INTERVIEW L13-SG2: SEAN MURRAY

Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interviewee: Sean Murray [pseudonym]
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Transcriber: Naomi Wells

Textual Note: Annotations and observations appear in square brackets (e.g. [pauses], [laughs]). Partial, interrupted or unfinished utterances are denoted by a dash. False starts, filler words and non-lexical utterances (e.g. 'um', 'hmm') are not generally transcribed. Time codes appear at ten-minute intervals in square brackets in bold type.

FR: Rolling now. Okay, so if you would just start us off by saying your name and today's date.

SM: Okay, it's Sean Murray, March twenty-s-, oh sorry, that's my date of birth, isn't it, it's not March, twenty-third of January 2020.

FR: Thank you, and thank you very much for agreeing to take part.

SM: No problem.

FR: So we're just going to start off with some questions about your early life I suppose, so where did you, where were you born?

SM: I was born in Aldershot, ironically home of the British Army, which is in Hampshire just, I'd say about twenty-five minutes' drive from here, born in '86, so yeah, Royal Army Hospital as well I was born, yeah, and my dad had, my mum and dad had come over here quite early on in their marriage. I think, no, my dad moved here before he was married to join the British police and my mum came over shortly after, so yeah, that was the first, and we actually lived in a police house in a tiny little village outside Aldershot called Ash which, that is technically in Surrey.

FR: So your, are your parents both originally from–?

SM: Yeah, my dad's from Armagh, Armagh city and my mum's from Dundalk, so just across the border in Louth, so they came over and then had me, so there was me and then I think we stayed here, I want to say for, till '88 we stayed here and my mum got very homesick and they moved back and I think they moved to Armagh.

FR: So you would've been two.

SM: Yeah, I moved, so I moved there at two and did, did the usual, I did nursery and pre-school there and then I started secondary school, well, not secondary school, whatever, junior school.

FR: Primary school, yeah.

SM: Yeah, and did that for about a year or so and in that period my middle brother Ross was born, so he was born, I think he might've been born in Craigavon actually, maybe, can't remember off the top of my head, so he was born there, and then ironically my dad hated his job cos he was working for the family business in haulage, which he just didn't enjoy.

FR: Oh okay.

SM: And so then doing that after about three, four years over there, and after I'd picked up a very thick Northern Irish accent, he decided that he was a police officer and he couldn't be anything else and, but couldn't join the force over there [pauses] for his safety, well, I think he asked, he very briefly enquired about joining the Northern Irish police and I think the family were around, Paul, let's not join [laughs], let's not join the RUC as it was at the time, so he came back over here and then stayed in Guildford, Guildford, Ash region, sorry, for the next ten years I think. Yeah, I think I moved here with a very thick, obviously Northern Irish accent at first, which, there are still like, home movies of me with a very, very thick, broad, squeaky Northern Irish accent, which has obviously now filtered out very much so, so I think that's, yeah, oh yeah, sorry and then sixteen, my dad was offered a job working back in Northern Ireland in the Ombudsman's office, which was, at the time was basically looking into historical issues of, obviously RUC issues and, you know, tensions, and so he was offered that job and he took a sabbatical, I think must have been for about eight years. He moved back to Northern Ireland, to Belfast, for about two years before we did eventually, he said the money was just too good to refuse, so we all moved back to Northern Ireland, back to Armagh, then this time with an English accent.

FR: What age were you then?

SM: I was sixteen. I'd literally, I think I was only, I moved, we moved in November, so I'd started college here and then had to go back and do college over there. We went, I mean, my brothers went to St Pat's College in Armagh, which was obviously all boys and all Catholic, and I went to Armagh Tech, which is obviously both boys and girls and both Catholics and Protestants, which, I think there's still not a huge amount of those over there, which was interesting in many different ways cos my name is Sean, but I have an English accent. It confused [laughs], confused people and we lived very much in the Catholic part of Armagh, which is actually quite divided unlike a lot of other towns, so I was very quickly singled out as the guy with the English accent and it was strange because I, initially just, I think I initially made friends with nationalists, as it were, and I just seemed everywhere I'd go I'd, to draw attention from people and, and then it grew to the point where I, I was chased out of a few bars for unknown reasons that still to th-, well, I can gather the reasons, we were in the, I want to say the PSO's club, which is the local Gaelic team's, and I remember a guy, Ian, coming to me and saying you should leave, and he was, he wasn't, he was actually a friend of mine, he went no, no, just leave, trust me it's safer and then as I left I remember being chased up the road and having to, the motorway went over the bridge, and I had to hide under this little, underneath the motorway to try and escape and happened on more than a few occasions, I think once I got assaulted quite badly for it, and

to the point where I ended up not wanting to be, so I ended up just through, almost a bit of alienation, making friends with unionists, and actually one of my good friends is a guy called, I've unfortunately lost contact with him, he's called Neil Dodds whose uncle is Nigel Dodds, so all my close friends then became unionists.

FR: That's really interesting.

SM: Yeah, but becau-, I don't know whether it was just cos of the type of people they were, but I never seemed, or maybe cos they just, cos of the English accent, they never seemed, I never seemed to get questioned in the same way, or are you really Irish, I mean, I don't know, I've never thought that, I was always, well, yeah, cos in England they never expected me to be English, so here, and that was, I mean, there was always the things when we'd go out, if I went out to a pub of their area I'd have to change my name and couldn't bring my passport out, and I've got a Celtic cross on my arm, would have to make sure that was covered and little things like that, but it was a little easier being with unionists rather than being with nationalists at that time, cos on more than a few occasions we had stones thrown at the house and, yeah, although I, then I saw the other side of it with how the authorities treated me depending on what area of town I was in, which I've always found quite, quite strange.

FR: So you felt like it was different.

SM: One of the biggest examples, so, so my, I had two friends, one's Stuart and one was Neil, so obviously the guy whose dad is Nigel, or uncle is Nigel Dodds, they drove down to my part, down to pick me up, and now I know, I've been part of the police, I can see it in a bigger, so it was a nationalist side of town, they were driving down to pick me up and they pulled up and as they pulled up there's a car, a police car has followed them in and put the sirens on, and I'm kind of coming out like, what's going on, and then you see they've kind of been told to stand back, and then they've called up for back-up and the second car's come around and blocked them in, and now I'm thinking I know how police works now, so I can look back and that's quite a bit, oh he's, and then basically they were accusing them for not wearing a seatbelt, and I was like, okay, and then when they've asked for their ID and Neil has shown them the ID and he went yeah, that's Neil Dodds, nephew of Nigel Dodds and they went sorry, gave it back to him and just drove off. Well, there's two cars, now I know nowadays that if you're requesting back-up, yeah, so that, I remember being like that, being like, that's in-, that's insane, they just saw, they, you're on the Catholic side of town, so they pulled you over for crappy reasons and then just dismissed you as soon as they figured out who you were.

FR: The name of Nigel Dodds has some authority.

SM: Yes, carries some weight obviously in the community, I mean, this was obviously, this would have been what, still 2007 and eight, and I remember one night I was walking back from a bar, which was a Catholic bar at the time, where, it still is, I was walking back from it and I was wearing a Dundalk Young Ireland top, which is my mum's family club, as it were, again, knowing what I know about being in the police, this car just followed me the whole way home. I thought this is a bit, I'm walking slowly and this car is not taking, overtaking me

and, so I purposely went down a one-way street knowing well they can't follow me this way, and they zoomed all the way round, come back and they've started accusing me of having a, of things, and there's a fight and we believe you were involved and I went there's, that's impossible, you have followed me, no, we haven't, yeah, you have, and then basically they, they tried to put me in the back of the car and my parents said no, cos, you know, I'm technically still under eighteen, I know **[00:10:00]** that you have to contact my parents, and they went alright, fine, and I was like, this is my dad, he's head of the Ombud's office, so by all means if you want to contact him go ahead, but that's my dad, you'll have to contact him, and they let me go, and I was like, this is just ridiculous, this–

FR: It really seems like a kind of profiling thing, right.

SM: Yeah, and it was silly because I think, I suppose my dad had kind of convinced us on the idea we're moving home cos it's not like that anymore, it's, and obviously the way he went, what he went through, much younger in the sixties and seventies, it was obviously a lot different, and I was like, well, granted it's probably not as violent, but there's still something there that's not letting it go, and me not being able to almost pick a side and being seen on both sides didn't seem to go well with anybody.

FR: No, you're kind of caught between.

SM: Yeah.

FR: It's really interesting, and so would your dad have talked to you about his experiences, was he from Armagh?

SM: Yeah, him, yeah, my dad, he was born in Armagh and, like I said, we, there's still a haulage company, grandparents were both from Armagh, so all that side, going further back I'm sure there was other areas of Northern Ireland, but they were all predominantly from Armagh, and he men-, you know, a few of the armed soldiers throwing him up against fences and, you know, I don't think he was ever seriously brutalised or anything like that, but there was a lot of stopping and questioning, and what's interesting, his name is, he's called Paul, and my uncle's called Derek and auntie Sharon, and my nan once said the reason I called them Paul, Derek, Sharon is cos they're not giveaway names, I, she said I can't, you know, if you say I'm Paul you could be either side, you, so she said that's why I named them all that because and cos their surname's Murray, it's again a little bit, it's difficult to put you on either side, so she said I named them all that so they wouldn't be discriminated against, because no one could tell for sure what they were, which was always an interesting story, but then I came along and my mum named me Sean, and my brother Ross to, which is a Protestant name, to annoy the family cos, you know, she did that one day and then my youngest brother's called Stiofán, so again that's a–

FR: Stiofán doesn't really fit into the scheme, does it?

SM: Well, yeah, it's quite, it's definitely, especially when he explains how you spell it, he says it, oh with an a with a fada over it.

FR: Oh sure.

SM: He's like, yeah, that's putting you one side, definitely, but that was always I thought interesting, that.

FR: No, really interesting.

SM: Such bland names my parents, my grandma gave.

FR: And your mum's from the, from the South of Ireland?

SM: Yeah, she's from, from Dundalk.

FR: Do you know how her and your dad met?

SM: They were in the Scouts and she was in the Girl Guides and I think it was a cross-community thing where they, I can't remember the exact place they met, but it was a, you know, South and North community relations thing and they just, they met from there, you know, I think about sixteen years old or so, and they married not too long after that, I don't know how [laughs], my grandad, my mum's grandad, so would often talk about, you're dating someone from the North, huh, okay, right, this is, I mean, he wants to do what, he wants to join the police, right, right, these are issues here, these are all issues, he wants to join the police, he's from the North and he's going to England, right, okay, we need–

FR: That's a lot.

SM: Yeah, it's, that is a lot, yeah, from, for my grandad who was one of the, he won an All-Ireland with Louth, the only time they did win it, so.

FR: Really?

SM: Yeah.

FR: Oh that's interesting.

SM: Yeah, the only time, they weren't anywhere near it since, but yeah, he's got quite a lot of pictures of him, it's quite cool, I mean, you try and explain it to some people over here, they say, pfff–

FR: No, Gaelic games is not big on the agenda over here.

SM: No, I'm, for my, actually for my dad's Christmas present I got him, we're going to go and watch in Ruislip, watch the London GAA this weekend.

FR: Ah cool.

SM: Yeah, but it's not a great [laughs], it's not a great area, you kind of go alright, this is just a venue you've picked.

FR: Yeah, I've never been actually, I know roughly where it is in London, but I've never been.

SM: No, I haven't been either, but my mum went last year to, when Louth played them and she said he really enjoyed it, so I thought I'll take him again.

FR: Ah that's a good–

SM: Think they're playing Sligo, so, it's not any real connection, but.

FR: So when you were living in England, up to about sixteen, would you have gone back to Ireland for holidays and things?

