

Title:

Men Behind the Wire: Loyalist Prisoners and Songs of Resistance

Abstract:

During Northern Ireland's Troubles (1969-98) as many as 15,000 loyalists were incarcerated for politically motivated crimes. Inside the main paramilitary prison of Long Kesh, prisoners described how they would sing loyalist songs 'to prove that the spirits and hearts of Ulstermen could never be broken'. Drawing on interviews with former paramilitaries and loyalist musicians themselves, this paper explores the role loyalist songs played within Northern Ireland's prison system. The paper explores the multifaceted role music and songs played within the prison, being both a motivational tool used to support the wellbeing of inmates and a weapon through which to strike out at those enemy combatants who could not be reached physically. In so doing, the paper deepens current understandings of loyalist prison culture during the Troubles, and charts the changing aesthetics of loyalist protest music and how it is used today.

Bio:

Stephen R. Millar is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam. His research and teaching focuses on music, conflict, and cultures of resistance, with a particular emphasis on Britain and Ireland. He is author of *Sounding Dissent: Rebel Songs, Resistance, and Irish Republicanism* (Michigan, 2020) and co-editor of *Football and Popular Culture: Singing Out from the Stands* (Routledge, 2021). Stephen's current book project examines the interconnection between Ulster loyalist songs and political violence in Northern Ireland from the Troubles to the present.