INTERVIEW M15-SG3: MICHAEL CASSIDY

Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interviewee: Michael Cassidy [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.

BH: Okay [pauses], okay, so that's it off now recording. Okay, before we begin Michael, I just want to say first of all thanks very much for agreeing to do this. I would have preferred to do a face-to-face interview, but obviously because of the Covid situation that's not possible, so we've resorted now to doing these online digital interviews. In any case, thanks for carving a bit of space for me today in order to do this. So it's coming up to a quarter past five and it's the seventh of July 2020 and I'm here with Michael Cassidy to conduct an interview on second-generation memories for the project Conflict, Memory and Migration. So I'll just begin Michael by asking you first of all when and where were you born?

MC: I was born in Rochdale, a town in Greater Manchester, in 1986.

BH: Oh right, Rochdale, I didn't actually know that, I actually don't live that far from there, I actually live myself in Burnage. And do you have any brothers and sisters?

MC: Yeah, I have two younger brothers. My dad was from Rochdale and he and my mum were living there when I was born, but I didn't really grow up there, I grew up mostly in a town called Runcorn in Cheshire, which is closer to Liverpool, but not very far from Manchester either really.

BH: Okay, and what did your parents do then?

MC: So, when, they met in Liverpool in the early 1980s or late, yeah, early 1980s I think and my dad was working as a hospital pharmacist for the NHS and my mum came over from Northern Ireland as a nurse to work in a hospital as well, and they met in the, they used to have what they called nursing accommodation, which was for young medical professionals basically.

BH: Yeah, so it sounds like then you come from a family with quite a strong medical background then?

MC: Yeah, but they work in those, I think they call it allied medical professions, so not doctors, but other professions.

BH: Okay, so you moved to Runcorn then, and is that where you went to primary school?

MC: Yeah, we, until the age of seven we, until I was seven, we'd moved round quite a bit from living in Rochdale until I was about four, then we briefly emigrated to Australia, but that didn't work out, then a very short period lived in Wigan in Greater Manchester, then spent a couple, two or three years living in a town in Leicestershire before moving to Runcorn when I was seven, so I went to primary school in Runcorn and secondary school, and I lived there, lived in Runcorn between the age of seven of seventeen.

BH: And what was school like? Did you enjoy school?

MC: Yeah, I've always been academically inclined, so I enjoyed the learning and that side of it. I enjoyed playing football as well, so I didn't mind that, but primary school was very different to secondary school, socially, because I lived in a part of town that was I suppose, you know, quite normal socio-economically, but with a few middle-class areas, but where I went to secondary school was much a more deprived and disadvantaged area, socio-economically.

BH: Right, is that in Runcorn or did you go to–

MC: Yes.

BH: You went to secondary school in Runcorn, right, okay.

MC: I did yeah, so they went to the Catholic high school in Runcorn.

BH: Okay, because from what I recall, yeah, your parents don't live in Runcorn itself, that's right, it's, was it Frodsham, yeah, is that right?

MC: Yeah, yeah, it's Frodsham, so when I was seventeen they, well, we as a family moved to Frodsham, which is only about, it's less than five miles outside Runcorn, it's a smaller town, about eight thousand people, whereas Runcorn must be about sixty thousand, but Frodsham is much more Cheshire, it's far more affluent, more middle class than Runcorn.

BH: Sure, yeah, so what was Runcorn like then to go grow up in? What kind of a place was it?

MC: It was a bit grim, to be honest with you.

BH: [laughs] Right, okay.

MC: It's a funny place Runcorn, culturally, because it had been historically a small town on the river Mersey, where the river becomes the estuary, and it was an old Cheshire town until the 1960s when there was a big programme to knock down the slums in Liverpool and they built two, maybe three new towns, so areas where they built lots of social housing and they moved people out from the city of Liverpool, the other one was Skelmersdale I think,

and I believe there was some other areas as well, but Runcorn was the other big one where they built big social housing estates, decanted probably thousands of people in the 1960s and 1970s, so in Runcorn you would have what people probably still refer to today as the old town and the new town, and the old town was, the identity's much more of a Cheshire town, of a broader accent, it's closer to the river, and then the new town was the other side of the town, where people there, their parents or their grandparents were Scousers and they have a lot more affinity with Liverpool and, you know, they'll support Liverpool and Everton football clubs and they speak a lot differently as well, much more of a thick accent.