SM: Yeah, fairly frequent, at least once a year for about two or three weeks because they would, well, I wouldn't say a holiday in, probably again in loose terms, it was more of, my parents had to go back and make sure, speak to all these family members to make sure they're all okay, so you'd spend, yeah, you'd spend three weeks just going from family home to family home to having the same benign conversations, it's just, yeah, we just had to keep track, you know, do we have to always go there [laughs].

FR: I know, I know exactly what you mean.

SM: Yeah.

FR: Irish holidays.

SM: Yeah, and I still have to do that now.

FR: So quite, quite a lot of family.

SM: Yeah.

FR: On both sides.

SM: Yeah, I mean, do we have any relatives that live here directly, no, one auntie who moved here for a bit and trained to be a nurse and then moved back, but still all relatives, you know, and cousins, they all live, the first way is probably Cork, and a few cousins now living in Dublin just cos they've grown up and moved, but yeah, still quite heavy in both Armagh and Dundalk, so.

FR: And what are your memories of going back to Armagh in the nineties, cos still slightly kind of securitised, Armagh then?

SM: Well, one of the, and again, it's one thing till you grow up and all of that, when we, more, from Dundalk, which is always, that sticks in, my parents never parked the car outside

the house, it was always quite a distance away in someone's backyard they'd locked up, and I remember asking them a while ago why did you always do that, and it was because it was a, it was a Northern Ireland registered car, they were scared, the idea was if they left it there then someone was going to plant a bomb underneath it, so they had to put it somewhere where, locked up overnight, so no one would plant a bomb underneath it, and that was something I didn't ever really remember, but, or I remembered it, but never, cos you, you–

FR: You didn't have a logic for it or a reason for it.

SM: Yeah, and I can remember always crossing the border like, with these army men there, and this is one of these memories which I don't know whether I remember or people tell me it, so I remember it, you know that type of, we were going over the border and I must have still been quite young cos I had a bag full of Thomas the Tank Engine trains and apparently at that stage, the, a lot of the soldiers had become familiar because my mum and dad would have, even though when they were living there, would have crossed over the border fairly regularly and then when we were doing visits I heard my mum saying, you know, you know, says, but it's a woman and a four-year-old child, but they took my Thomas the Tank Engine trains off me and kind of just shattered them to pieces to try and see if there was anything in these trains, and I'm like, what [laughs], it's Thomas the Tank Engine, I mean, I'm, again, I don't know if I remember this, but my mum has told it to me, so it's difficult to actually decipher what's from learned memory or what's from memory, but yeah, and I always remember being, having to, told, right, if anyone asks what your dad does, he's a lawyer, he's a civil servant, again, these were all things that didn't really make sense till I grew up or, yeah, and I always found in Ireland everyone knows who you are by your surname, no one ever called me Sean, it was always Murray, which was something, which is different from here, and also how no one ever locks their front and back door was another thing, it's just, is that it, don't [laughs], cos living where we lived it was like, what do you mean you don't lock your front door, oh just go on up to the house, and you're like, but I can't go up to the house, oh the door's unlocked, yeah, it is, it's fine, a lot of things like that, a lot–

FR: That kind of tight network thing, which is the surname thing and the not locking the doors thing, which is, if everyone knows everyone you don't need to lock your doors because who would–

SM: Yeah, who's going to steal, and if they do steal, well, we'll know who stole.

FR: Exactly, that's interesting, and was, I presume that your mum's family had come to terms with the fact that your dad was a policeman by this stage.

SM: Yeah, I don't think there was ever going to be, I mean, my grandad's still around at the age of ninety-three and he, yeah, he, I think they've just come to terms like, this is clearly the man she's going to be with, there's not a lot we can do, so yeah, and we, but like I say, we still, nobody knew what he did and it was kept that way for a long time because of those fears that, yeah, and he didn't drink, so it helped that he doesn't drink, so he wouldn't end up in a drunk situation telling people what he does.

FR: And he wouldn't be in pubs I guess, which is–

SM: No, no, which was a, one of the things when I was, moved back there and started going to pubs was that that was mum's biggest concern was that loose lips after a few pints, we'd mention, oh yeah, this, and fortunately I was never able, never in that situation where I told people what he did, but–

FR: It must be, it's quite difficult though to always have to have that sense in the back of your mind.

SM: Yeah, it–

FR: As a sort of a reserve or something that you can't quite–

SM: Yeah, cos you'd also hear people talking about, you know, the British police did this and I suppose also with things like someone talking about the Guildford bombing once, cos they said oh you live in Guildford, those fucking police, and I was like, yeah, but no, cos that was a while ago and my dad was working for the Guildford police after it, but you'd get people who would obviously have their opinions and you'd kind of have to just sit there and be like, yeah, **[00:20:00]** oh yeah, the police over there, fuck, bastards, yeah, just to, because like, it's not worth the risk of being, putting yourself or your family in a situation.

FR: Absolutely, especially if you've already got this kind of complicated, with the English accent and the–

SM: Yeah, I'll just stick up for you, the English guy over there is sticking up for the British police, shocker.

FR: [laughs] In the Gaelic club as well.

SM: Yeah, yeah [laughs], let's just, let's just not twist things here Sean, just–

FR: What, does your mum work?

SM: Yeah, she's currently a lecturer, well, is she a, but she works in Farnborough College, she's one of the heads of department or a lecturer of sorts, she, I think she deals with more kids who have learning needs rather than a particular subject, she's been doing that for quite a while and when she was in Northern Ireland, again, there was jobs that she was told she couldn't apply for cos, well, that's like–

FR: Cos she had the Irish accent, because she was from the South?

SM: Well, no, cos she was Catholic and they [indecipherable], and I think, I remember she, when she started applying for jobs they used to say to her well, you can go to Newry, but there are particular places in Newry you can't get a job, so again, that's something I don't particularly remember directly, it's more brought up on conversation at a later date like, you know, how come you ended up working in Newry, actually when I think about it, cos we

weren't going to get a job in certain places, and even I remember actually applying for a, I remember I worked for Blockbusters, it was called, no, it's called Vision Express over there.

FR: Yeah, yeah.

SM: Yeah, and I remember applying and just having one piece of paper that says please tick Catholic/Protestant.

FR: Ah ha.

SM: Why does that matter, I was like, did you not, I was like, and they were like, oh it's just for data and I'm like, but surely you'd want to know, what if I'm not either of those, and that being strange, and then, thinking then, I remember, then a week after that we, so I lived opposite from my auntie's and this fella came, moved in, I think he was an English fella also, and he's introduced himself to my auntie and blah, blah, blah, and she said now, well, what side of the fence are you on, he clearly didn't have a clue and he was like, what the fuck, and then they got down to the idea of what religion you are, and she said oh, he said well, I'm Jewish, and she went ah great, now are you a Catholic Jew or are you a Protestant Jew [laughs], he's like, the f-, what, and fortunately I think I was about sixteen, seventeen at the time and getting it, ah I kind of get where she's going with this now, but it was like, you're going to have to pick a side here for her [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Jewish isn't going to cut it.

SM: Yeah, you don't try and sit on the fence here, this isn't a thing.

FR: [laughs] That's wild.

SM: Yeah.

FR: So you said you lived in what you would call like, a nationalist bit of Armagh in the second stint.

SM: Yeah, the first stint we actually lived opposite the police station.

FR: Oh do you have any mem-, you would have been quite young, do you have memories of that?

SM: Yeah, but no, no, I've said that, the reason actually we eventually moved, that forced my dad's hand was, so if you look where Armagh police station is, it comes down, it's the bottom of the hill and it's fences all round it, still to this day, considering I work in a police station here and like, there's no fences round ours really.

FR: Yeah, it's true, I found that very strange when I first moved here.

SM: Yeah, but we lived, I mean, as in, I don't want to use the phrase stone's throw light-heartedly again, but it is, you can see it, it would be like that to here, and the main memory,

again, this has probably filled in the blanks, there are blanks filled in, so my cousin from, from Drogheda had come up to stay with us and must've been quite late at night cos it was around the Twelfth celebrations, soldiers came in and said everyone out because the IRA had left a van outside the police station, so we all had to leave the house in our pyjamas and walk [laughs], there's also, it's right next to the old female prison that's up there, in Armagh, which is at the top of the mall, so we lived kind of in between the police station and the jail, and I think it's used quite a lot for BBC document-, BBC shows now actually, but we were just told to get out and just ended up walking around. I remember, again, these are things I remember flashes and hearing bangs and the shooting and all that, and then eventually a cousin, a family, or sorry, an uncle actually ended up picking us up from the other side of town and taking us up to where our auntie lived, but yeah, I remember that, well, not remember, I was told, I remember, you know, having to wake up, why am I waking, why is a soldier walking with us, I don't understand this, this, and then my auntie never came back to Armagh after that, and I think my mum, who was from, obviously from the South, was like, I am not staying here, and I can remember people, you know, some friends occasionally coming over to visit from England and being like, why is that police station, cos it was so, it was such an eyesore from the front door, you could see this huge police station with guards.

FR: With the kind of barbed wire across and the–

SM: Yeah, and obviously when the armoured trucks come out they just, why is it, why's the, why's that armoured truck being, he had a little, you know, Vauxhall Astras over in England, just, why's that big armoured truck and, yeah, yeah.

FR: That must've been quite frightening.

SM: Yeah, I mean, again, it's one of those things I don't, I can remember bits, but memory plays with your–

FR: And it's always hard to figure out what you remember and what you've been told.

SM: Yeah, I mean, I kind of remember sitting very much on the, on the bed and being like, why am I getting up.

FR: In like, the middle of the night.

SM: Yeah, and with my other brother and being like, and then playing, you know, shut up, do as you're told, car backfiring, is it a car backfiring, but from what I also, would, mum tells a story of, cos my partner is, her dad's a British Army, so we got complete, and then my mum told the story, she said, you know, you know, Sean, one age, came to me saying oh mum, by the way, they're shooting again, because it had become apparently such a thing that I was, that at that stage you just become aware that they shoot and that's what they do, and probably just nonchalantly walked in the kitchen, yeah, by the way, mum they're outside shooting again, cos it was up at the police station and it was the Twelfth, and again, these are, I would have only been two or three at the time, so, but these apparently, it was to her, that's one of these things that convinced her we shouldn't stay here, he's so nonchalant to the fact–

FR: That you, that you were able to just describe it in this kind of–

SM: Yeah, they moved to, you know, Aldershot, home of the British Army like, yeah, yeah, yeah, you're not really helping me here mum, are you [laughs].

FR: [laughs] It's an identity crisis, it must've been, so when you moved you had a Northern Irish accent.

SM: Yeah, when I moved here, back to here at the age of six I had a very strong Irish accent, and even up until the current day, so obviously at police we talk on the radio and when I first joined, I suppose cos you get excited and nervous at the same time I would speak quite quickly and they said, and I had one of my sergeants say I can't understand a bloody word you say on that radio sometimes because you speak so quickly, because somehow I, and she said I, I, your accent sounds funny on the radio, so then I would have to make a concerted effort to not, to sound, I mean, I've been in the police now for six, seven years, to sound English, more so than I was, which is, again, I think it's one of those things, I mean, you wouldn't have asked anybody else to change their accent, but you're asking me to alter my accent, which I still kind of have to do now, which is, alright, stiff upper lip and try [laughs], and try and sound–

FR: Speak more slowly and speak–

SM: Yeah, which is strange because no one at home seems to have that issue, they are definitely the quickest, they speak far quicker at home.

FR: That was one of the biggest changes that I found when I moved to England, was that I had to speak much more slowly than I, than I naturally do, especially like, teaching or whatever, it's interesting, and do you remember that kind of early period of moving back to England?

