some non-Irish guitarist” to gain credibility because “his talent speaks for itself.” These tensions are also reflected in comments by Irish fans who claim that Gallagher is only overlooked as the world’s best guitarist because of his nationality: “If Rory Gallagher had been British, not Irish, the ranking of guitar legends would be entirely different.” Equally, when recalling that Gallagher was asked to join the Rolling Stones but refused, many Irish fans state that the band would not want to admit that “they had been stood up by an Irishman,” implying that Mick Jagger and his fellow bandmates were embarrassed to be rejected by somebody who they considered inferior to them. These types of remarks show how even playful forms of nationalism are connected in complex ways to a country’s history and can rapidly become inflammatory if not handled sensitively.<sup>48</sup>

In a similar vein, Irish fans are very quick to correct non-Irish fans who describe Gallagher as “British” or even “English”: “Rory is Irish, not British, you fucking idiot”; “We’re the Irish from Ireland, not Britain”; “Rory was born free of the crown in the Republic of Ireland.” In the international press, successful Irish sports stars and musicians are often labelled “British,” even if they come from the Republic. Indeed, a recently released 1979 interview with Thin Lizzy frontman Phil Lynott shows him correcting an American presenter three times when she refers to him as British. Therefore, it is likely that many non-natives are influenced by these dominant cultural messages rather than trying to be intentionally provocative with their YouTube comments. Nonetheless, they are promptly reminded that to be a true fan of Gallagher, they must have a clear understanding of where he comes from.

Another major bone of contention is the pronunciation of Gallagher's surname. Irish fans often mock non-Irish fans for pronouncing it with a hard "g" (/ˈgæləgə/) instead of a soft "g" (/ˈgæləhə/): "it's Gall-a-HER, not Gall-AGG-er"; "Galla-her: the second g is silent." Here, authentic fandom is granted on the basis of knowing how to pronounce Gallagher's surname correctly; not to do so calls into question a person's level of commitment to fandom and, in turn, their level of fan cultural capital. Challenges to authenticity are even extended to members of Gallagher's own family; videos featuring interviews with his nephew Daniel, who was brought up in London, are full of comments criticising his pronunciation of the family surname: "How can his own nephew pronounce his surname wrong!"; "He doesn't pronounce it like the Irish do!" Thinking about a topic critically and negotiating critiques is an intrinsic part of the fan experience.<sup>49</sup> We see this in fans' responses which are quick to defend Daniel's authenticity: "It's just a mistake due to force of habit"; "he IS absolutely Irish." Here, a tension develops between Daniel's authenticity as Gallagher's nephew and his lack of authenticity because he does not have an Irish accent. We see similar tensions in comments about the accent of Gallagher's brother Dónal: "What happened to his accent? He sounds English!"; "His accent is more English than Irish!" Gallagher himself, however, is fully upheld by fans as being Irish: "You can tell he's Irish just from that one sentence"; "his accent is very Irish." These fan reactions indicate how accent is integral to authenticity and offers a way for members to strategically mobilise their own ethnic identity and position themselves as "experts" in a bid to accrue fan cultural capital from others.<sup>50</sup>

Smyth has argued that Cork stood out from other areas of Ireland due to its quirky and "mad" music scene that emerged in the wake of punk.<sup>51</sup> Gallagher himself acknowledged that people in Cork "have different ideas about lyrics and chord structure" (*Modern Guitars Magazine*, 1994, published in July 2005) and even compared the city's music scene to Manchester's in its alternative feel and "anti-U2" attitude (1995 phone interview, Leeuwarden). However, on YouTube, Corkonians make little reference to what makes Cork unique from a musical perspective, beyond it being the adopted hometown of Gallagher. Instead, they frame regional identity only in terms of accent and geography – perhaps because these are the most visual indicators of "Corkness" apparent in videos, such as the 1973 RTÉ Music Makers Documentary or Irish Tour '74 documentary.

Many fans comment on Gallagher's strong Cork accent in interviews: "His Cork is really coming out here"; "That soft Cork accent is so charming"; "What a rich Cork accent." They also draw attention to certain linguistic features of Gallagher's speech that are synonymous with Cork, such as the classic Irish velarised alveolar approximant (/ɹ̠/ instead of /r/) and open vowels in the LOT and THOUGHT lexical sets (e.g. Cork pronounced /kaɪk/ instead of /kɔ:k/). In many cases, fans stress that they are from Cork and, therefore, are able to recognise these features. In her YouTube study, Mangaoang argued that Filipino commenters gain authenticity by sharing Filipino perspectives on the video.<sup>52</sup> Here, the identification of Cork linguistic features in comments works in a similar way, serving to perform authenticity and create more subtle hierarchies amongst Irish fans, with those from Cork framed as most authentic.<sup>53</sup>