BH: Right.

MC: And that's where I went to school, in a part of the new town.

BH: Okay, and you mentioned there that you were interested in football outside of school.

MC: Yeah.

BH: What, so would you have supported one of the Liverpool teams or did you support–

MC: Oh God no, no way. My dad being from Greater Manchester he's a lifelong Manchester United fan and he's a season ticket-holder, so we were, yeah, he brought us up supporting Manchester United, he'd take us to, I've got two younger brothers and we were lucky enough to go to games as well quite a lot when we were younger.

BH: Yeah, so your pull then was more towards the Cheshire side, is that right, and more towards the, towards Manchester then in terms of football?

MC: On football, definitely, yeah.

BH: Yeah, what about then, did you stay on at school then to do A-levels and things like that or did you leave school at sixteen?

MC: I went somewhere else, I went to a high school in Cheshire to do my sixth form, it was a school called Helsby High School, which is a village just next to Frodsham, so I was already travelling there to go to sixth form when my parents decided to move to Frodsham.

BH: Right, and did you want to go on to university then, was that the plan?

MC: Yeah, yeah, that was, that was, because I enjoyed school and I did quite well academically, my parents had always inculcated in me, you know, you've got the oppor-, you've got the potential to go to university and you should always consider it, which was quite interesting in school because I don't think I knew anyone in school who'd had a parent go to university.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

MC: Yeah, my dad went to univ-, yeah, my dad had been to university to study pharmacy. My mum didn't go to university, she was trained as a nurse and in those days they went to nursing school or nursing college, but they didn't do university degree and, yeah, I don't recall knowing anyone in school who'd had a parent who'd gone to university, and I suppose that kind of reflects on me and my mates in my group were considered the posh ones, if you like.

BH: Yes.

MC: More middle class, even though once I went to sixth form and university I realised it's all very relative.

BH: Yeah, and was the sixth form quite a different atmosphere then to the school that you did your GCSEs in?

MC: Oh yeah, massively, yeah, so where I went to secondary school it was, it could be quite a nasty place at times, it was quite, there was quite a dog-eat-dog attitude, there wasn't, the teachers tried and some of the kids had aspiration, but the overall levels of academic ambition were quite low, it wasn't cool to do well in school. I think a lot of, as I said, people came from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, so there wasn't necessarily a drive for people to go to university or aspire very high, whereas when I went to sixth form it was a much more middle-class area and you could feel that, just in people, I'm sure you notice, as you go through life and you meet people from more advantaged or middle-class backgrounds one of the things that really stands out is their confidence in themselves and what they believe they're capable of.

BH: Yeah, did your parents send you to that secondary school in Runcorn simply because it was close by or was there simply, was there no other available options in the area?

MC: I think we looked at actually another school in Cheshire, but it, the one I ended up going to sixth form for, I think we looked at that, but that was a very popular school cos it was the best high school in the county at that point, so I don't think that was an option, and then after that there were a few sec-, in Runcorn when I first went to secondary school there must have been, let me think, there must have been at least four secondary schools at that point, but St Chad's where I went was the Catholic school and **[00:10:00]** my parents at that point were practising Catholics and raised us Roman Catholic, so there wasn't really any consideration of going to another one in the town.

BH: Sure, and were your parents, even at that stage, aspirational for you to do well at school or was it something that didn't really matter to them?

MC: Oh yeah, it did, yeah, they really wanted, they always encouraged us to try hard in school and to aim high and to aspire academically, and I remember my mum saying from a young age, you know, probably once I was in secondary school, you know, you've got to realise not everyone's parents have had a positive experience with education so they may not value it in the same way as other families.

BH: Yeah, yeah, presumably then religion was at least at that stage important to them as well, was that what motivated them to send you to St Chad's?

MC: I think partly, yeah, like I said, we did look at this other school which wasn't a religious school, but also it's, I went to a Catholic primary school and almost everyone from that primary school would go to the Catholic secondary school, you know, it's just, I think for a lot of people there's not a conscious decision it's just that's the route which they go down, you know, graduating from the primary school to the secondary school which their pupils are fed to.