SM: Yeah.

FR: On Al-, in Aldershot?

SM: Yeah, we lived in Aldershot and I went to school just about twenty minutes away in Guildford and the reason was cos mum wanted to find a Catholic school.

FR: Ah okay.

SM: So, you know, you have to go to Catholic school, really, still, but she never let that go, so it was always, I don't know whether she'd do that today, she's, you know, I think occasionally she drifts in and out, whether or not she regrets trying so hard to hold on to the Irish identity, cos I think especially with me more than my other two there was definitely times where I was like, what am I, and I would go so far one way to try and prove, you know, I am Irish, I mean, maybe that could be the reason why I went to university and did what I did and why during World Cups I would prominently, I would wear an Irish shirt and I

wouldn't care what everyone else was wearing, I am going to wear this. At university it was very clear, cos obviously I'd gone to university from Northern Ireland, and while everyone else was hanging up posters, I was hanging up tricolours and decoration and, I mean, oh no, this is me, this is what I am, it seemed cos, you know, I don't know, somewhere along the line, well, it's definitely my mum cos she was into politics and stuff like that, so that's, which it's, was, that was interesting that someone recently, cos in the most recent election someone mentioned, do you know, it was at work and I was talking away and they said do you know what, every Irish person I meet **[00:30:00]** cares about politics far more than anybody else, so I, that got me thinking right, am I only interested in politics, so I thought I was interested in politics, or is that because that's a cultural thing that we are more interested in pol-, maybe cos it's more effect on us, I don't know, but–

FR: You get a sense that politics has been kind of forced [laughs] on Northern Irish people at least.

SM: Yeah, because I suppose, yeah, it has more relevance I suppose to you, but, well, I remember, I do remember someone saying, very young in school, something along, you know, my dad, your dad shot my dad, because it was home of the British Army, so you think I'm going to school and coming across with this Northern Irish accent and I don't, probably it was a young kid who probably had heard something, oh there's Irish family and, you know, more than likely somebody in there is obviously family in the British Army or something, so I'm sure there was a crossroads, but that I remember more so than being told, no one told me that one, I remember that one cos it was me in school and me going what, have you met my dad, he doesn't even drink, he's not going around, but, and he worked for the British police also, mate, so, but yeah, I remember that early on in.

FR: That's complicated, that's a complicated thing.

SM: Yeah, it's like, okay, he probably didn't, but, I don't know, all these little things, they've kind of made me, and there was once in school, me asking why do I need to learn English when I'm Irish, and this was again, in school, when we'd first moved here, kind of I suppose you had, you're not aware actually, I've actually moved across a water, there's now, I'm in a different, you know, like, five or six, so I was six and I just, yeah, there is that, and what I've also found, from working, I work in Slough and what's interesting is, which when I relate this back to my parents is, if I meet a lot of people in Slough, whether they be Asian or African of some sort, they're very proud to tell you oh we are now British, I'm British, I'm a British citizen, no, I don't meet Irish people who've moved here who say oh yeah, I'm British, they, unless they obviously already were, and they would almost take an insult if you called them British, no, no, no, we're, they're still Irish, we're still Irish, whereas other immigrants from the colon-, from the Empire seem to be happy that they're British and we don't have that, and I've, I sound very, cos people tell you at work, they're like, oh I'm a British citizen, I have this, these rights and you're like, I don't know what rights, you're still breaking the law, mate [laughs], that doesn't matter what you think you are, whether you think claiming that makes anything, you're still breaking the law, never mind, but that always struck me, I'm like, cos of this, cos my mum went to elocution lessons when she was young, so she has a very soft Irish accent, so if anyone's ever mistaken her for being English she would take quite a umbrage to it and be like, no, I am fucking Irish, and I'm like, yeah, yeah, but other,

Asians and Africans and they're all very proud to be British and we don't have that, which is again confusing, I've never been able to put my finger on why, maybe for a longer period, I don't know.

FR: No, I don't know, but that's, it's really interesting, and your mum, it sounds, you said your mum was kind of quite political.

SM: Yeah, yeah, I mean, she's always, I mean, she's a huge history buff, which is probably again one of the reasons I did it, and my parents have nearly divorced over arguments about Michael Collins and de Valera, that's the only thing they ever came close to divorcing over was, to the point where they, they, my mum had this drawing done of de Valera and she hung it up and then my dad went out and got one done of Collins, and they now sit at the top of the stairs opposing each other for the rest of time and I just, that's visual history right there, and depending how bored I am, sometimes I like just to mess things up by bringing it up just to see them go at each other, cos I know they will and they still to this day will not let it go, you sold us out, yeah, whatever, he signed the Treaty, right, okay, we're going down this road, are we [laughs].

FR: It's still, it's still there.

SM: Oh it's still, yeah.

FR: And maybe it's the kind of centenaries of all of that happening in Ireland at the minute, and there are still arguments going on.

SM: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, and families on different sides, so it's, it makes sense.

SM: Yeah, I remember watching the Collins film with them, fucking hell.

FR: *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*?

SM: No, no, no, yeah, well, that one as well, but the actual Collins film with Neeson in.

FR: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

SM: Yeah, I mean, it wasn't particularly accurate in many ways, but I can remember him sit-, my dad getting, oh look at him, he's going for him, fuck them British, and my mum's going yeah, he's just cycling round, sleeping with women, isn't he, fucking bastard, Jesus, and then, you know the horrible scene in the Michael Collins film where they, they don't say de Valera did it, but they let, they show de Valera and it's like, yeah, see, he shot him, he had him killed, and it's like, did he, or is that just, no he, yeah that's, probably not, that's your man Jordan, what was his name, I can't remember the director now, but anyway, artistic liability there, freedom and, yeah, he's done that for effect, but, Simon Jordan I think it was.

FR: Neil Jordan.

SM: Neil Jordan, yeah, I think Simon Jordan's something else, but, Crystal Palace maybe, but yeah, so yeah, I can remember, that still gets to them.

FR: So there's still a kind of history.

SM: Yeah, still, and my mum would obviously only vote for one party, I mean, it doesn't, what's happening, you know, and it's the same with my dad, well, obviously back home, well, he votes SDLP, but he wouldn't ever con-, that's just the way he votes, you don't vote for the other side, doesn't matter how good economic policies may be, which obviously they're never going to be, but yeah, still very tribal politics, unlike here with the most recent election showing there isn't really that tribal politics anymore, I think in Ireland there is still, obviously with the Alliance–

FR: So your parents would both be Sinn Féin.

SM: No, they wouldn't be ever be Sinn, SDLP.

FR: SDLP, SDLP, okay.

SM: Yeah, oh well, Gerry Adams obviously is my grandad's local TD.

FR: Oh yeah.

SM: Well, there was obviously three of them and when my nan died about two or three years ago and we were having the wake, which again is a huge thing for people to understand, what, what, you mean you held them in the house for two or three days.

FR: Hmm, massive thing.

SM: And which is I, I suppose here and there, well, you go back, you'd always go back for funerals and you come here and you have a funeral here and you're like, why is it taking so long to bury this fella, but the local TD showed up, my nan died, cos, I can't remember which one did, but then someone said oh Gerry's going to come down as well, and my grandad said he will not cross that front door, and a very, no, that guy is not coming into my house.

FR: Wow.

SM: Which is strange, again, how you've got, so I can remember still, cos like, why is, sorry, cos up in the North you've got obviously two sides and then down here you've got the one side, but the one side doesn't like the side at the t-, up in North, which is from the same side, that doesn't make sense really, and then apparently I'm English, right, okay.

FR: [laughs] It's a lot, it's a lot to try and make sense of.

SM: Yeah, cos I was always called that as well, you'd go out, you're still a Brit.

FR: A Brit.

SM: Yeah.

FR: In the North.

SM: Yeah, I was always a Brit in the North.

FR: Do you think after a while, so primary school in England, you've still got a kind of a Northern Irish accent, these fragmentary memories of things like your dad shot my dad, but by the time you were in secondary school had your accent kind of settled into a more–?

SM: Yeah, it had, it had to, it's not probably too dissimilar to what it was, what it is now, and having obviously gone through secondary school I moved areas and I only knew two or three people, but that's nothing to do with being Irish, that was just, and then, again, it was, had to be another Catholic school, it was called All Hallows and the headteacher and the deputy head were both Irish.

FR: Well, I was going to, yeah, so I was going to ask were there other Irish kind of connections at these Catholic schools?

SM: Yeah, yeah, they were both, one of them actually played for Down for a couple of years, so there was always that, you have to go somewhere where, and then mum was, why, you know, why are you like the way you are, Jesus Christ woman, you say [laughs]. I think it was one of the only other schools that had a Gaelic team, I remember playing, joining a Gaelic team, thinking who are we actually going to play against, it was great I guess, but who are we playing against, but yeah, I was getting another, had to be an Irish connection, you have to go there, but by that stage I had, yeah, I didn't, there wasn't, I don't remember being, other than football, I don't remember there being the hostility anymore, despite still going to a school, or going to a school nearer Aldershot, and there were a lot of people whose family were army, by the time I hit sort of eleven, twelve and fourteen, I don't really remember there being any hostility towards me, I think there definitely, it had plateaued greatly. In fairness, actually being in England, I don't, other than a lot of jokes which are still made to this day, it seems like we're one of the only protected groups that you can still make jokes at openly.

FR: Yeah, Irish jokes.

SM: Yeah, cos the last three years in my job I've, the secret Santa, I've got a bag of potatoes one year, I got a Guinness and I got gold coins and lucky charms, and you kind of said, sitting, to my friend, next to my friend Bubba who's, who is saying he lives in south, in south London, black guy, I was like, no one's got him fried chicken, so why is this okay to give me potatoes, take it in good humour and I just, but other than ribbing like that, and I do appreciate they are, they're not trying to be, cos we've been a team for six years and I, I know what they're like and I'm not, but other than that really I've never, it's always been

the being in Northern Ireland that's the tension, it's never really been here. I mean, it may be strange that my mum's, dad, all their friends seem to be Irish in one way or another.

FR: In England?

SM: Yeah, in England, which is always, **[00:40:00]** yeah, one way or another they always seem to end up having Irish friends, don't know how it works.

FR: That's interesting.

SM: It's almost like they seek them out, and there wasn't even Facebook back then, so how they seeked out all these Irish people.

FR: And so you played a bit of Gaelic in London, sorry, not in London, in England I meant to say.

SM: Yeah.

FR: What about the Catholic church, so Catholic schools, but was church–?

SM: Yeah, yeah, it was very much still the Catholic church up until, I don't know what age, yeah, but most recent, I mean, I've, I'd say I'm an agnostic Catholic, a bit like you said, is how I would deem myself. I suppose the whole church, you know, the outcome into a couple of years ago, when you had *Spotlight* and all that, I mean, I've vague memories of being sent when I was younger, go to the church, if you'd done something wrong go and speak to the father about it, but looking back on it, you kept sending me up there [laughs], so that's probably affected, you know, you can't help but think sometimes when habit affects your belief and, but even like, I, cos we'd moved here sort of less than a year now, and at Christmas I, both me and my partner were off and she's, has no religious bones in her body, but I was like, I have to find a Catholic church and I had to go to mass at Christmas and at Easter, so we went and found one in, up the road in Ascot there, I don't know why, I couldn't tell you why, I was like, I need to, I just have to and she was like, well, you don't go to church, and I'm like, yeah, but at Christmas and Easter I just, I don't know, no, she says you don't really believe, I know, I just have to, don't ask me why, because I think up until you gain some type of freedom it's, I think it must have been sixteen that I was finally allowed to not go to church on a Sunday.

FR: But your parents would have gone.