This emphasis on Gallagher's "Corkness" as opposed to "Irishness" is also apparent in other comments: "Here's my fellow Corkman"; "Long may we of Cork remember him"; "we of Cork adore Rory." Just as we saw previously with assertions of Irishness, writers deliberately position themselves alongside Gallagher and fellow Corkonians through

the use of first-person pronouns that create a feeling of togetherness and help them gain authority amongst peers. In contrast, other comments emphasise Gallagher's links with Donegal: "Ballyshannon man"; "He's from Donegal, the forgotten county!"; "Gallagher is a pure Donegal surname." They also remind other fans that Ballyshannon is "where Rory's statue is" and "where the Roryfest is held every year." Dónal Gallagher acknowledged that Donegal "is a collage of everything that Rory was: quiet, nicely spoken, would do anything for you, very friendly, the home is everything" (*Donegal Democrat*, June 2000). However, any links with Donegal are rebuffed by Corkonians on YouTube who admit that Gallagher may have been born there but that "Cork is Rory's hometown" and "we claim him as one of our own." In a bid to authenticate Gallagher's association with Cork, some fans even use their comments to gain support for a petition to rename Cork Airport after him. For non-Corkonian fans, this petition is an opportunity to draw on their insider knowledge, reminding others that this is not a sensible idea because Gallagher had a chronic fear of flying. Here, insider knowledge is deployed to trump Irishness, or at least regionalness, with the aim of gaining fan cultural capital amongst other fans. The supporting "hear hears" or "amens" written by other users act as encouraging feedback, legitimising this claim of knowledge over national/regional identity.

### Politico-religious memories and mythology

According to Jones and Moore, football is a public arena in which fans can reassess and reinvent their ethnic identities.<sup>54</sup> However, when it comes to politics or religion, these reassessments and reinventions are more difficult to carry out. This is particularly the case for the island of Ireland, where football grounds remain "sites of public displays of political affiliation."<sup>55</sup> Political and religious identities are also heavily tied up with the context of music. In Ireland, rebel songs, the 1960s folk revival and punk are just some examples of the entwinement of these three spheres.<sup>56</sup> Given these deeply rooted tensions, one would expect music fans to express a broad range of political and religious views on public forums such as YouTube. The Rory Gallagher YouTube channel, however, is surprisingly a hub of mutual respect and tolerance when it comes to Irish politics, bringing together Catholics and Protestants, nationalists and unionists who are united in their love for Gallagher.

In many ways, the absence of inter-Irish political tensions in the comments section is reflective of Gallagher's own philosophy of life: in a 1975 interview at Ruisrock Festival, he explained that he had "strong emotional feelings about Ireland" but that musicians should stick to talking about music. Gallagher's constant refusal to be drawn into political and religious commentaries won him fans on both sides of the debate. Gallagher was one of the few artists to play Belfast throughout "The Troubles," returning every year for a Christmas concert at Ulster Hall. He repeatedly played down the significance of his act, arguing that he did not "see any reason for not playing Belfast" (*Melody Maker*, 8 January 1972). However, bassist Gerry McAvoy emphasised the shows' significance, noting that ten bombs went off around Belfast during their 1971 concert – some even shaking the Ulster Hall – but Gallagher continued to play, feeling that he was "shielded" because there were members of the IRA and UDA in attendance.<sup>57</sup>

McAvoy was not exaggerating the impact of these concerts. A review in *Melody Maker* (8 January 1972) shortly after Gallagher's 1971 concert described the atmosphere in Ulster

Hall: "2,000 people together as one, with no minority, no troublemakers, no inhibitions [...] You just wanted to take the lid off the walls from around this hall and put it on a huge platform, raise it above the city and let just everyone see it, and hear it." Almost fifty years later, these emotions remain strong amongst Northern Irish fans on YouTube who regularly mention Gallagher's annual shows in Belfast in their comments:

"Rory was a beacon of light through those dark days in Belfast."

"RIP Rory, you never forgot Northern Ireland."

"You brought our community together through the bad times."

"He lit up UK's Beirut, a sad grey city full of hate, bombs and shootings."

"We always loved Rory. When he kept coming back to Belfast despite the bombings and murders, we loved him even more."