BH: Sure, so what did you study then at A-level?

MC: At A-level, I first studied for my AS-levels combined English, which was English literature and language in one single A-level, French, biology and chemistry, but I wasn't very good at chemistry, so I dropped that after AS-level and then just did the three plus general studies which everyone did.

BH: Right, okay, and did you have an idea of what you wanted to do with that like, when you went to university?

MC: Not really, no, I was on, I was forecast to achieve good grades and I didn't really know what I wanted to do and I think somebody in the sixth form I was at said oh well, with grades like that you could study law. I didn't have the sciences to do medicine, so I didn't really know what I wanted to do, but I really enjoyed French, so I found a course at Manchester University that was combined a law degree with French and a year living and studying in France. I went for that.

BH: And is that what you did then, did you go to Manchester University?

MC: I did, yeah, it was the only university I was accepted for, I went there.

BH: And so did you move into Manchester then or did you commute from home?

MC: No, I moved to student halls in Fallowfield in south Manchester, lived there for my first year, second year moved into a student house with some mates, which was the next area down, Withington, then in my third year I was studying in Dijon in France for a year and then for my final fourth year of the degree came back and lived in Withington again.

BH: And then did you finish, complete your degree then, and did you become a lawyer effectively?

MC: No, no, no, I didn't really enjoy the course that much. I was, I went to university thinking that it would be really intellectually stimulating and challenging, but what I found on law a lot of the people just wanted to get the grades, and it's the kind of course where you just have to study a lot and learn a lot of rulings and precedents and there's not so much room for debate or creativity, so I didn't find, I did some work experiences with solicitors and barristers, the barrister side of it I thought was quite interesting, but it seemed

like quite a slog to get into the profession because after your degree you then have to I think go to legal college for a year and then do a training that can last for two years normally.

BH: Yeah, so what, by the end of the degree then you'd settled on doing something else, is that right?

MC: Well, not really, but I just, you know, I didn't want to do law at that point, so I, one of my friends who was, she studied languages and she told me about this scheme which was an EU-funded programme which the UK participated in, where if you'd done a deg-, a language at degree level, you could apply to go and basically be a teaching assistant in a European county. I think they did outside of Europe as well, but I applied for the Europe stream and I decided I wanted to go to Portugal cos I could speak French and I'd studied Spanish at high school and I thought I can go out there and try and learn Portuguese, and I got accepted for that and then lived in Porto for a year in Portugal, for half the time working as a teaching assistant in a school and the other half of the time I was working in tourism in port wine cellars, giving guided tours.

BH: Wow, what about your two brothers then? Did they follow you to university as well or did they do something else?

MC: Yeah, they both went to university, so Thomas my, so with me and my brothers there's five years between each of us.

BH: Right, okay.

MC: So my youngest brother's ten years younger than me, and Thomas, he's the one, he's the middle one, he went and studied physiotherapy and he qualified as a physiotherapist and he's been, now he's working as an occupational physiotherapist and he must have been doing that for, how old is he now, I think he's twenty-nine now, so he must have been doing that for seven years now I think, he's been working since he came out of university, although he did spend a year in New Zealand where he wasn't working as a physio. The youngest one Paddy, Patrick, he just graduated last summer, from a degree on, oh I don't quite understand it, it's some kind of like, biomedical sciences degree, but he got a job straight away, fair, you know, fair play to him, at in an NHS laboratory in Cardiff. So originally he was working doing genetic testing for people with congenital disorders, I don't quite understand what he does, but when the Covid situation erupted he voluntarily transferred to their pathology lab and he's been running the tests for coronavirus.

BH: Right, wow, so are you still based in the north west yourself or are you living somewhere else now?

MC: No, I live in London. I've lived in London since late 2011, so I've been living in London for the best part of nine years now.

BH: Right, okay, so has all of your family, your brothers dispersed then effectively from the north west?

MC: No, Thomas, the middle one, he's now living with my parents temporarily cos he had been living with his girlfriend in Manchester for quite some time, but they broke up at the start of the year and he moved back to live with my parents, and Paddy was studying in Sheffield and he just moved to Cardiff, it would have been last August or September.