SM: My mum would, my dad won't, my dad's, nah, my mum still fears for her soul if she misses a couple of weeks.

FR: Okay, and then, so, back to Armagh at sixteen, initially, it's interesting you were saying initially you had kind of nationalist friends or you would have drank in kind of nationalist bars and stuff, and then that kind of soured.

SM: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, and then more unionist friends including Nigel Dodds's cousin, which is quite something–

SM: Nigel Dodds's, yeah, nephew, sorry, yeah.

FR: Or nephew, and what was school like, or Tech, you were at the, which was mixed boys and girls and mixed Protestant and Catholic?

SM: Yeah, well, from little things like you can't wear your football shirt, why can't I wear my football shirt, well, I mean, I was a Man United fan.

FR: Yeah, that's right, I remember you saying.

SM: I was like, I've, I had Celtic jerseys which were bought for me, no one ever, I never bought a Celtic shirt, but I remember school telling me you can't wear Man United shirts, you can't wear any football shirts, or no sports shirts, and I was like, I'm a sixteen-year-old boy who plays football, I'm like, and it could, I struggled to get my head around it and it, I think they, they, you know, instead of just saying no Celtic or Rangers, obviously we're just going to have no shirts.

FR: A blanket ban, yeah, and there is sometimes an idea that the English team that you support can also signify–

SM: Well, yeah.

FR: Although that's a little bit hazy, but people do sometimes say that.

SM: Yeah, but then again some of the United fan groups, I remember watching something about how it is actually, was a unity thing because there was so many United fans from both sides, and the same with Liverpool.

FR: Makes sense, yeah.

SM: I think Liverpool with the whole 'You'll Never Walk Alone' are probably more likely or, you know, same as, sharing songs with Celtic might be a bit more, but with United particularly, there's, I've never felt that there's anything like that, but also I remember sitting down next to a guy called Fraser and him saying once something about, you know, he was talking away and telling me how I live in England, blah, blah, blah, and he says oh have you figured out which, what side people are on yet, and I said I don't know, occasionally if you tell me a name I can figure it out, he said well, just look at them and you can tell, and I went, no you can't, this was a law class and I remember him pointing going this is again, quite an early week like, Catholic, Catholic, Protestant, Catholic, and I was like, how are you doing this, he was like, you just tell, how do you just tell, this isn't like it's apartheid South Africa, it's not where it's clearly you're black, you're white, you're, but he could, and then I mentioned this to my dad and he went yeah, and when you'd go out on polling day he'd

walk past and say that's a Protestant, that's a Catholic, but how are you doing this, I don't know how you do this, I still can't figure it out.

FR: It must be really strange to be suddenly in this kind of system and be kind of caught up in the system where people do it to you, but you're not quite yet, you kind of understand it, but you're not, or you kind of intellectually understand it, but you don't.

SM: Yeah, and coming from, although I went to a Catholic school here, it was, we were Catholic overarching, but we've kind of got everything in here, because there was more a catchment area, it's, you know, we'll say this is a Catholic school with Catholic, to then go to area where no, there is just, there is one black guy in this town, we all know him cos he's the black guy in town, to, and everyone is either Catholic or Protestant, there's no, nothing else, so you've gone from quite a multicultural area to, from the outside yes, we all look the same and we're all Christians, but no, we're not, it is quite a, I suppose you, yeah, it's quite a switch to, I've never, to think, I've never thought about race or my religion really, for ten years in England, it never really, I never had to be that concerned to, now I need to think about who I am and what I am, and what am I actually, that, that, so I would say around that period was probably when I'm like, what am I, cos no one likes me here, I need to pick a side [laughs].

FR: Oh it's difficult. Did you play Gaelic in Armagh?

SM: No, that wasn't, I mean–

FR: Or football, or anything?

SM: No.

FR: Soccer or anything, well, whatever you played–

SM: Yeah, no, I didn't. I briefly looked into it and I, it just was, it was something I didn't think I'd feel comfortable doing because you settle in and I remember finding at school it's difficult enough to, yeah, it was just something I just didn't do.

FR: No, I can understand, in light of the kind of confusing, yeah, and any other kind of social memories from that time?

SM: Other than the, you know, bars and I suppose dating as well was strange.

FR: Yeah, that's interesting.

SM: Cos again it hadn't really occurred to me that that could be an issue, and I remember, her name was Mairéad, was it, yeah, I think, meeting a very pretty girl, this is great, obviously drinking over there is like, it's, whereas here the pubs are always quite strict, I'm like, wow, I'm in a pub at sixteen and no one's even asked.

FR: Nobody cares.

SM: No one gives a shite. But I remember her, I think she'd obviously told her parents I'm dating this guy called Sean and that was fine, and I walked, said hello, how are you, nice to meet you and [clicks fingers] it was just like that, it was like an instant reaction, wait a minute, why didn't you tell us, can we have a word, and then I was, then they assumed, they took her to a side room and had a word with her and just was tense, they clearly didn't like the fact that I was, that I was English, and I thought well, yes, I'm technically English, but no I'm not actually English, but that wasn't, it was the accent, it was then, where are you from, oh I live just down the road there, no, well, no, no, no, you're not from here, okay, I'm not from here, I lived in England for the last ten years, this is why my accent is like this, where were you born, okay, I was technically born over there, well, ah so then no you're not, you're not here, and then one girl I did date for a long period, her dad was, what is the league where they try, the Irish, tried to get Gaelic back as a national language–

FR: Aye, the, I know what you mean.

SM: Yeah, he was into that and then I started dating him, dating her, sorry, not him, no, he'd come home drunk and start shouting British soldier chants at me and I'm like, this is, this is ridiculous, and then also if people spoke to me, was like, because I was such into history and ended up, you'd talk to people who would just call me British and I'm like, I can, I know more about this place than you do probably, but I'm still British, okay, and British soldier this and, so there was, yeah, there was definitely, you're a Brit, not you're English, you're a Brit, which is strange.

FR: Yeah, that is strange.

SM: Yeah, cos if you were going to call me English I'd be like, yeah, I can kind of get that a little bit cos, you know, I sound English, but you're a Brit.

FR: A Brit, specifically.

SM: There's something to, you, you Brit, you British soldier.

FR: It's got, yeah, it's got a kind of political resonance that like, English doesn't have.

SM: Yeah, English is softer almost, you know, but Brit sounds more like the colony, the colonising power.

FR: Yeah.

SM: So yeah, there was a lot, jobs, yeah, certain jobs.

FR: So you worked in, you mentioned–

SM: Oh yeah, I worked in Xtravision.

FR: Xtravision, that is what it was called, I've not thought of that for years.

SM: No, you know, cos obviously it's, and one of the guys I worked with, he was the, well, he was the only Asian guy, he was initially of Indian descent, and we, but he was Protestant cos obviously I'm assuming, from, if I remember correctly his dad obviously had joined the British Army from, and so he'd gone down that route and we were sitting–

FR: Interesting.

SM: Yeah, but he had a very thick Northern Irish accent, but **[00:50:00]** was Indian and at the time that's quite, but I remember Deo, we're about the same age, and him, we were both talking, cos he was allowed extra days off, paid, and I was like, why can't, it was around Twelfth, and I was like, why can't I have that off, well, cos you're not Cath-, cos you're Catholic, I'm like, but he's paid to be off and I'm having to work, this doesn't make sense, yeah, but you can't have it cos you, right, that doesn't make sense, but little things like that, no, you can't have that day off, and again, if I'd been older, I'd have been like, that's illegal, you know you can't do that, right, but at that stage you were kind of just, or it'd go why do you want the day off, well, cos I want the day off, well, why are you going to go. I remember saying to my mum about it well, this is unfair, just shut up and go along with it because if you start, I think she was like, if I start trying that I want that day off too like, are you one of them, that type of, but also it was weird, I remember him, me and him talking about history very briefly once and he was under the illusion that the British Army came over to help the Irish during the Famine and what are you talking about, we came, and we brought you potatoes cos you were starving, no, you didn't, yeah, we did, that's what the Famine was, you guys were starving, we brought you potatoes, what [laughs], he was like, this is what we learnt in school, did you, is that why there's still an issue, if that's what you're being taught, that is not, oh Jesus.

FR: [laughs] That's a good misreading of the Famine.

SM: I was like, oh maybe that's why you were, we're having, we're worlds apart, so you think that, wait, we came over here and we gave you potatoes and you hate us, why do you hate us for coming to try and solve your issue, which would make a little bit of sense why still to this day, if that's what they're all, if what everybody in a Protestant school is taught, then maybe that's–

FR: You can see why they think that's very unfair.

SM: Yeah, why do you dislike us.

FR: [laughs] Did you have any other jobs, other than Xtravision?

SM: I, yeah, I worked in Burger King. I worked in a bar very briefly, again, I think I'm putting in an application in, just, here's a piece of paper, name's Sean, it's fine, give him a job, then cos I worked in one of the bars, did my first shift, I didn't even get halfway through and he told me to go home, and I'm like, what.

FR: That's interesting.

SM: It was a Catholic pub, but I'm good, I'm okay, I can pull pints and friendly and getting, everyone seemed to be friendly to me, but you've told me to go home halfway, it's just not going to work out, mate, why, just, just, mate, this, I don't think you're the right fit, right, okay, I'm going to go home, instead of asking, I can figure out why, I'm assuming you saw Sean, you saw the fact that I'd worked in bars here previously, just figured, yeah, we'll give him a go, no, just go home, here's twenty quid mate, just go home.

FR: Would you never have said to people, you know, my dad is from Armagh, do you see what I mean, as a kind of like, a, like, my dad is from Armagh, this is his name, this is the street that he grew up on or whatever, do you see what I mean?

SM: Yeah, no, not in those situations. I kind of figured when it got to a stage if people were going to say you're British, go home, why am I arguing with this person, and one, I think also because my grandad owned quite a large haulage company and on the side of his trucks there was Murray, if I said Murray, they very quickly, they knew.

FR: I can picture the trucks actually, I think I've seen them.

SM: Yeah, so they were like, well, that's, so yeah, that's Murray, that's who he is, but the English thing then sometimes I think threw them because, because my dad, not mentioned, nobody knew where my dad had gone because, so I think there was always this–

FR: That makes it a bit more complicated.

SM: Yeah, like, okay, well, yeah, he's not, well, yeah, so yeah, your accent, you're from that family, but, so I, you know, if I'd mentioned, you know, my dad's this, but I always figured if people were just calling me a Brit I can sit here and I can argue that this is my family, but they don't care, they just hear the accent and they, and there's no, maybe that's why it was easier to be friends with unionists because, fine, you can be British, that's okay, we don't care, maybe they perceive me British too, I don't know.

FR: But just didn't consider it to be an issue.

SM: No, if you're British then that's fine, we don't really care, whereas I think definitely with the nationalist side, yeah.

FR: It was an issue.

SM: I can, yeah, I can, you can say you're English, but you can say, you know, so you can say that you've had this family tree of, you know, you've lived here all your–

FR: However many years.

SM: Yeah, this is one, this is a period of ten years that we, they haven't lived here that's, I've formed this and, but no, you're not, you're not, now stay over there.

FR: Do you think your siblings had similar experiences?

SM: I, they, they might have had, I know definitely my middle brother, cos he moved, so me, so me would have been, he would have been about ten, twelve, and because he obviously he, there were two things, his name was Ross, which is a Protestant name, he doesn't have the same interest in history that I did and I do remember him having quite a, and he went to an all-Catholic school, boys' school, to the grammar, so his probably was even more of a sharp, short sharp, no, you're not, but I think he, he, I think because he was there for a longer period and maybe cos the boys were younger, year ten and year twelve, and that he seemed to just, I remember him initially having a lot of issues, but I think just over time it disappeared.