Through his music, Gallagher provided Belfastians with temporary relief from the fears and divisions that tore their city apart.<sup>58</sup> While concepts of Irishness were extremely divisive outside of the concert hall, within, a type of polysemic Irishness was encouraged, an Irishness that was not bound with geography, politics or religion, but was fluid, malleable and heavily anchored in music and collective memories, enabling all other connotations to be temporarily "suspended." As one fan explained, "Rory may have been Catholic, but for those three hours, he was one of us."

Gallagher's defiance of political and religious boundaries went beyond the island of Ireland; he played Spain several times during Franco's regime, as well as Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and East Germany in the 1980s. According to brother Dónal, "That was just Rory's way. [He] just liked doing that for the kids" (*Dallas Observer*, 27 November 1997). But like with Northern Ireland, the significance of these concerts is still felt amongst fans today. Spanish commenters on YouTube recall that Gallagher's concerts offered "pure adrenaline for a youth in the grips of fascism, censorship and repression," while another fan joked that Gallagher's concerts in Spain were "what finally did away with Franco." Even on the international stage, we see similar themes emerging: the temporary suspension of politics and religion, the collectivism of fandom and music as a healing force.

In his study of collective memory and music festivals, Green argues that iconic meanings do not arise from the bare facts of an event, but through a process of mythologisation.<sup>59</sup> This is apparent in some of the comments from Gallagher fans on YouTube who describe him as "Ireland's High King" in reference to the important figures who once had lordship over the entire island. Fans emphasise that Gallagher should be considered a High King because he was able to temporarily unite the north and south of Ireland through his music. The metaphor of the High King is taken further by some who describe Gallagher's robes as "flannel shirts and jeans," sword as "a flaming Strat" and throne as "a stage." This hyperbole embeds Gallagher in the roots of Irish history and mythology, while also simultaneously placing him at the forefront of a "new" history of Ireland as a contemporary High King with the power to break down barriers between fans across the political and religious spectrum. Gallagher is also mythologised in comments about his talent that become increasingly elaborate and quasi-superhuman: "I heard that he changed a string mid-song and kept on playing"; "Rory played so loud that he put a crack in the Ulster Hall ceiling"; "I once saw Rory keep playing while retuning his guitar and drinking a beer."<sup>60</sup> In these heroic feats, Gallagher is transformed into a modern-day

Cúchulainn, the symbol of a perfect warrior and ideal protector of his people – whether from the north or south of Ireland – whose life was adventurous yet tragically short.

Gallagher is also mythologised through the transformation of sites associated with him into pilgrimage landscapes. Like Elvis Presley's Graceland or Jim Morrison's grave in Père Lachaise Cemetery, Gallagher's statue in Ballyshannon and grave in St Oliver's Cemetery, Cork have become "shrines" where fans congregate to leave offerings and feel momentarily closer to him. The "holiness" of these sites does not come from their conventional religious connections, but rather from the ritualistic behaviours, attitudes and actions displayed by visitors.<sup>61</sup> On YouTube, fans discuss how they make "annual pilgrimages" to Cork to pay their respects at Gallagher's "shrine," while Corkonians describe it as their "duty" to regularly visit and tend to the grave. In their comments, non-Irish fans frame Ireland as a "promised land," expressing that it is their lifelong dream to visit "the place that gave birth to such a unique human being." Irish fans, in turn, respond positively to these remarks, writing itineraries and arranging trips: "We'd love to show you Rory's shrine. Come on over!" Thus, Gallagher's grave and statue become sociocultural spaces where fans can perform Irishness through a deep spiritual connection with him and his homeland. Even non-Irish people feel that they become "momentarily Irish" when they sit at Gallagher's graveside, talking to him and listening to his music. For them, Irishness is an emotion or feeling, channelled through their deep love for Gallagher.

Irish and non-Irish fans also regularly use Christian symbology to refer to Gallagher. Comments describe him as a "god," "angel," "saint" and "apostle," emphasising that he is "deified" or even "canonised" without need for intervention from the Pope. Interestingly, these descriptors are chosen not because of Gallagher's guitar playing ability, but because of his gentle demeanour and relatively straight lifestyle. Gallagher was known for his strong opposition to recreational drugs and cigarettes and lack of interest in groupies and would retreat to his hotel room after concerts to read or watch films.<sup>62</sup> He put this down to his Catholic upbringing, which meant he was "never really tempted to try those excesses" (*Record Collector*, August 1995). Gallagher's bandmates and brother say that he lived a "monastic" life, married to his guitar and forsaking all else, including intimate relations with others (*Classic Rock*, 2 March 2020). Fans often refer to this in their comments, nicknaming Gallagher "the priest," a nickname that both Dónal and Bob Geldof have also used to describe him, elaborating that "Rory could have been in a seminary" (*Ghost Blues* documentary, 2010). For fans, Gallagher is a "crusader of the blues," while his iconic Stratocaster is seen as the "Holy Grail" and his music as "manna from heaven." Despite their religious undertones, all of these references are elevated to a cultural level where they become secularised and separated from their original context of use. Thus, conventional religious identity is separated from Irishness; instead, it becomes heavily bound with music, offering a level playing field for everybody regardless of their beliefs away from YouTube.