BH: Yeah, which isn't too far away I suppose, Cardiff.

MC: No, no, he used to see my parents quite a bit actually, they'd go walking in the Peaks when he was living in Sheffield.

BH: Right, about your parents then, where was your mother from originally? I know they met I think in Liverpool, you said.

MC: Yeah, so my mum's from Lurgan in Northern Ireland, but then I think when, I think she moved to Craigavon when she was about ten, which is, I think it's like, a little suburb of Lurgan.

BH: Sure, and did she, when you were growing up did she talk much about her childhood back in Northern Ireland?

MC: Yeah, she did quite a lot actually.

BH: Yeah, what did she talk about?

MC: Oh lots of things. You've met my mum, she's quite talkative.

BH: Yeah [laughs].

MC: Everything ranging really from, she's quite a raconteur, a storyteller, and it was everything ranging from, you know, just the normal everyday stuff of growing up in a family with brothers and sisters through to, she went to convent school, you know, like a state school, but run by nuns, cos I suppose the schooling's more of a religious bent in Northern Ireland, what it was like being taught by the nuns, the religiosity of it, just how much more religious life was and some quite traumatic episodes in her young childhood associated with the Troubles and some family problems as well.

BH: Did you get the impression that she enjoyed growing up in Northern Ireland or it was something that she wanted to distance herself from?

MC: No, I don't think, I mean, you grow up where you grow up, don't you, you don't really have any choice about it, but I think [pauses], I mean, I think she certainly had a certain bitterness about some of the events and how it affected her life and her family's life and the lives of other people around them, and, you know, she reg-, you know, was very, if things would happen in the news when I was younger I can remember her getting upset, things to do with the paramilitaries or the peace process, because I think that would stir up a lot of upsetting, traumatic and painful memories from that time.

BH: Right, what kind of episodes did she talk about that were important?

MC: So I think probably one of the most formative experiences for her was when she and her family were kicked out of their home when she was about ten years old.

BH: Hmm, yeah, and did she talk to you and your brothers about that?

MC: Oh yeah, yeah, we've heard the story countless times. It's quite funny, even only in the last year I've heard some new details about it. So she, her family's Roman Catholic and they grew up **[00:20:00]** in a council estate, but she said it was very mixed both socio-economically and in religion, it was a majority Protestant area, but they had people from all walks of life living there she said, doctors, teachers. My grandfather was a manual worker, a skilled manual, a skilled operator of construction equipment and he would work on building sites, building the motorways, so it was a real mix and she said, you know, the Catholics and Protestants lived cheek by jowl for years with no problems, but then when the Troubles started up, probably after the IRA began their campaign, there was, there were a lot of problems with, you know, Catholics being chased or spat at or hounded, or the boys being beaten up by loyalist thugs basically, in gangs.

BH: Yeah, and did she talk much about why? Obviously, that episode sounds like it was quite, quite early on. Did she talk about why she left Northern Ireland in the end?

MC: Not really. So I know that she, so my mum didn't complete her A-levels, she decided halfway through to go and become a nurse and she moved from Craigavon to Belfast, so she'd already done that and then, I mean, I remember, you know, growing up she'd tell us about these people she knew who got blown up or were injured or lost an eye or lost an arm or a leg in bombings, even in some, I remember she told me some girls she went to school with, they went nosing around in one of the girl's brothers' bedrooms, and unbeknownst to them there were explosives underneath his bed because he was involved with one of the paramilitaries, and it blew them up, it killed one of the girls and I think crippled the other one, and then she said as a nurse training in Belfast, in the accident and emergency department, they'd see people, you know, with bullet wounds, shrapnel, people on death's doorstep, little funny details she'd say to me like, you would know whether to call for a priest or a, I don't know what, what it is in the Protestant faith, it's a pastor or a vicar, based on someone's surname, you know, if they were, if they were nearing death for the last rites and they could generally tell by the surname what their faith was, so I think, I mean, like a lot of people I'm sure she was just sick of it. Again, little details like, I remember her saying when she was younger, she, maybe this is before she got kicked out of her home by the mobs, that she said the cinema in her local town got blown up and she said she was really, really, really sad cos she was just getting of the age where she would have been able to start going to the pictures and that was the biggest, you know, probably the only form of entertainment and they'd blown it up, and just that I remember speaking with her and my uncle just about how life was during those times, you know, bombings every week, people being murdered, assassinated, executed and the pervasive violence, not only from the paramilitaries, but from the British state as well, whether it was in the form of the police or the army, and so she and her friend decided to move to Liverpool.