FR: You're that little bit younger, it's maybe a little bit easier.

SM: Yeah, and then my youngest one, Stiofán, so he would have been six when we went there and again, I don't ever remember him having any issues initially cos kids are kids, but what was interesting, do you remember there was like, a period where everyone was wearing those little rubber bands.

FR: Different things or–

SM: Different meanings for different charities.

FR: Yes, I do, Lance Armstrong and stuff.

SM: Yeah, so this was my brother Stiofán, who was a huge Man United fan all his life, and now he wore nothing but Celtic jerseys, that was all he wore, and he had one of these like, there was a Celtic one of some sort and he'd an anti-racism one, and he, you could tell when he, as he would speak about things, he was developing a hatred or a dislike or a distrust of Protestants. I was like, do you know you were born in England, was I, yeah, oh yeah. He was being, I thought, up until, cos it was more about, what, so he, he stayed there till about ten or eleven, maybe even older, but I thought he was losing sight that, well, you were, you were born in England, theoretically, and yes, you are Irish, but you're, you're becoming to, you're becoming a bit of a bigot without knowing it, in fairness he didn't know, he's just six, but you can see that kind of change from you're a Man United fan, and I know this is a very simple way to view football, but I was like, you now, you've just changed your teams and you're changing your teams because you've, people are just, other family members are buying you Celtic shirts, and my dad was never a huge Celtic fan, never just, again, but to me, although that was a very visual thing, he's now stopped wearing all his Man United shirts, he's wearing Celtic shirts, you know, you could tell, there was the occasional lines that would slip out like, where did you learn the word hun from, where did you learn that.

FR: Okay, yeah.

SM: Oh my friends and their, they, but where have you learnt that, that's, that's, and why, little things like that like, where has that slipped out from, and you've learnt that because

unfortunately you're now in a very insular group, there is, and you know, you just see that as the other side of town, but that was–

FR: That's interesting, it's the effects of going to that kind of school and having friends, nationalist, kind of Catholic friends, huh, okay, and then, when you were eighteen did you, you just, what happened, did you, so you left Tech?

SM: Yeah, I went to university, first in Chichester, which is–

FR: Not far from–

SM: Brighton, yeah. It was smallest university in the UK.

FR: Why Chichester?

SM: Well, initially my parents had said, and this is 2005 actually, they'd said, my dad had been offered a job back here again, to work back with the police, so he said 2005, he was like, right, you know what, if you're going, we're, you know, we're going to go back to England and I was like, right, I will pick universities all within an hour of Guildford.

FR: Of Guildford, so he was going to move back to Guilford?

SM: Yeah, cos whereas loads of people wanted to be as far away from their parents, I've always had a good relationship and I, still to this day, I won't move too far from them because my mum gets quite, if I even mention the idea, so I picked that.

FR: How did your mum feel about moving back to England if she'd been, she was quite homesick the first time you said?

SM: Yeah, but she then I think, she'd spent ten years working here and had grew to love leafy Surrey and, you know, they were very comfortable and so she was, she was, she was desperate to move back to England, however, my grandma got quite ill like, in the last six months, so, to the point where they, we, they rented the house out here, so we'd all moved back and I'd picked all these universities, but because of my gran, and then the lorry had pulled up here and my mum just broke down, I have to go back to Ireland cos she's too sick, so then they moved back to Ire-, and I was like, well, I've just picked all my universities for this reason and now you're going to be in Ireland and, great, so now it became, and because, cos, you know, I, you know, I get on, I'm close to my family, I would go home then again, I keep calling it home, which is–

FR: Ah yeah, that's interesting.

SM: I keep, I would go back every half-term, Easter, Christmas and summer holidays, so I'd spend all my time, you know, the four months break, off university back in Ireland, back in Northern Ireland, working there, which was again ironic **[01:00:00]** cos I went back to university and I was Irish again, cos the voice, to them it's, back in Ireland it's an English

accent, over here it's an English accent with an Irish twing, twang, so that's what I became once again at university, I was like, right, I'm back to being Irish.

FR: And it was interesting, I think you said to me earlier that when you went to university you were, you would've had, it sounded like you would've had a kind of a slightly nationalist political position.

SM: Yeah, yeah, it would, it definitely–

FR: With the tricolour and stuff like that.

SM: Yeah, and that was, oh my grandma gave me that and my grandma gave me the Declar–

FR: The 1916 Declaration.

SM: Yeah, and I was like, well, okay, and because I'd obviously become very interested in history at the time, and that whole who are you, and you're trying to, it was weird cos even though I remember people, you know, calling me Brit, I seemed to be trying harder to be Irish, so that was, yeah, trying to prove, no, prove my self-worth like, well, self-worth, prove what I am, but yeah, then when I went back to Ireland, back to the university in Chichester I was like, oh this is easy, cos my name's Sean they just assume I'm Irish, no one questions.

FR: No one's calling you a Brit, right?

SM: No one's calling me a Brit, I'm Irish again, that is nice, to the point where I almost prefer being here now because I'm Irish here and I like being Irish.

FR: That's really interesting.

SM: But I don't like being in, I don't like going back there cos they call me Brit.

FR: Yeah, I see what you mean.

SM: So I'd rather be an Irishman in England than an Englishman in Ireland, so we're, if we're Northern Ireland, cos I think down south it would be easier, but yeah.

FR: So you would've gone back, you were in Chichester, what did you study?

SM: History.

FR: History, and you would've gone back sort of summers, half-terms, stuff like that.

SM: Yeah.

FR: And worked or–

SM: Yeah, worked, I was always, you know, one of those awkward things where you can't tell people, yeah, I'm back here, oh we'll give you a job, for how long, oh no I'm not going back to university, no, no, no, I'm not, this is going to be my full-time job and you'd do four months and be like, yeah, changed my mind, I'm going back to university.

FR: [laughs] I remember it very well, I remember it very well, I did the same thing.

SM: [laughs] You lied through your teeth just to get a job for four months.

FR: What kind of jobs did you do?

SM: I did a lot of, well, all sorts, from old folks homes to working, could never get a bar job, was the one thing that always went, to working in Argos, I worked in a call centre very briefly, just hated that, that was nothing to do with anything, I just didn't want to do that, yeah, so it was the old folks home, being a cleaner and then working in Argos, so, but they were all, none of them were, I think Argos cos it was, I found it easier to apply for a job, oh and Sainsbury's as well, they were all multinational companies, which is easier I thought to apply to rather than local.

FR: Rather than trying to make friends with a local business, which has got a slightly different–

SM: Yeah, which all had leanings one way or another, but those weren't, but it was, I do remember going I just kind of want to get back to uni because you kind of forget about it, you forget about it for a couple of months, that these things are issues, and then you come back and the first day you, so you're British, oh yeah, this is happening again, isn't it, oh yeah, if I'm going out I have to change my name, my name can't be Sean here, my name has to be David or Steven or–

FR: If you're in a more Protestant unionist–

SM: Yeah, so I remember like, every time it'd come flooding back, yeah, have to change my name, okay, right, I can't be, have, I can't have thoughts and opinions here.

FR: Or you've got to think twice before you–

SM: Yeah, you've got to be quite docile and be like, yeah, okay, whenever your opinion is I'm going to agree with that because it's just easier than you, than me saying well, maybe. Even on anything like, thinking back to it, you talk away to anybody, you could have, you could have views on completely anything, be it comedians or something and if your view was different, it was like, ah it's probably cos you're British, it's like, no, no, it's not, it's cos I, it's cos my mind, I like different things, I like the colour blue maybe, it's not because I'm British, you know, but I do remember that actually, kind of like, fuss about this or that, people would say a lot of the time, probably cos you're a Brit, yeah, what.

FR: That must be frustrating.

SM: Yeah, yeah, cos I remember ordering, I didn't like Harp lager, I still don't like Harp lager, it's cheap.

FR: Ah it's bad lager [laughs].

SM: Yeah, and we're on a night out, want a round, yeah, what do you want, oh I can't remember what I'd ordered, but it wasn't Harp, and I went not Harp, oh that's probably cos you're a Brit, isn't it, no, it's just nasty beer, it's just horrible, no, I don't want that.

FR: It's so frustrating, yeah.

SM: Yeah, it's like, you know, it's just–

FR: And then, so you're doing history at Chichester. I've been to Chichester once I think. I suppose I think of it as like, the most English place in the world.

SM: Yeah, lovely [laughs].

FR: Yeah, it's got a cathedral, yeah.

SM: Yeah, it's very, very, there are four roads, North Street, West Street, four roads in town, yeah.

FR: And what did you make, well, how, did you enjoy university there?

SM: Yeah, I do, I enjoyed it a lot, but what was strange, I am actually, I fell out with all, well, not fallen out, I just lost contact as soon as I left because then it went the other way a little bit, when not, I was still Irish there, but I remember a few people had saying oh they wouldn't really let black people date their daughters or their sisters, and I'm like, what, oh well, you know, because that was again very English, and it was strange.

FR: Kind of English, insular, small town.

SM: Yeah, and I just, I kind of thought, because for a while I was in the university bubble where there is just a bit more, I suppose a bit more liberal in one sense, but, and then this kind of, the friends like, never questioning that, I'm like, why is, why is no one questioning this point, I was like, wait a minute, and then when we left university again I'm like, I consider myself, maybe I'm not English like you, so are you saying that you wouldn't let me, no, no, it's okay for you like, what, this isn't making sense to me, and I suppose almost, though I thought I'd come from there, this is going, I've been to Guild-, you know, I'd lived Guildford, which was and still is a very, well, far more open-minded place than Chichester, and I thought well, there are places then, even in England where still, you know.

FR: There's a similar kind of exclusion or a similar–

SM: Yeah, maybe it's just a little bit, I suppose it's more polished because it sounds, softer accents and slightly more educated and wealthy, whereas I suppose in Northern Ireland

unfortunately the wealth isn't there and it's harder to cover up these things, but yeah, so I've lost contact with pretty much all of the friends from university [indecipherable] because it was just, but it was one social gathering, I thought this is, cos at the time I was actually working for the Labour Party and I was like, I can't, yeah, I need to, this isn't something I can continue to do because, a lot of those folk, that was my identity, you know, maybe if I considered myself English, but I didn't, I considered myself Irish still, so you're saying that people who aren't like you can't date your family members. I'm not like you, am I, am I like you, that type of, again, in my head I'm like, what am I type of, yeah, so that, yeah, I remember that.

FR: And so you were working for the Labour Party?

SM: Well, I did an internship and then in the last, this is in 2010, and then I ended up working for them in the run up to the election, getting paid absolutely nothing, but they still–

FR: 2010 election, yeah.

SM: Yeah, and our candidate lost in Reading West, was it West, yeah it would've been Reading West, so I lost my job with that and ended up working in the House of Lords for a cross-bench peer.

FR: Ah as a researcher or as a–

SM: Initially it was, it was, I think it was a just quote-unquote project manager, which was just I think a very vague term to, I'm going to call you at eleven o'clock at night because I've decided to go to Australia tomorrow, can you sort things out, that, so I'm like, I'm not–

FR: A fixer.

SM: Yeah, just, you're just going to call me because you want to do something and, which again the Irish thing came up in that when I was going for my interviews, and again they went through my dissertations, what are your views.

FR: What was your, so I know we talked I think before we were recording [laughs] about your MA dissertation, but did you also do something Irish for your BA?

SM: No, my BA was the, a comparison of how fascism and communism are portrayed in the media, two very different, it sparked from the idea of watching an episode of *Friends* actually, when Rachel called Chandler a fascist, and I was like, what, that's nothing to do with fascism, what are you, just something to do with, about Monica's boobs, and that's kind of when you look into it I always found that despite communism having as many issues as fascism it doesn't really seem to get the barbaric portrayal in the media as fascism is.