The only time that politics overtly creeps into comments on the channel is in discussions about the blues and why Gallagher has such an affinity with a traditional black music. Some Irish fans argue that this has to do with the long history of oppression in Ireland by the British and the subsequent political turmoil: "It's no wonder he could play the blues like he did. The Irish were slaves many years ago"; "Given our history, us Irish feel the world's pain more acutely"; "It's unsurprising in a country that kills and is full of hate"; "Blues comes from poverty, hardship and discrimination. Familiar?" Thus, for these fans,

the blues and Irishness go hand in hand, feeding off one another and intimately connected. Others, instead, believe that Gallagher's own state of mind played a huge role; he was an extremely insular person and a long-term sufferer of social and health anxiety and depression: "You can tell he was lonely and the blues were his reaction to this"; "In a few notes of blues, he could express feelings that he couldn't express in person"; "Rory spoke through his guitar. You only have to listen." For these fans, the blues is not so much bound with Irishness, but rather with Gallagher as a person. This was echoed by Gallagher himself in a 1976 interview at Rockpalast, where he stated, "The blues is a feeling, a mood [...] you just do it to express sad emotions within you," as well as artist Jim Fitzpatrick who links Gallagher's blues-playing to his "very troubled" feelings of carrying "the weight of the world on his shoulders" (*Irish Examiner*, 6 May 2021).

### Tokens of Irishness

In her study of Irishness in New Zealand, McCarthy noted the importance of material tokens of ethnic identity for Irish emigrants.<sup>63</sup> She claimed that Irish cultural practices relating to food and drink, dress and music were all promoted as elements pertinent to displays of Irishness. Non-Irish people, on the other hand, tended to articulate Irish stereotypes and manipulate them for political or rhetorical purposes.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, this challenge between expressions of pride and perpetuations of stereotypes is clearly seen in fan comments on the Rory Gallagher YouTube channel. While non-Irish fans use tokens of Irishness from an impartial distance, their ideas are often distorted and rely on surface-level understandings of what Irishness is. Irish fans, in contrast, tend to write more profound comments that delve deeper into Irish temperament.

In Western culture, there is a deeply rooted stereotype of Irish people as prone to alcohol abuse.<sup>65</sup> Although this is a stereotype that Ireland has tried to move away from in recent years, its image is still widespread amongst non-Irish people. We see this in comments by non-Irish fans on YouTube who, aware that Gallagher was a heavy drinker in later life, unfairly state: "The Irish would be world-beating if they didn't drink so much!"; "The Irish drink like bloody pigs"; "Everyone I know with drinking problems is Irish." In their own way, non-Irish fans use these comments to signal their "understanding" of the Irish and, therefore, gain credibility amongst Irish fans. However, their sweeping generalisations instead alienate them and are responded to negatively: "Rory drank no more than anybody else. It was paracetamol that ruined his liver"; "You don't know what you're talking about."<sup>66</sup> In other comments, non-Irish fans emphasise the consumption of alcohol, particularly *Irish* alcohol: "Whenever I hear Rory, I get a strong desire for Irish whiskey"; "I'm here with a pint of Guinness listening to Rory"; "Enjoying the black stuff right now!"; "RIP Rory, I owe you a pint of Guinness." Here, authenticity is sought by drawing connections between Gallagher's nationality and traditional Irish drinks; in other words, fans who listen to Gallagher while drinking whisky or Guinness are truly authentic.

Non-Irish fans also try to assert Irishness "by proxy," playing up elements of their personal identity that have some kind of connection with Ireland, albeit loosely, to legitimate themselves and exclude others who are not considered to be Irish enough.<sup>67</sup> One fan, for example, informs others that "I'm not from Ireland but my surname is Irish. I'm Irish to the bone," while another states, "My mum's maiden name is Gallagher!" Often, these assertions are accompanied by shamrock and Irish flag emojis and serve to perform

authenticity and demarcate the “right to pride”<sup>68</sup> amongst fellow Gallagher fans. Mangaoang noted similar performances of “symbolic ties to the homeland” in her study of comments on the “Philippine Prison Thriller” video, arguing that they highlight how national identity should not be homogeneously constructed or imagined.<sup>69</sup> On the Rory Gallagher YouTube channel, however, these blurred and fluctuating boundaries of Irish identity are often quashed or ignored by Irish fans who “check in” with their location: “Greetings from Dublin, Ireland”; “Hello from Longford, Ireland”; “Hello from Cork: the land of Rory.” For them, the mere fact of being born or living in Ireland authenticates their claim to fandom over others.

