

L13-SG2: SEAN MURRAY INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Sean Murray [pseudonym]
Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interview summariser: Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks

L13-SG2: Sean Murray	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:49:07	Duration: 01:49:07	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in Aldershot in 1986 to a mother from Dundalk and an Armagh father who emigrated to England to join the police. His Catholic parents moved to Armagh in 1988, then returned to England in the mid-1990s and subsequently relocated to Armagh in 2002, when his father joined the NI Ombudsman's office. Sean had a 'very thick' NI accent when young, but was 'very quickly singled out as the guy with the English accent' when he returned to Armagh aged sixteen. Attended Armagh Tech and lived in a Catholic area of the city. He initially made friends with nationalists, but after being 'chased out of a few bars' and 'assaulted quite badly' he became friendly with unionists, including a nephew of the DUP politician Nigel Dodds.			
10:00–19:59	States that his 'being seen on both sides' of the political divide 'didn't seem to go well with anybody' in Armagh. Mentions his grandmother giving her children names that evaded political categorisation. Explains that his parents met through a cross-border community relations initiative. Speaks of having family holidays in NI and the ROI at least once a year when younger. Recalls his parents being worried about driving a car with NI registration plates in Dundalk and questions whether his memory of British soldiers breaking one of his childhood toys at a border checkpoint is an actual or a 'learned' memory. Discusses having to conceal what his father did for a living for safety reasons when socialising in NI.			
20:00–29:59	Mentions some of his own and his mother's experiences of religious bias when applying for jobs in NI. Discusses his early memories of living in Armagh when young, including being evacuated one night because of a bomb scare, which was a factor in his family deciding to move back to England. Sean is now a police officer himself and has had to moderate his NI accent for English ears. Explains that his mother's decision to send him to a Catholic school in Guildford reflected her wish that he retain an Irish identity. He himself sometimes questioned his nationality and recalls seeking to prove his Irishness by wearing the national colours and displaying the tricolour in his university accommodation.			
30:00–39:59	Reflects on the complexities of growing up in Aldershot, the 'home of the British Army', with a NI accent and NI Catholic policeman father, saying: 'all these little things, they've kind of made me'. Discusses his mother's strong sense of Irish identity and how her favouring Éamon de Valera over Michael Collins riles his father. Reveals that both of his parents were SDLP voters in NI and that he was always identified as 'a Brit' there. Recalls attending Catholic secondary schools in England and encountering much less hostility than he did at primary level.			
40:00–49:59	Says he stopped attending mass in his teens and is now an 'agnostic Catholic', although he still feels the need to go to church at Christmas and Easter. Discusses ban on students wearing the colours of their favoured football teams at Armagh Tech and his bafflement at the extent of sectarian thinking in everyday life in NI, which thwarted his attempts to fit in. Recalls dating Catholic girls and meeting with opposition from their parents because of his English birth and accent.			

50:00–59:59	Discusses occasions when sectarian bias worked for and against him when he was seeking part-time work in NI, and how perceptions of him as English or British led to him being regarded as not 'the right fit' for certain jobs. Compares his own experiences to that of his two younger brothers, one of whom he felt was developing anti-Protestant views, which Sean sought to counter. Explains the complex family circumstances that influenced his decision to apply to the University of Chichester, where he began his studies in 2005.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Describes how people's perceptions of his nationality seesawed between English and Irish depending on which country he was in. Speaks of 'trying harder to be Irish' in reaction to being called 'a Brit' in NI and finding life in England preferable 'because I'm Irish here and I like being Irish'. Says that he would 'rather be an Irishman in England than an Englishman in Ireland'. Identity issues continued to plague him during the times he spent working in NI while doing his BA in history, which he enjoyed. He then went to Manchester to undertake an MA, after which he briefly worked as a Labour Party intern in 2010 and then as an unpaid assistant to a cross-bench peer in the House of Lords.
01:10:00–01:19:59	Discusses his experience of Irish people in Manchester, where he lived with his Armagh girlfriend until the relationship ended and she went back to NI. Provides details of his MA dissertation, which examined Sinn Féin's changing relationship to socialism. Explains that his parents moved to Guildford in 2008, partly because his mother did not want his younger brother to stay in NI and partly because she herself never 'fully felt comfortable' there.
01:20:00–01:29:59	Discusses the different dress codes that operate when socialising in NI and England. Reveals that he supports the ROI football team rather than those of NI or England. Discusses working at the House of Lords, which he describes as a 'rich man's club', where people assumed he was a Labour voter because he was Irish. Mentions being subject to extra background checks because of 'the Irish thing' and possibly his dissertation on Sinn Féin. He next worked in child services for a short time and then decided to join the the police and was posted to Slough, where he was appointed to the role of terrorism lead by an inspector.
01:30:00–01:39:59	Recalls an occasion when he was accused of racial discrimination by Irish Travellers in Slough. Says that he no longer feels the need to prove his Irishness 'because no one's telling me I'm not', and explains that he does not purposely cultivate friendships with Irish people in England. Discusses tensions with a work colleague who specifies that she is Northern Irish, not Irish, which reanimates thoughts about his own sense of nationality. Explains that while he still visits Dublin annually, he stopped going to NI for a decade and has only recently taken his English partner there, 'because I don't feel a connection with there anymore'. Takes issue with assumptions that Brexit will reactivate violence in NI.
01:40:00–01:49:07	Regarding Irish unity, he thinks many NI people would vote to remain in the UK because of the NHS and other 'financial benefits'. Suggests that his parents would support Irish reunification, although his mother values the NHS for having served his brother's medical needs over many years. Discusses visiting NI with his partner and trying to explain its politics to her. Reflects on how the conflict in NI is sometimes misrepresented by outsiders as being about religious difference 'when it's not really, it's structural and economical and everything else'. Ends by making some general remarks about the varying levels of interest in politics among people from different ethnic and cultural background in England.