BH: Yeah, I remember her telling me about that. Another nurse from Fermanagh I think she said it was?

MC: Yeah, yeah, what was her name, is it Valerie, I think it was Valerie.

BH: Yeah, I can't remember the name now, but I remember her saying that. It's quite, you know, you're very much on sort of the coalface working as a nurse in a hospital in Belfast at that time, you know, you've probably seen quite a lot of quite traumatic stuff. So she moved then to Liverpool, and she met your father, so what about your father's family then, where were they from?

MC: So they were from Rochdale, where I was born and where my dad's from, which, Rochdale was one of the mill towns where they used to, Manchester built its fortune during the industrial revolution on cotton, Rochdale was one of the towns were they had these mills, which I think turned the cotton into cloth and textiles, but that went in, that was in decline I think possibly even before the Second World War and certainly afterwards, I think the lasts mills were closing in the fifties and sixties, so it was one of those northern towns that had, you know, been affluent, but was on the decline really and, yeah, so my dad grew up there.

BH: And was your dad from a working-class background or a more middle-class background?

MC: I think you'd probably say lower middle class, cos his father died, his biological father died when he was very young. I think he'd worked in a factory, but as a, not as blue collar more as white collar, but my grandma, my maternal grandma, she ran small businesses like, I think she ran a small corner shop at one point and a chip shop at another point.

BH: Yeah, and did they have any kind of Irish background or a connection with Ireland or were they, they had absolutely nothing to do with Northern Ireland?

MC: Well, I always thought not, but until a few years ago when my dad said that either he or one of his sisters had done some family tree research and apparently there is way back in time some link to Ireland.

BH: Is that right? [laughs]

MC: Yeah, that's what he told me, but other than that I, growing up I never knew of any link, despite the fact that his family are Roman Catholic.

BH: Yeah, well, this is what I was going to say, because very often people, you know, from an English Roman Catholic background have some connection at some point to some part of Ireland.

MC: They do, though having said that I think Lancashire was always a very Catholic county and I think, you know, after the Reformation by Henry VIII and the suppression of the Catholic faith, I think it was quite a stronghold.

BH: Sure, so whenever they met then your mother was working as a nurse and your father was, he was a pharmacist, is that right, is that what you said?

MC: Yeah, a hospital pharmacist, yeah, so not working in one of the chemists, but, you know, in one of the hospitals, probably the Royal in Liverpool.

BH: Okay, and how do you think your mother found English society whenever she moved over? Did she like it or did she–?

MC: [laughs] It's a funny question, cos I remember, my mum's always got these anecdotes and she said to me that her gran-, my granny, my maternal grandmother had said to her the English are so mean they count their potatoes, there's a sense that the English were tight, and as if to bear this out my mother said that when she first met my paternal grandparents, which was my grandma and my, the man she'd married who, you know, became my dad's stepdad and my grandad, that when she first went to meet them she, they offered her a cup of tea, but no biscuits, she was horrified, she said in Ireland that would never happen, she said you could not invite somebody into your home and give them a cup of tea without a biscuit, and she said that my grandad made some off-colour remark about Irish people as well.

BH: Oh is that right?

MC: Or referred to them as, you know, using some kind of epithet which definitely would not be acceptable nowadays.

BH: Yeah, well, I suppose what I was wondering there, you know, your mum has moved over against the backdrop of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and obviously at the same time, you know, the IRA are dropping bombs in places in England, in fact, they, I'm pretty sure they set off a few in Manchester.

MC: Yeah, yeah, a bit later on the big one though, wasn't it?

BH: Yeah, 1996, the one during the European Cup.

MC: Shopping centre, yeah, the shopping centre.

BH: I wonder, you know, what did they think about their son going out with a Northern Irish Catholic? Did they have any views about that, like, I wonder?