In some cases, Irish fans question their own authenticity because they have only discovered Gallagher’s music recently: “As an Irish girl, I’m so embarrassed that I’ve only just discovered Rory!”; “To my shame as an Irishman, I only discovered Rory last year.” In these assertions, knowing about Rory Gallagher is presented as an innate aspect of being Irish, implying that those who do not know about him are a failure to their country and its culture. Dlaske found similar implications in her analysis of the Coláiste Lurgan music video, where user comments suggest that it is normative to like the video if you are Irish.<sup>70</sup> Unlike the comments by non-Irish fans that are frequently rebuffed or challenged, these comments are met with support from other fans: “Better late than never!”; “Now you’ve discovered our Irish brother.” Again, being Irish automatically grants positions of authority amongst Gallagher fans, even if they are newcomers to his music.

Despite these tensions between Irish and non-Irish fans around alcohol and other tenuous connections with Ireland, music is never a source of friction. Both Irish and non-Irish fans regularly mention other renowned Irish musicians alongside Gallagher (particularly Gary Moore and Phil Lynott): “Rory. Gary. Phil. Great power trio”; “Rory, Gary, Phil: the Holy Trinity”; “Can you imagine the jam session in heaven with Rory, Gary and Phil!” They also highlight Irish musicians who they see as inferior to Gallagher: “How is Rory overshadowed by fucking Edge?” “Why all this talk about U2? Rory and Lizzy are way better!” Associating Gallagher with other Irish icons serves several purposes: for Irish fans, it is an expression of pride and a desire to firmly stamp Ireland’s place in the annals of rock history, while for non-Irish fans, it stems more from a need to gain approval and acceptance amongst Irish fans. It also serves as a bonding mechanism, particularly when comments critique Irish musicians seen as less talented and single Gallagher out as unique, thereby gaining supportive feedback from Irish fans (“Yeah! U2 can feck off!”).<sup>71</sup> Given the context in which they are created, these musical tokens of Irishness are deemed more acceptable than other tokens that fall back on lazy stereotypes or ill-judged remarks.

An important aspect of Irishness that is particularly drawn upon in comments by Irish fans is Gallagher’s “Gypsy lifestyle.” Irish fans regularly draw parallels between Gallagher’s constant touring and the peripatetic lifestyle of a Traveller, describing the restlessness he often said that he felt when not on tour as an inherent part of his Irishness: “As an Irishman, Rory lived for travelling”; “Like all good Irish, Rory loved the circus”; “Spent my youth under a canvas roof as I roamed from town to town: pure gypsy Rory.” To them, Gallagher’s enjoyment of life on the road is a reflection of his deep Irish roots and fits with the romanticised image of Travellers in the popular imagination as people who freely roam the countryside in horse-drawn wagons, playing music along the way.<sup>72</sup> Gallagher himself often admitted that he loved his “Gypsy lifestyle,” but that this was rooted in his fascination for the Wild West rather than Ireland: “It goes back to my ideas when I was

a kid, that romantic image of the Woody Guthries, the Bill Broonzy's travelling around, the hobo thing" (*Sounds*, 15 March 1975). He did recognise, however, that his feeling of "Gypsy guilt" when not on the road was strongly linked to his Irish Catholic upbringing and his perfectionist tendencies (*Sounds*, 10 December 1988).

Although not a Traveller, Gallagher was exposed to some aspects associated with Irish Traveller culture from a young age: his mother read tea leaves and his grandmother was deeply superstitious and a strong believer in astrology.<sup>73</sup> This exposure to Irish superstitions had a huge effect on Gallagher's own life: he followed horoscopes, avoided going out on Friday 13th, had a fear of certain numbers, would not put shoes on a table or enter a room with a crooked picture frame and even stopped listening to Robert Johnson after he felt an "evil force" that gave him a "black cat feeling" (*The Times*, 14 August 1992). Gallagher admitted that it was making him "psychotic" and having an "unhealthy" control on his mind, but that as a Catholic, it was "extra dangerous" for him to toy with these "pre-Celtic dark forces" (*Q*, July 1990). On YouTube, Irish fans also recognise this link between superstition and Irishness. Comments on Gallagher songs that explicitly address such themes include: "This completely sums up Rory and his attitude to life!"; "He could never escape that Irish superstition"; "Seems he was talking about himself. Us Irish are a superstitious bunch." These comments romanticise Gallagher's superstition as an element of authentic Irishness and simplify what had, in fact, turned into a struggle with OCD towards the end of his life.<sup>74</sup> Thus, framing Gallagher's superstition as an Irish tradition serves as a way for Irish fans to assert expertise on Irish culture and distinguish themselves from non-Irish fans.