FR: It doesn't have, it's not, doesn't have the same kind of shorthand.

SM: No, no, yeah, communism is just oh it's just an economic way of thinking, and you're like, yes, yeah, if you, but obviously fascism, no, no, no, that's death to everybody who's not you, isn't it, yeah, okay, so that was, that was my–

FR: And then did you, did you do your MA after the BA directly?

SM: Yeah, I was straight up to Manchester.

FR: Straight up to Manchester.

SM: Yeah.

FR: How did you find that? There's quite a big Irish kind of community in Manchester I suppose, compared to Chichester I would say, anyway.

SM: Yeah, and I gue-, Manchester I really, I really enjoyed, and I went up to Manchester and then to come fo-, one of the people I again started associating with was a guy I'd known from Armagh called Dave who was a unionist or, well, he, as he put it, he said I don't really give a crap about it, he was a unionist by birth, but he didn't care one way or another, so I then became friendly with him and, you know, more of his friends, some were Irish, some weren't, cos he'd been to university **[01:10:00]** there for the three years, so, but there was, there were more Irish pubs up there and it was, yeah, I think Waxy O'Connor's was quite a huge one up there and, yeah, that was a brilliant pub and, but I was also living with my Irish girlfriend, who, we'd, who I'd stayed dating for the three years over university.

FR: Was she from Armagh?

SM: She was from Armagh, yeah, and I'd met her like, a month before I went off to university and considered this is just going to be a month thing cos I'm going to university, well, I'll never see you again, and then my parents moved back and I was like, actually I'm going to be coming back fairly regularly now, so we just lasted three years, but–

FR: And then she moved with you to Manchester?

SM: She, well, she moved to Manchester, I think that, I don't, I can't honestly say whether or not she would've done that had I not been living there, but she, cos she was a year younger, so she went to university a year after me and she picked Manchester, I don't–

FR: Oh I see, okay.

SM: Yeah, and so then I've, but when I finished mine I went well, if I'm going to do a postgraduate anywhere I might as well do it up in Manchester. I can't tell whether or not she moved there because of me, I don't know, she might've done because there were quite a lot of Irish girls over there it seemed.

FR: Yeah, no, I think so, yeah.

SM: Yeah, and even from Armagh that you, you'd meet people who were also from Armagh, an unfortunate incident, I bumped into someone who dated my uncle when he was younger and she seemed to hate him, and I was like, how's this my issue, you know, I got a lecture for my uncle being a dick and I'm like, okay, probably, yeah.

FR: It's the perils of having a large Irish community I guess.

SM: Yeah, they–

FR: It's not all positives.

SM: Yeah, but what was interesting, they didn't, when I talked about it with them, you know, that my dad had been in the police, they never seemed to have, the Irish people who moved didn't seem to, at least I didn't find it, I could be wrong, but they didn't seem to carry, carry the scepticism that people back in Ireland used to have, it seemed like if you got out, but none of them have actually ever, none of the Irish friends that I now know who have moved here, different variations being Leeds and London and Manchester, none of them have gone back. I don't, actually no, the only one who did go back was the girl I dated, who I broke up with and she went back.

FR: She went back to Armagh?

SM: Yeah, I don't know anything after that, but yeah, yeah, none of them have gone back, they're all–

FR: Everyone stayed, yeah, which I guess maybe that says something about the way that they think about Ireland or think about politics or whatever.

SM: Yeah.

FR: So you said, I think before we were recording, that your MA was about Sinn Féin.

SM: Yeah.

FR: Which is interesting, so did you choose that before you applied or was it something that–?

SM: Yeah, it was, no, I didn't choose it before I applied, what, one of the topics we covered was Margaret Thatcher and I'd never, I'd known Margaret Thatcher and I'd known the Conservative Party, but I just found it was an incredibly interesting story, Margaret Thatcher, and then we also did Gandhi at the same time.

FR: Wow [laughs].

SM: So they were the two, and obviously with Thatcher I got quite into the whole '84 bombing, the hotel, and, I mean, you're also reading about Gandhi at the same time and there's this com-, not to draw comparisons between Indian independence and Irish

independence, but there's a guy in a towel who walked around preaching non-violence and yes, India has a huge resource, but that non-aggressive thing seems to work, and then we've got, you've got us on the other hand and, who aren't really, you'd the civil march, but you'd still got the IRA, and so when you come into, initially I wanted to do stuff on Robert Kennedy's assassination, but, but it actually wasn't that easy to do.

FR: From England I guess.

SM: Yeah, I mean, it, it seemed to be like, if there was anything else to discover it was done, so I ended up just, because it was just reading a lot of politics and you find your own political feet up there and I was getting interested in Labour and then, and then like, I questioned, why did I ever vote for SDLP and Sinn Féin and then you, well, you just did it because you were told to do it [laughs]. Sinn Féin once knocked on the door actually and one of them said have you voted, yeah, do you want to vote again, no, I'm alright. Mum, there's a fella here asking if we want to vote again, can I close the door, yeah, okay, I don't know what's going on there.

FR: You hear those, you hear those stories though.

SM: Yeah, you just think, I'm not going to ask questions about that, but yeah, then I started looking on like, you know, Sinn Féin had gone kind of, obviously they went through their socialist phase in the seventies and they still were claiming to be quite left wing and I was like, well, are they, so that's kind of what led me into, to that and reading far too many books about Sinn Féin I never gave a damn about in the end, but, they were, whether I'd call them socialist now is slightly different or even–

FR: Well, it's interesting, I was just thinking as you were talking, they have, at least, especially in the South, tried to kind of pivot again into an ostensibly kind of socialist or at least kind of left party.

SM: Yeah, cos, well, in the North I suppose it's a little bit easier to appear that because when on the other side you've got the DUP and the UUP, who were so, maybe not in economic terms, but in progressive things such as gay marriage and abortion it's easy to like, yeah, we can appear left wing cos we just don't have to be that, it's quite easy, but economic policies, I, well, the other response was sort of James Connolly's, well, he was the one who first got me interested in this type of stuff when I started reading about him, and Irish isn't, Irish isn't, Irish nationality and socialism is a hard mix, so I don't know. I mean, you read a lot of their economic policies, it's kind of, but I think I remember reading once they were talking about trying to nationalise the rail service and I'm like, there isn't really a rail service in Ireland to–

FR: To nationalise [laughs].

SM: Yeah, it was, but there was nothing overarching really that, it was just them saying we're, we're a socialist, a democratic socialist party, and thinking you're not really, you're just whatever takes your fancy that day.

FR: Yeah, that's really interesting, and so you did this dissertation and you were living in Manchester and then, are your parents still in Armagh at this stage?

SM: Yeah, they moved, no, they're not, sorry, they're not. They moved down, no, they moved back in 2008, so the year I moved to Manchester they moved back to, because my nan's health had stabilised at this stage and I think my brother was looking to stay in Northern Ireland to do his degree, and I think my mum had reached her end of the situation in Northern Ireland and I think she just wanted out, and I think she was concerned that if she stayed in Northern Ireland then my brother Ross would stay in Northern Ireland, and she didn't want him to stay in Northern Ireland.

FR: That's interesting.

SM: So she moved back to Guildford and he went to Guildford University, to Surrey, or Surrey University, as it were. I think he was, that was kind of a forced like, well, we'll contribute, but not if you stay here.

FR: Hmm, why do you think they were so keen, just because jobs or–?

SM: I, yeah, I don't know if it was jobs, I don't think my mum ever fully felt comfortable in Northern Ireland. I think the reason she was there was because it was easy to get across back to Dundalk, but I don't think she ever fully, I think she was also tarnished with the Free Stater–

FR: Sure, you're also not quite from–

SM: Yeah, yeah, you sold us out. I don't think it was quite the same thing I got, but she got her own, you know, Free Stater and remarks of one sort or another, you're not really from here and it's like, it's twenty minutes down the road, across that border, but you're not here, it's there, it's, and I just think she thought, I don't want, I don't want them growing up, I've sampled life in the south of England and Surrey in a fairly progressive area, and no one really gives two shits and, I mean, granted you have to lock your front doors cos there's nowhere near the community here.

FR: Mmm, that's a big change.

SM: Yeah, there's, there's, there isn't the, yeah, there just isn't, I mean, even where we lived, and at that stage we'd been living there for, you know, ten years before we first moved, kind, we like, we kind of know the neighbours, my parents have now been there since 2008, they know them by name and hi, how are you, but it's nowhere near a communal atmosphere, although when we lived in Armagh I knew everyone in the block and I would socialise–

FR: People are in and out of each other's houses and–

SM: The back door was never locked, the front door was never locked, but no one used the front door, no one ever uses the front door also, I find.

FR: That's, that is true, that is true, that is a strange thing. What, they say weddings and, weddings and funerals are the only times you should use the front door, so like, you, you're to carry your partner in through the front door, and you can carry a coffin–

SM: Carry it back out [laughs].

FR: Through the front door, but that's it [laughs], that's what my, that's what my grandfather used to say [laughs], so yeah, your parents have moved back to Guildford.

SM: Yeah.

FR: And then do you, you moved back down south, did you?

SM: Yeah, I was in Manchester for about a year and a bit and then the relationship soured and my own thought process behind that was always she carried a little too much of being Irish with her, it was, could never understand how I could be friends with females. I haven't really experienced that when I've dated English girls since then that, but I remember very much like, why have you such an issue with me having female friends, **[01:20:00]** I thought it was cos, this is my own thought process, there's still very much singular sex schools over there, you know, the only time you were I suppose friends, you only met a girl over there, was because you were dating her.

FR: That makes sense actually.

SM: I don't know, that was, I mean, it was always something I, cos I've never had that now and, you know, that, you know–

FR: The gender politics are kind of different in Northern Ireland, aren't they.

SM: Yeah, they were very much about, you know, presentation as well like, you have to go out dressed immaculately and that and, I found–

FR: Shirt and, shirt and shoes.

SM: Yeah, or, and girls had to be fully make-upped and that I don't think is such a thing here.

FR: No, that's interesting, I think you're right, yeah.

SM: Like, Christmas mass and Easter mass you had to go out and buy a new outfit over there, why, it's mass, oh you never know who might see you, what, you know everyone here, this is ridiculous, well, it's because we know everyone here that you need to.

FR: That's interesting.

SM: Again, another thing which I didn't quite pick up on.

FR: I always found, well, I went to university in Dublin where everything was a bit more relaxed and you didn't have to wear shiny shoes to go to nightclubs, and in fact, you looked stupid if you went to a nightclub in shiny shoes, people would be like, what are you dressed like that for, why aren't you wearing trainers, but if you tried to get into a club in Ballymena in trainers, no chance.

SM: Yeah, yeah, I can remember that as well.

FR: They would send you home to change your shoes [laughs].

SM: Yeah, cos I remember English friends coming over to visit me in Ireland and I was like, yeah, you have to bring a pair of nice shoes if you want to go out, what do you mean, what's nice, define nice.

FR: Yeah, expensive trainers, no.

SM: Yeah, define nice, well, if you were going to work in an office you'd have to wear those shoes and they'd be clean.

FR: Yeah, very strange, alright, well, then I think that's been really interesting, just some questions about kind of your life up to now, I don't know how much you want to say about your job or whatever, I understand that you might not want to say that much about it, and then just some questions about how you think about Northern Ireland now probably. So how, what did you do after you finished the MA?

SM: Okay, after I finished the MA I started, I, so I interned with, with Labour for a bit, I worked with them, then I worked in, up in, I worked up in the House of Lords for a while.