MC: I don't know, it's a good question. My dad's quite a reticent man, so I've not heard really his views on it, but more generally I do get the impression that my mum felt, not necessarily from my father's family, but from society at large in Britain, prejudice and, you know, a sense of Irish people as outsiders. She's drawn a comparison with the way Muslim people often get marginalised and stigmatised, and associated with extremism.

BH: And did she ever encounter anything like that, like, directly in her work or in any aspect of her life?

MC: I th-, well, cer-, well, like, I suppose it's different, but growing up she had loads of it, you know, being called a Fenian, as I mentioned, when they got kicked out of their home, that was by mobs of loyalists and, you know, to make it worse it was in front of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Northern Irish police force at the time, and the British Army who were in their estate and watched it happen and didn't lift a finger, so she was always very, very bitter about that, especially because she said, which I find amazing, but Catholic people in Northern Ireland apparently welcomed the British Army with open arms at first, when they first came to the province because they thought well, finally here's a neutral arbiter who'll look out for our interests because the institutions were sectarian, the police force was sectarian, they weren't represented in **[00:30:00]** politics because of gerrymandering and, yeah, people thought well, if the British state sends the army here then we'll be looked after and it didn't happen. So in Northern Ireland, yes, I mean, it sounded rife, I think people say if you were Catholic you couldn't get a job in the civil service, in manufacturing, in the unionised industries, but in England, she doesn't, she hasn't recounted or I can't remember any direct episodes where she was called something, but I'm sure it has happened and generally just a sense of suspicion and little things like it being acceptable to make Irish jokes, you know, that was common and, you know, people, you know, putting on Irish accents or making, you know, just what they saw as comical remarks about the Irish and extremists and terrorists and Catholics and that kind of thing.

BH: Mmm, who were your parents, did they have a circle of friends when you were growing up? Who would they have socialised with outside of work and things like that?

MC: Well, cos we moved quite a lot when I was younger they didn't really have a set circle of friends. They had friends back in Rochdale, but, and they would occasionally see some of them, they were mostly people my dad went to school with, but once we were in Runcorn, Runcorn's the kind of town, not many people move there, and a lot of people have quite longstanding roots there or, like I said, their family will be from Liverpool, so they'll have a lot of family and links in Liverpool, so it's, I think it's the kind of place where it, as an adult it can be a bit more difficult, or it was on those days, to break into and hang out, you know, find new friends.

BH: Sure, I understand what you mean, yeah, there's not a lot of population change.

MC: No, certainly not in, well, apart from all the people who moved out from Liverpool to live in the new town of Runcorn, no, in those days there wasn't, and it was a different place then, it was, you asked me how I found it growing up there, it was just a very closed-minded place, if you were, you know, if you were different in any way, you know, you'd get mocked for it or worse, you know, chased, beaten up sometimes. I think it's a bit more open-minded nowadays, like society more broadly.

BH: Yeah, did your mum, when she was living in Runcorn, did she have any sort of engagement with like, local Irish communities or anything like that? I mean, I know there's, I

mean, maybe there isn't in Runcorn, but I know there's an Irish community in Liverpool, for example.

MC: No, I don't think she did, you know, I, no, I don't recall that. I mean, whenever she meets an Irish person, especially a Northern Irish person, you know, she'll just, she'll, if she ever meets a Northern Irish person she'll always end up knowing them by six degrees of separation, you know, she'll talk with them for half an hour and work out they know someone who knows someone who knows someone who is married to someone, and they'll always find a way back, you know, whichever side of the community they're from, but in Runcorn, no, I don't recall her having in links to the Irish diaspora or the community.

BH: Sure, what about church then? As you said, at that time they were practising Catholics. Presumably then they would have attended mass and so on.

MC: Oh yeah.

BH: Did they, were there any other Irish people within that Catholic community in Runcorn, or were they aware of them?

MC: Some of them, so, some of the nuns were, and my mum knew them a little bit, I think she, they had a St Vincent de Paul charity and my mum helped them out on a few occasions and I think maybe some of the older parishioners were Irish, but not anyone of their age, no.

BH: Sure, yeah, what about going back then? Did your parents take you back to Northern Ireland whenever you were growing up?