While countries cannot be reduced to a set of oversimplified ideas, Irish fans on YouTube frequently conduct home-bound assessments of what they consider to be Irish aspects of Gallagher's personality. These types of comments are particularly prominent in interview videos, which showcase Gallagher's softly spoken and gentle manner. Fans regularly describe Gallagher as "the true manifestation of Irishness" and "pure Irish soul" because he was down-to-earth, humble, reserved and hard-working with a touch of stubbornness, using stories about him to exemplify these traits:

"A proper Irishman. Never let fame go to his head. Always queued and bought his own ticket for concerts. Never wanted special favours."

"He never forgot where he came from. The boy from Cork always came home and had time for us."

"A real Irishman. So humble. What other artist do you hear say 'I hope you'll like this', 'I'll give it a bash', 'I'll probably mess this up'."

"It's so sweet how intimidated he was meeting other stars. He couldn't go on stage for 15 minutes after being introduced by Lonnie Donegan. Proper Irish."

Here, Irish fans justify Gallagher's Irishness through personal anecdotes that showcase their in-depth knowledge of him and the Irish character. Given that these comments are shared publicly, they also have an ambassadorial function,<sup>75</sup> serving to create a good impression of Irish people for non-Irish fans. Fans also note Gallagher's clothing and his battered Strat as playing a key role in his unassuming demeanour: "Totally devoid of ego in a simple checked shirt and jeans"; "Checked shirt hero of Ireland"; "Pure Irish humility in that casual dress and guitar." In the 1995 documentary *Gallagher's Blues*, Belfast promoter Sam Smith joked that Gallagher wore the same checked shirt and pair of blue jeans throughout his career, while brother Dónal explained how Fender gave Gallagher a new

guitar, thinking that he lacked the money to replace his (Cork City Library interview, 2020). However, Gallagher saw no need to change his clothing or instrument, arguing that “in Ireland, people don’t lose their balance that easily” (*Sounds*, 6 June 1975). Through these comments, fans frame Gallagher as capturing the very essence of what it means to be Irish, thereby “(re)creating, (re)inventing and (re)inforcing the myth”<sup>76</sup> of an idealised Irishness.

Linked to this, Gallagher’s polite, reserved and somewhat old-fashioned nature is also a frequent topic of conversation for Irish fans, who claim that Irish people “are extremely moralistic,” “have more respect for women than the British” and “are brought up to remember their manners and not to dishonour themselves, their families or countries wherever they go.” While these types of statements are highly subjective, particularly when coming from Irish people themselves, again, they serve to associate Gallagher with an idealised image of Irishness and have an ambassadorial function for non-Irish fans. Gallagher’s bandmates describe him as “extremely well-brought up” with a deep respect for women: he did not swear, did not like coarse jokes, always said please and thank you, called his mother every night before he went to bed, always stood up when a woman walked in, told off bandmates for ogling women and even changed the lyrics in blues covers if they were sexist or racy (*Hot Press*, December 1995).<sup>77</sup> Irish fans frequently mention these well-known aspects of Gallagher’s personality in their comments, warning other fans who swear or blaspheme that “Rory wouldn’t appreciate that.” Irish fans also discuss Gallagher’s shyness and lament his frequent self-deprecation and lack of self-belief, framing it in the context of Irishness: “Wouldn’t be surprised if it came from those beatings he took from the Christian Brothers”<sup>78</sup>; “Good old Catholic guilt rearing its head.” Many of these comments are repeated from interviews given by Gallagher himself (“I worry a lot, especially in bed at night,” *New Spotlight*, 1978; “I’ve always gotten nervous about everything,” *Guitar for the Practicing Musician*, August 1991) and his brother and bandmates who describe him as a “painfully shy and extremely anxious” person who was convinced that he was a “simple Irish buffoon” and went through a “traumatic transformation” from back to front stage (*Gallagher’s Blues* documentary, 1995; *De Telegraaf*, 7 January 1995). However, in these “armchair analyses,” fans position themselves as experts in the Irish psyche and, by the same token, experts in Gallagher.