FR: Where your Irishness was a point of discussion or–

SM: It was in, because I think I'd done my thing in SDLP, sorry, in Sinn Féin, and it was, you know, I don't think it was ever really mentioned, and because I, cos I suppose, I mean, I walk in, other than my name being Sean it doesn't jump off the page. I will men-, if, you know, in background I will talk about, you know, in sport, I'm Irish, there is no, I don't support that English team, it's the whole anybody but England I would, sometimes because we, obviously we don't make it to the World Cup that often, I get upset when England go out because now I've got no one to cheer against, that type of weird–

FR: [laughs] I know what you mean.

SM: Yeah, well, I don't want you to win, but I don't want you to go out just yet cos it means some–

FR: Would you support Ireland or would you support Northern Ireland?

SM: No, it's Republic.

FR: Republic, okay, that's interesting.

SM: Nah, it's never, it's never been, even my dad, my dad is this weird like, he would support Republic, but there is a, every now and again there's sort of kind of want the North to win cos that is my home, but they probably wouldn't let me play [laughs], the whole Neil Lennon situation with him getting bullets and all that.

FR: I remember it, yeah.

SM: Yeah, so no, I, it would, funnily enough, well, the only team I would, time I would support England is when they play Northern Ireland [laughs], so yeah, no, yeah, that, yeah.

FR: Okay, that's interesting.

SM: Yeah, that, that I can never really, again, trying to explain that to people outside, but at least the English team would let me play, the Northern Irish team, if I could play football, might be a bit more, but yeah, so then, yeah, from that and, no, politics, I never really, I think a lot of people assumed that I couldn't vote Tory or be, or work for the Conservatives because I'm Irish, so that was, I remember that being a, you, of course you're a Labour supporter and yes, I was, but not because you think I'm Irish.

FR: But not because of that.

SM: Yeah.

FR: Kind of almost tribal, yeah.

SM: Yeah, cos they, and there used to be that, because I was, I was working in a cross, cross-bench peer, he was, you know, there was a couple of, who would have been Conservatives and, and you'd talk and they'd be like, ah it's just cos you're Irish and a foreigner you vote for them, you, once you get it, once you see sense, right, no, maybe, I don't know, I'm not rich, okay, but again that was a bit of a, do you perceive me as just my nat-, my identity rather than what I have to say.

FR: Although it's like being told oh that's because you're a Brit, people saying alright, because you're a Brit, and you don't vote Conservative or work for the Conservatives because you're Irish.

SM: Yeah.

FR: It's a kind of reduction.

SM: Yeah, you are, which is why I really disliked the way they went recently with the whole identity politics, it's like, people have thought, they're not, which is probably, cos what I would, you know, people telling me what I thought and I did what I did because I am what I am or perceive, but I don't, I don't ever really remember it coming up, oh and sorry, I had to get, you had to get a pass to work obviously, to go in and out of the House of Lords and

Houses of Parliament, security checks again, where, what, cos, and I was telling, you know, so we had to get a pass and that again had to, have you checked him because he is, yeah, I do, I do remember having a bit of an issue, wait a minute.

FR: So you would have an Irish passport, for instance?

SM: Yeah, and because people had asked, when you're in the office people ask you, you know, what do you do and, you know, explain how you got here and you tell them about you're Irish, you know, the dissertation on Sinn Féin, I think people just heard Sinn Féin, right, right, we need to check him, and I was like, well, my dad's worked for the British police for the last twenty years, I think I'm okay, okay, yeah, okay, fine, but yeah, I remember trying to get the pass and the Irish thing was a bit, I don't know whether it was the Irish thing or the Irish thing and the Sinn Fé-, and my dissertation, I'm sure it didn't help, so I remember that being a bit of a, cos usually they were just, it wasn't the same background check, but I had to have a slightly more deeper one because they were like, just let's make sure here, cos, you know, I was like, really, just, okay, fair enough.

FR: Yeah, and then what about after that, so you–?

SM: Then I worked for, then I, yeah, I hit a limit because, it's money, it's a rich man's club and he was, I was the only one who, I, cos we were paid quite, I wasn't even paid the working wage I think at the time.

FR: It's kind of almost an internship thing, that sort of work–

SM: Well, it wasn't cos I was paid, but I don't know, I was paid, I think I was paid like, twenty pound a week, which was–

FR: That's not great for–

SM: Yeah, it was kind of like a paid intership, yeah, more would be the best way, and I also had to work in a bar at the time and, and I was, yeah, the other three people we were working with, they were, all of them, they all had, two of them had their parents bought them a place within London and the other one's parents, they were all Oxford, Cambridge and I was the only one who actually had a master's, they had masters' which matured and that pissed me off no ends that you–

FR: Is that that thing where you just pay?

SM: Yeah, after three years.

FR: And at Oxford and Cambridge you can just pay to have it converted?

SM: Yeah, after three years, yeah, it's now a master's, I'm like, that's not a thing, I did mine, I actually sat and I worked, but, and, yeah, I remember that we were sitting and he kind of said, you had these like, what was it, you know, what are they called, recaps of how you're doing like, you know, when you sit down, he's like, the only thing, you don't really go out

and you don't network and socialise after hours, and I'm like, no, cos I have to go home and work in those bars which they all go out and socialise in and, cos also, cos I was being young and idealistic and you want to help people, I'm like, nothing in politics I does help people cos you never meet people, you, you just attend meetings and you never actually learn, so I then, I, through a friend of my dad, yeah, it was a job in social services, working in child services and I worked in that for a couple of years and it wasn't, it was never going to make me money, but I just enjoyed that aspect of it, but when I wanted to try and progress through that they said well, you kind of need to go and do a degree in social–

FR: You would have to have a social work qualification.

SM: Yeah, and I'd kind of hit that like, oh think I was about twenty-six at the time and I'm like, I'm not going back to university.

FR: It's been four years, yeah.

SM: Yeah, my dad was like, you could just join the police and do that there, where no one, you don't need any qualifications, so I was like, I'd always been interested in police.

FR: And I can see the connection between a certain kind of social work and a certain kind of police work for sure.

SM: Yeah, I mean, however, now I'm in I don't want to do child services now, I'm very happy with what I am doing, but yeah, but and again going in the police, the identity never came up apart from the initial–

FR: Oh yeah, so you mentioned that, someone asked you about your–

SM: Views on the IRA and, right, but other than, oh it's come up actually, the other time, the other time, off, I wouldn't say off-the-cuff racism, but remarks like, so on each, in each, you know, team you have an individual who is responsible for burglaries or robberies or any particular terrorist offences that were likely, or news that the rest of us needed to know about, sitting around briefings there was a bunch of us, retired inspector now, Scottish Presbyterian, and he turned and such and such has left, so we need a new terrorism spock, terrorism lead, Sean, you can do that, I haven't volunteered for that, yeah, but, you know, Irish, what, yeah, don't worry about it, you can do it, and everyone laughed and I'm like, yeah, it is funny and yes, I am interested in this and I do want to do this, I don't want to do it because why you told me I'm doing it, and then, because the area of Slough there's quite a lot of Travelling society, **[01:30:00]** somebody once, there was a going on, I had something else to do and, can you go down, this was a different officer, can you go down and speak to the Travellers, I've got something, there's a lot of other free people, yeah, but you're the only one who can understand them, no, I can't [laughs], little things, I know nobody's trying to be, but there's been the odd little–

FR: But I can see how that would be annoying.

SM: Yeah, and actually once, but then again the other end, you know, I was dealing with Travellers once and they once raised a complaint against me and said the only reason I did what I did was because I discriminated towards the Irish Catholics. What was strange was the person who dealt with me for that complaint, he said well, they said, you know, the complaint is that you discriminated against them cos they were Irish Catholic and I went what, I'm Irish Catholic and they went are you, yes, I think [laughs], have I come this far that I'm now not.

FR: Oh it's confusing.

SM: Yeah [pauses], because you always get, you get loads of complaints about being discriminated, or racism one way or the other, being in the police, but that was one that, where I remember the most being like, but I am that, aren't I, and that being one of those sombering moments like, have I now, or do–

FR: Am I not that anymore because–

SM: Yeah, I mean, cos I don't feel the need to wear it as much, I mean, I will make jo-, I mean, currently the team is made up of, the current team I'm on there's a Nigerian and a Hindu, a Sikh and then there's me and there's, there's and, yeah, and I will make jokes like, we all make jokes about each other's ethnicity in one way or another, so I will occasionally mention, you know, that, it'll be brought up there, but there isn't actually, there's no, I don't bring it up in the same way I suppose used to, or I used to when we were living, when I was in Northern Ireland, trying to prove to people that I am Irish, and now I don't feel the need because no one's telling me I'm not, oh, oh, apart from that one time, and I'm like, have I come so far to the point now that I, because I'm not faced with it everyday, people telling me that I'm British, I'm a Brit, that, you know, how, how would you define what's different between, aside from the accent, what makes me different then than your average Joe who had grown up round here or, and had parents, hist-, an historical thing from here, so do I see myself any different now that, maybe then that was one of those like, I don't know, am I different, I suppose the Travelling community are always going to perceive you as different even if I was Iri-, I had an Irish accent, they'd still–

FR: And God knows the Travelling community get a hard enough time in Ireland.

SM: Yeah [laughs].

FR: Okay, I was going to ask, you said, just to kind of finish or to move towards the end, you said your parents have a lot of Irish friends.

SM: Yeah.

FR: Or almost exclusively Irish friends.

SM: Yeah, yeah.

FR: And what about you, do you have Irish friends in–?

SM: Not in this–

FR: I've actually forgotten where we are.

SM: We're in a little place called Martins Heron.

FR: Martins Heron, how could I forget [laughs].

SM: Between Bracknell and Ascot, I think technically this is Bracknell, but, not, not really, I mean, I've, I think my oldest friend who, who now lives in, was, well, one of my oldest friends is, is obviously a descendant of my dad's best friend from Dublin, but he, and although he is kind of Irish he doesn't see it, I don't think he's as, his nationalism isn't as pronounced as mine, his mum's South African so that might probably have something to do with it, but my other oldest friend which was from school is from Gal-, his parents are from Galway, but that wasn't, you know, so he's Irish, I'm Irish, that was, cos we, he, yeah, he's named Sean and he's English as well, you know, English accent, so he, he never lived in Ireland, but other than that not real-, I mean, I find a lot of people when you ask them, you know, oh yeah, I have an uncle was Irish or I have a grandad, so I'm a little bit Irish, but no I wouldn't say I'd, I would say, oh I have Irish friends, it's not really, it's something I've, no, I mean, I've, no.

FR: You wouldn't really think of them in that sense like, they're just your friends, some of them happen to be–

SM: Yeah, I, yeah, they are, some of them have parts of being Irish, but [pauses] saying that, there was actually, when it comes to, the only other time actually my own identity I think has come up in work is when there was a girl there who started around the same time I did, who was also from Northern Ireland, but she was, she had the accent and I didn't, and she, and that was the other thing, are you Irish or are you Northern Irish, and she knew straight away when she was speaking to me, cos I was talking away and someone at the other end, oh and Sean, oh he's Irish too, and she went, before I'd even said anything, she went are you Irish or Northern Irish, I went wow, you've, but she was a Protestant and she made that straight away, so she carried that with her and–

FR: And she would have thought of herself as Northern Irish?

SM: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SM: She said, cos she was like, oh I'm not Irish, I'm Northern Irish, and I'm like, well, yeah, so you're, but no and also you've, I know why you're saying that, because you're trying to say you're not the same as me and technically I'm not the same, so that I remember, but I always found we never got along and I don't know sometimes, her personality wasn't, you know, we clashed in other ways, but I sometimes in the back of my head thinking you bringing up the idea of whether I'm Irish, because you're Irish, if that makes sense.

