

Jonathan Mullins  
Professor Amireh  
ENGH 363  
30 November 2025

### No Longer Irish

My great grandmother, who was a part of the second generation of her family to be born in the United States, was a member of the Irish diaspora. Her grandparents, like many members of the diasporic Irish community, settled in the Appalachian mountains, where their culture mixed in with the amalgamated Appalachian culture. Despite traces of my family's Irish heritage remaining in our larger Appalachian culture, I do not consider myself Irish, or a part of a Diaspora. I consider myself Appalachian without considering myself part of the Irish diaspora because my family fully assimilated into Appalachian culture adopting an American identity while losing their Irish one, causing me to identify with being a gay American Southerner and Appalachian.

I do not consider myself Irish because my family has fully assimilated into Appalachian culture, losing their Irish identity and desire to return to their homeland. According to the lecture on diasporas by Professor Amireh, a diasporic identity is a dual one that identifies with both their cultural and ancestral homeland, and the current land they inhabit. Within this dual identity the culture of a diasporic people's homeland mixes with that of the settled land, while still maintaining that original ethnic identity and a desire to return home, (Amireh). When my ancestors settled in America, they did not remain connected to their homeland, they fully assimilated into Appalachian culture. It was not an immediate assimilation, as my great grandmother considered herself Irish despite being born here, however over time my family's culture would be absorbed into those they mixed and exchanged with. My great grandmother married a man, who was unsure of his own ethnic heritage, who was a baptist and she converted.

Unlike many Syrian Americans, who remain Muslim, my great grandmother lost her spiritual connection to her homeland. When my grandmother married my grandfather, she did not cook any of the Irish food her mother taught to her, instead she learned dishes that were uniquely Appalachian, or learned to use Irish ingredients in a way that was not inherently Irish. Through each generation a part of my family's Irish identity was lost through cultural mixing and failure to hold on to their own in any meaningful way, causing me to be unable to identify with being Irish, and lose any meaningful interaction between my heritage and American culture.

I identify as an American Southerner and Appalachian, but not as Irish because my Irish heritage has no interaction with my American cultural identity. In Amireh's lecture on diaspora, diasporic communities often experience interaction between the cultural and ethnic heritage of their homeland, and the culture of the place they have settled, (Amireh). This interaction is illustrated in the short story "War Years," by Vietthaanh Nguyen, whose narrator notes a clash between his American and Vietnamese identities, when pricing cans at his parents' store. When pricing cans for his mother the narrator notes, "they're [the customers] just going to ask for a lower price," (Nguyen 51). The narrator's mother replies to this by asking, "are you going to be the kind of person who always pays the asking price?" (Nguyen 51). Clashing here is the narrator's American idea of what is socially acceptable, and his mother's Vietnamese idea of the same. In Vietnam haggling for a better price is socially acceptable in any kind of store or market, while in America it is only considered acceptable in places like yard and garage sales, not in grocery stores. Both characters lack understanding of the other's perspective causing them to question the other, creating a cultural clash and a tension with the older generation that marks the narrator as diasporic. While I have had clashes with the older generations in my family and community, it was not over a cultural misunderstanding. I have had a similar encounter with my

father over pronouns and trans rights, where I tried to explain to him, “sex is what you are born as, and gender is what you identify with.” My father replied, “Isn't sex and gender the same thing?” While I have had conflict with an older generation’s perception of gender concepts, it was not in the context of myself or my heritage. The conflict was between two aspects of American culture, not between Irish and American culture. Many of the issues I personally struggle with, exist outside of cultural ethnicity.

I am not a part of the Irish diaspora because my personal struggles do not involve my family’s Irish lineage. According to Professor Amireh, diasporic communities see themselves as linked to but different from those they have settled among, (Amireh 9:30-9:47). This relation of difference causes tension between diasporic communities and the people they have settled amongst, creating a unique struggle for them. I, nor my family, faces struggles relating to relations of difference because we see ourselves as the same as those we live amongst. Many of my own personal struggles have to deal with perceptions of gender and sexuality in the regions I am from. I am from both the American South and the Appalachian region, I also identify as gay, so most of the struggles I deal with involve perceptions of gay men as overly sexual or effeminate. I also break a gender norm by being a man with long hair, which a lot of the older members of my family use to tease me or be rude to me. I also struggle with being seen as a “poor hick” as many of the people from the regions I hail from are. Neither of these struggles involve me being seen as unamerican, or not from here, as many refugees, like Vietthanh Nguyen do. In an article he wrote Nguyen states, “[he] came to understand that in the United States ... it is un-American to be a refugee. The refugee embodies fear, failure, and flight,” (Nyguen). Unlike Nyguen who had to face being perceived as the representation of a country’s implosion, and the fears that his people, Vietnamese refugees, would bring that to America, I

struggle with being perceived as a twisted version of an American. Someone who is American, but something is off with them, for unlike the majority of Americans I happen to be attracted to those who share my gender while hailing from a region that is perceived as being given up on by the American dream. My struggles have nothing to do with my ethnicity, or my family possibly hailing from another country, and they all mostly relate to being American, so I do not identify as Irish, or diasporic.

My family arrived in America's Appalachian region from Ireland, but fully assimilated into it, adopting an American identity, causing me to lose connection to my Irish heritage and having to identify with being a gay American Southerner and Appalachian. While I do not fully understand the struggles of a diasporic people, I can relate to being perceived as something other and understand the implications of being poor in this country. While I am not diasporic myself, I empathize with those who are and they struggles they go through in these United States.

My name is Jonathan Mullins and I attest to having wrote this paper myself, in my own words, with no use of generative AI.

## Works Cited

- Amireh, Amal. "Diaspora." *Canvas*,  
[https://canvas.gmu.edu/courses/49678/files/19378904?module\\_item\\_id=5526548](https://canvas.gmu.edu/courses/49678/files/19378904?module_item_id=5526548).  
Accessed 30 November 2025.
- Nguyen Viet Thanh. "Viet Thanh Nguyen on Being a Refugee, an American - and a Human Being." *Viet Thanh Nguyen: Winner of the Pulitzer Prize*, 6 February 2017,  
<https://vietnguyen.info/2017/viet-thanh-nguyen-refugee-american-human>.
- Nguyen Viet Thanh. "War Years." *The Refugees*, Grove Press, 2017, pp. 49-72.