### The collective legacy of Rory Gallagher

Online platforms like YouTube have introduced a new generation of music lovers to Rory Gallagher. Through the comment sections on his official channel, young and old, Irish and non-Irish, Catholics and Protestants, nationalists and unionists all come together to share memories, express emotions and perform fandom. As this paper has demonstrated, a key aspect of this performance is Irishness. While Irishness was never something to which Gallagher overtly drew attention, for fans, it has become a key way of expressing authenticity and gaining status within the community. However, the type of Irishness that they promote is multi-faceted and multi-layered.

On the one hand, Irishness is non-sectarian, casting aside political and religious differences and embracing Gallagher as a figure who united the island of Ireland through his music. On the other, Irishness determines internal hierarchies, with fans from Cork viewed as the most authentic, although this claim for authenticity is regularly challenged

by fans from Donegal. For the Irish, a person's authenticity as a Gallagher fan is tied up with many factors of Irishness, including national and regional accent, proficiency in the Irish language, knowledge of Irish politics, religion, culture and mythology and a deep understanding of the Irish character. This "insider" knowledge can be exclusionary for non-Irish fans and makes it challenging for them to pursue legitimate claims of Irishness and, in turn, of authentic fandom.

Despite these challenges, some non-Irish fans make attempts at transnational forms of Irishness, claiming Gallagher as an international icon or relying on tokens of Irishness based on stereotypes to demonstrate their "understanding" of Irish culture. Through their annual pilgrimages to Gallagher's grave and their framing as Ireland as a "promised land," they also seek to legitimise Irishness as an emotion or feeling rather than a nationality, claiming belonging by proxy. While there is a friendly rivalry between Irish and non-Irish fans, the banter serves as "playful nationalism," embedded in pride that such a talented musician is Irish rather than any malice towards "outsiders." The only time that tensions arise is when Gallagher is labelled as British for which non-Irish fans are quickly required to apologise in order to repair face and restore the congenial atmosphere on the channel.

The way that fans constantly return to videos to respond to each other's comments showcases the Rory Gallagher YouTube channel as an interactive community that enables community formation rather than an imagined community. Although this interactivity between fans was discussed throughout this paper in relation to thorny topics (e.g. the false Hendrix quote, pronunciation of Gallagher, calling Gallagher "British"), a more sustained investigation of how these interactions take place over time between fans and how they change per video type offers an interesting avenue for further research. Another possible line of inquiry is how fans use the channel as a platform for memorialising, returning to videos on Gallagher's date of birth or death to pay their respects. Similar studies of Irishness could also be carried out on the YouTube channels of other Irish musicians, particularly those with complex heritages, such as Phil Lynott.

Overall, the Rory Gallagher YouTube channel is an insightful window into how Irishness can be interpreted, adopted and recontextualised by fans in a bid for authentic fandom. For a man who tried to live his life under the radar, Gallagher's fans are ensuring that he remains firmly in the spotlight, using their comments to build a collective legacy that anchors him in Irishness and establishes him as the man who put Ireland on the global stage for music.

## Notes

1. Gil López, Ahmed and Taylor, "Understanding Fandom."
2. Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*.
3. Burgess and Green, *You Tube*; and Mangaoang, *Dangerous Mediations*, 161.
4. Way, "YouTube as a Site"; Rühlig, "Do You Hear the"; Brown, "Meaning, Melody and YouTube"; and Dlaske, "Music Video Covers."
5. Graham, *In Search of Ireland*, 2.
6. Craith, *Culture and Identity Politics*, 190.
7. See O'Malley, "The Mixed Race Irish."
8. Negra, *The Irish in Us*, 1.
9. *Ibid*, 2.