FR: Yeah.

SM: People can draw the comparison, well, you know, so maybe I feel a little bit like I'm less Irish and I then start questioning my, who I am again because you're here to kind of contradict, if that–

FR: Or as a comparison or as a–

SM: Yeah, even though she would still not consider herself Irish because I suppose she can't tell people she's British because they won't get that, but yeah, actually yeah, this, yeah, that would always bounce, I remember her being on the team and there's a comparison, oh you two are the, you're both Irish.

FR: You're both Irish.

SM: You're less Irish actually Sean cos you've a Irish accent, because you don't have the accent, she's more Irish, and she'd be like, well, no, I'm not.

FR: [laughs] That, that's such a complicated–

SM: Yeah, she's like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, I consider myself British.

FR: And British or Northern Irish.

SM: Yeah, I am not Irish, he's Irish.

FR: Even though I've got an English accent [laughs].

SM: Yeah.

FR: Wow.

SM: So yeah, I remember that and people being like, oh fucking Irish.

FR: So complicated.

SM: Yeah, oh Jesus.

FR: Yeah, and I suppose that's the third element is these English people who just want to be like, you're both Irish.

SM: Yeah.

FR: That's enough.

SM: Yeah.

FR: You don't need to confuse it anymore.

SM: Stop, stop making, put, stop putting other things round it.

FR: Do you, do you go ba-, do you still have family in Armagh, do you go back? You said your grandfather's still–

SM: Yeah, yeah, my gran-, I take, I mean, initial-, I've, I think I've gone, I go back every year, but it's more that I will go to Dublin to have a bit of a holiday or enjoy it, and I will then go and see family. Up until this year, couple of months ago actually, I wouldn't take my partner up north, cos I just, I was like, it just–

FR: You partner's English?

SM: Yeah, Georgia's English, yeah. I was like, I just, because I don't feel a connection with there anymore. There was, there was a ten-year gap where I didn't go to Northern Ireland, I would always go to the South because I went back there for my grandma's wake, my grandad's wake, sorry, and again, it had been quite a few years and I, it just kind of came back like, even at the wake I was still with my family and extended family, oh yeah, you're the British lot, and I'm like, I just can't deal, I can't be bothered with this, I can't be bothered to come back, and if I'm not seeing direct relatives and at their house, and if I'm in the town again, oh yeah, Brit, aren't you, oh for God's sake, it's still here, there's still elements of it, and I'm like, this was, was it November, yeah, cos we would go back, I go back every year for my nan's anniversary mass and like, which is around the start of November, but it's, yeah, it's still, even though I suppose with the whole Brexit thing it makes things slightly–

FR: Well, that was going to be my last kind of question, or my last set of questions, about like, Northern Ireland being in the news again.

SM: Yeah, I've, what I have found is I, I've, I've found watching the news, and people who, people on the Remain side who try to use Northern Ireland as an excuse, oh that's why we can't break, that's why we have to remain, it's like, that you're, you're, cos you're like, well, cos if we, if we have this hard border the Troubles'll come back, and I'm like, you're being quite derogative to think the only way that we can solve things as, as a country is to go back to violence and I don't like that cos that's your first assumption is, I'm sure there will be tension, I'm sure it'll cause the whole border question to come up again, but I dislike that approach, I think you're being disingenuous, I think you don't know enough about Irish history, but your assumption is just oh if they have a disagreement they're going to get violent.

FR: This kind of knee-jerk assumption that Northern Ireland is a violent place.

SM: Yeah.

FR: And that what we need to do is kind of tread carefully around it in order not to upset–

SM: Upset them, cos they're emotional beings over there, they'll just react with guns and bombs and, and you're then also comparing a situation that, you know, the forties, fifties, sixties, seventies, which was when rights were questionable, to an area now where I, I don't think there's, although there's still distrust between areas, I don't think the rights are still, I think they're fairly balanced over there, it's–

FR: Well, there's the kind of structural sectarianism of the fifties, sixties.

SM: Yeah, it's not, no, and that's why there was violence, that violence isn't there now and [pauses], **[01:40:00]** I mean, I've always thought when, you know, when Sinn Féin talk about the idea of a border question it's silly cos I actually kind of think, maybe it's cos of things like the NHS, a lot of Irish, Northern Irish people or Catholics in Northern Ireland would still want to remain part cos of the financial benefits, and I don't think Leo would be perfectly happy on taking on the burden of Northern Ireland financially. I think unfortunately it's now in that, yes, we're Irish and we want to, romantically we like the idea, financially we like our NHS, thank you very much [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Yeah, I can see, I see what you mean.

SM: Yeah, it's a–

FR: It'll be, I mean, I don't know what's going to happen in the next few years, but it does seem like the border question is going to re-emerge.

SM: Yeah, it'll be interesting cos like, I think, I look at someone like my mum and dad who–

FR: Aye, I was, I didn't, so would they, do you think, have they got a, would they like the idea of a united Ireland?

SM: I think yeah, you know, I think it's that romantic thing that they, yes, they would and kind of what we were always about, you know, especially my mum's side who, I think they were far more political than my dad's side, maybe cos they were living in Northern Ireland and my grandad had a business to run and he didn't want his trucks being blown up every couple of days, and he was probably paying enough to the IRA at times to be sure to stop blowing up my trucks, but I think part of them would be like, well, actually, you know, a big change actually in my mum's mind, she's always been pro, quite a bit Irish and then my brother when he was born there was quite a lot of complications, and there's al-, I mean, he's good now, but there was, for about a ten-year period he would have to keep going up to Birmingham for different operations, and I remember it was a couple of years ago when we were talking about it and she went you know what, end of the day Tony Blair saved his life cos without, if we were down south we couldn't have afford half the operations and unfortunately I think there's been that, this is, yeah, so I'm Irish and I'm proud to be Irish and, you know, feck the British and all that, but actually they took an Irish family and they saved the boy and, you know, we could never have afforded that, so I think there would be that token nationalism saying yeah, I should do this, but actually kind of like the set-up over here [laughs], I kind of like the liberal ideas and being able to come and go and no one's questioning me.

FR: And free healthcare and–

SM: Yeah [laughs], but I'm sure she'd be so conflicted if that actual border question came up like, do you want it to go back.

FR: Aye, it's hard. So what, what did your partner make of Armagh then? You said you did go back, you hadn't gone back with her, but you did.

SM: Yeah, I think she, she, what was interesting is in regards to, this was before I, she said I kind of understand why you're a bit the way you are now, and I was like, what does that mean, she goes you're always kind of confused, and I got it when I was there a little bit because I think she was driving round and then the first time obviously she's seen a lot of the flags, flags, flag, and why is, why has they, why have they painted that side of the road in red and blue and that side over there is green, and I was like, oh I'm trying, my mum's trying to explain it to her in the best way she could, but this is, you know, no interest in Irish history, and she says I can kind of see if you're, and she says, she was like, well, what side are you, and I was like, well, we're Catholic nationalists, wait what, what are they, Protestant unionists and, but they can be called just Protestants or just Catholics and she was like, oh so if you're, if you're a unionist you're Protestant, well, technically you don't have to be because my mum has a friend who's from Dundalk who's Presbyterian, but who would be nationalist, so she's like, oh for God's sakes, so I think she, she thought it was very grey, I was like, yeah, yeah, Armagh's grey, a lot of Northern Ireland, it's not pretty, is it, it's a lot of buildings built for structure rather than to be beautiful buildings, cos if someone's going to blow it up in a couple of, see that, I remember that, she said it's very grey and with talking to people [pauses], yeah, she was like, I can understand when if you're having to walk around amongst, and the other thing was trying to explain to her, we come up to this shop, oh no, we can't, no, we'll go into that one over the other side cos, well, why can't I go into this one right here, you just can't [indecipherable].

FR: Let's not get into it.

SM: Yeah, cos it just, it's just easier if we go to that one over there [laughs], and oh the other thing she said, why's there so many bus stops like, ten metres apart from each other, and I said oh yeah, I was like, oh yeah, cos we can't stand at the same bus stop, it's, you just [laughs], what, I was like, yeah, I mean, I don't know if it's the same now, but I, I remember going to college and that's your bus stop, that bus stop up there, this is what, even though they go the same way, that's for the Protestants, that's for you guys, and when I explained it she was like, there's like, two bus stops right next to each other like, ten metres apart, yeah, can't stand next to each other, she's like, this is stupid, yeah, it is, yeah, it is.

FR: It's strange when you're sort of having to explain it to someone who doesn't, who's so outside of it.

SM: Yeah.

FR: Kind of strange in itself, it can be like, it's like, fresh.

SM: Yeah, and I suppose I think sometimes when we mischaracterise it and say it's, oh it's Catholic and Protestants, obviously a lot of people go, ah so it's a religious thing, well, yes and no, not really, because although there were minute differences in the rel-, in the re-, in the belief, it's not just–

FR: It's certainly not theological.

SM: No.

FR: Like, it's not about whether or not you believe in–

SM: No, it's not a Sunni and Shia thing, Shiite thing, it's not a, oh they believe a different strand of it or we've got these huge differences, it's a kind of overarching thing, but it's, the political thing is probably more of a, but I don't think she, I think it was a maybe a lazy explanation of just using the phrase Catholic and Protestant, that she expected it to be more religious based when it's not really, it's structural and economical and everything else and, yeah.

FR: Hard to explain.

SM: Yeah, I think she was just, she sat down in Dublin airport just, she physically just went puggghhh, she was like, what, where are we now and, you're, we're in Dublin, right, what are, what's this here, this is all just, they're all Irish here.

FR: You can sort of relax in Dublin, it's [indecipherable], it's less complicated.

SM: Yeah, yeah, if we'd gone to Belfast airport you might have had a, still had to go through it [laughs].

FR: Alright that's, that's great. Just to finish like, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you thought we might talk about, or that you wanted to talk about, or anything we haven't covered?

SM: Not really [pauses], no, I can't think off the top of my head. It was a while ago when we mentioned the politics thing and I'm like, yeah, maybe that does push a lot of us still to claim to be Irish because I find, particularly working in Slough, again, when you've got a lot of cultures and backgrounds and the ethnicities, the politic-, like I say, from an Indian background and, or politics is so much more corrupt, so you kind of, half the time they don't bother getting involved cos they know it's so corrupt, whereas we came to a stage where we actually, our voice has a, I suppose you've got, on the scale of democracy you have the British at one end and unfortunately you've got some of the Asian countries and, where democracy isn't, it's you'll do what we tell you to do type of thing, and British with the ultimate democracy, and we were kind of in between, where our voice was, for a while you weren't allowed to have a voice, although in India now they do have a democracy, it's, it's neither one way or another, but that's only more of a recent thing, we were always nearer to having a democracy, but couldn't quite get it, and we were so near to Britain and we saw

everything, so maybe that's why politics became such a thing is cos we were so close to it, but couldn't have it, so maybe then that's kind of came down like, there's something within our reach, but we have to be involved in it, whereas it wasn't so far out of our reach we think why bother.

FR: Sure, so it's kind of, and it's left you with an interest or a lasting interest in politics, anyway.

SM: Yeah, yeah, well, actually now that, my friend said that a while ago, I did think yeah, all my dad's friends that I talk to, did you see on the news, did you see something about politics, and the Brexit thing was far more for them than, so yeah, can imagine that politics does, cos it was I suppose so close to it, but couldn't have it maybe, whereas south of England everyone, it's just Conservative round here, that's it, you're just Conservative and–

FR: Nothing changes.

SM: Nothing ever changes [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Okay, listen, thank you so much, that was, that was great.

INTERVIEW ENDS