10. See "Fitzgerald and O'Flynn, *Music in Identity*; Mangaoang, O'Flynn and Ó Briain, *Made in Ireland*; McCarthy, *Passing It On*; McLaughlin and McLoone, "Hybridity and National Musics"; McLaughlin and McLoone, *Rock and Popular Music*; O'Flynn, *The Irishness of Irish*; Smyth, *Noisy Island*; and White, *The Keeper's Recital*.
11. See Farrell, "If I Should Fall"; McLaughlin, "Bono, Do You Ever"; Murphy, "Horslips in Irish Musical"; O'Hagan, "The Irish Rover"; Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish*; and Sørensen, "Listen – Christy Moore's Old."
12. Campbell, "Ethnicity and Cultural Criticism."
13. McLaughlin and McLoone, "Hybridity and National Musics,"
14. O'Flynn, *The Irishness of Irish*.
15. Brown, "Meaning, Melody and YouTube."
16. Dlaske, "Music Video Covers."
17. See Oh, "K-Pop Fans React"; Way, "YouTube as a Site"; and Rühlig, "Do You Hear the."
18. Edgar, "Commenting Straight From."
19. Mangaoang, *Dangerous Mediations*.
20. Vignoles, *Rory Gallagher*, 5.
21. Cullen, *Vagabonds of the Western*, 236.
22. Hogan, "Music in Ireland," 263.
23. Cullen, *Vagabonds of the Western*, 239.
24. Vignoles, *Rory Gallagher*, Chapters 5–6.
25. Cullen, *Vagabonds of the Western*, 31.
26. *Ibid*, 215–216.
27. *Ibid*, 246.
28. Vignoles, *Rory Gallagher*, 179.
29. Bury, *Cyberspaces of their Own*, 14.
30. Bury, "Technology, Fandom and Community."
31. Hetherington, "Rory Gallagher."
32. See Zimmer, "But the data is"; and Reilly, "The 'Battle of Stokes.'"
33. Markham, "Fabrication as Ethical Practice."
34. Reilly, "The 'Battle of Stokes.'"
35. Burke, "Wrestling Audiences."
36. Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of," 30.
37. *Ibid*.
38. King, "Football Fandom and Post-National."
39. Kyriakidou et al. "Media Events and Cosmopolitan."
40. Dlaske, "Music Video Covers"; and Mangaoang, *Dangerous Mediations*.
41. *Ibid*, 611.
42. Negra, *The Irish in Us*, 2.
43. See note 16 above.
44. Cf. Pavlenko, "Bilingualism and Emotions."
45. Bauman and Briggs, "Poetics and Performances," 73.
46. See note 19 above.
47. O'Donnell, "Negotiated Governance and Hybridity."
48. Dlaske, "Music Video Covers," 165.
49. McCudden, *Degrees of Fandom*, 16.
50. Wall, "Putting the Accent on."
51. Smyth, *Noisy Island*.
52. Mangaoang, *Dangerous Mediations*, 166.
53. Cf. Beal, "You're not from."
54. Jones and Moore, "He Only has Eyes," 18.
55. Armstrong and Giulianotti, *Fear and Loathing*, 53.
56. See Fitzgerald and O'Flynn, *Music in Identity*; and O'Flynn, *The Irishness of Irish*.
57. Muise, *Gallagher, Marriott, Derringer*, 231.

58. In 2006, Belfast City Council unveiled a memorial plaque on Ulster Hall to commemorate Gallagher's historic concerts there.
59. Green, "Whose Riot?"
60. Amazingly, these three feats have all been confirmed by surviving concert footage.
61. Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimages*, Chapter 1.
62. Vignoles, *Rory Gallagher*, 154.
63. McCarthy, *Scottish and Irishness*, Chapter 4.
64. Fitzpatrick, "That Beloved Country," 325.
65. See Greenslade, Pearson and Madden, "A Good Man's Fault."
66. Gallagher was admitted to hospital with severe abdominal pains in March 1995 and was subsequently given a liver transplant. After 13 weeks in intensive care, he contracted a staphylococcal (MRSA) infection and died on 14 June at age 47. According to his brother Dónal, "Rory never drank more than anyone else" (*Sunday Mirror*, 14 April 2002); it was his long-term use of tablets taken to help with his anxiety and depression that damaged his liver. Many of the tablets are now, in fact, banned due to their adverse side effects.
67. These types of comments were also found by Dlaske, "Music Video Covers."
68. *Ibid*, 163.
69. Mangaoang, *Dangerous Mediations*, 172.
70. See note 48 above.
71. McCudden, *Degrees of Fandom*, 97.
72. Bhopal and Myers, *Insiders, Outsiders and Others*, 79.
73. Vignoles, *Rory Gallagher*, 18, 148.
74. Connaughton, Mark, *Rory Gallagher*, 142.
75. The YouTube commenter as "cultural ambassador" was also identified by Mangaoang, *Dangerous Mediations*, 173.
76. *Ibid*.
77. Vignoles, *Rory Gallagher*, 40, 121.
78. Gallagher's brother Dónal told the *Irish Examiner* (4 June 2011) how, at North Monastery school, Rory was beaten regularly with blackthorn sticks by the Christian Brothers because he was in a showband. One particular incident traumatised him so badly that he stayed home from school for several weeks due to distress. When he returned, the Brothers beat him even more severely until his leg went septic. Dónal saw the injuries when Rory was getting undressed for bed one evening and told their mother Monica who intervened and moved both boys to St Kieran's College.

## Disclosure statement

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