MC: Oh yeah, I think we used to go there at least once every year, at least when I was younger, you know, we might go for Easter or at some other point in the year. I remember cos we'd always drive up to Stranraer and take the ferry.

BH: Yes, oh you drove the whole way up there, right, okay.

MC: Yeah, yeah, normally, although I think, and then on a couple of occasions we might have driven to Anglesey and gone to, is Dunleary, is that in the Republic?

BH: That's right, yeah, it is, yeah, in Dublin, yeah.

MC: So we did that as well a couple of times, but normally it was, yeah, via Scotland.

BH: And what are your memories of those trips going back to Northern Ireland?

MC: I remember we'd always go and see my granny and because she lived in quite a poor area, it was a very nationalist and it was different to where I grew up, which was more of a, yeah, I guess you'd call it like, you know, lower middle class, it was private housing, and then going to where she lived, which was social housing, and they had the murals on the walls and then come back one year and then the kerbs are painted green and white, my mum being unhappy about that, so we'd always visit my granny, she had cats, I remember that,

we'd normally see my uncle and my cousins, my uncle at that point lived in, what was it called, it's [pauses], it was a town on the, on with a beach, is it Larne?

BH: Yeah, Larne's on the coast, yeah.

MC: Yeah, so we would go and see my uncle there. I had another auntie who's recently died earlier this year and we would occasionally see her, but she was unwell, so we didn't see her very often, so yeah, normally, you know, we'd go and stay with my granny, see her, see my uncle, my cousins, go to mass maybe, but I think I might have stopped going maybe when I was about fourteen cos then I think they carried on taking the other boys, and then I went when I was about probably seventeen or eighteen and then I didn't go for years, but they would continue going, my mum would go, and then as, my granny died a few years ago, and as she got older, she had dementia and my mum was going all the time.

BH: Mmm, sure, when you went back, you know, whenever you were growing up and you went to this nationalist housing estate, what did you think of that? Cos obviously you said there it was quite different from where you lived in Runcorn. What were your, did you ask your parents, you know, why are the kerbstones painted kind of thing or–?

MC: Yeah, I remember asking my mum once about that and I think I was really little and it said, you know, I don't know if it was the mural or the kerbstones, but saying something, telling me off and saying don't talk about that outside, cos I probably was, you know, a little boy, maybe a bit naïve and open without, and, you know, said something too loudly, I think it's the kind of thing that you probably with an English accent don't want to draw attention to.

BH: Sure, yeah, did you play with any other kids or anything whenever you were over there?

MC: I'm sure we did, but I don't, I don't actually remember that so much. I think we did play with little kids when we were much younger, but for the most part I just remember being with my granny and then one of her friends coming round and seeing my uncle and my cousins, but I don't remember so much interacting with the other kids from outside our extended family.

BH: Yeah, and did your dad go over as well or was it just you and your mum?

MC: Oh yeah, yeah, he'd always go, yeah, my dad'd always go too.

BH: And did they ever come back over to Runcorn at any stage for like, a holiday or anything like that?

MC: The family? So my mum's got another sister who lives in Runcorn, so that was one of the, I think one of the reasons why we moved there, she was already living there, but my granny never came to England, she had loads of cats and she wouldn't leave them. I think, I think she might've, I remember my, she didn't even come for my middle brother or my youngest brother's christening and my mum wasn't happy about that. My uncle did, my

uncle would come over and visit, I remember him coming two or three times and hanging out with him and that was fun.

BH: So your mum's sister lives in Runcorn too, so was she already living in Runcorn before your mum moved there.

MC: Yeah, she did, yeah, so my mum had two sisters, one of them passed away at the start of this year and the other one she lived in Runcorn before us and still lives there.

BH: Okay, and was she a nurse as well or did she do something different?

MC: No, she was a teacher in, at crafts and design and technology, you know, I think it was stuff like, maybe dressmaking and textiles.

BH: Okay, right, and you think that that maybe was like, a pull in terms of actually eventually locating to Runcorn?

MC: I reckon it must have been a bit because my parents would, had already lived in Liverpool, but my, I don't think my dad's so keen on Liverpool, being a Mancunian, and he lived there for years and because Liverpool football club and Everton were very successful in the 1980s and his team Manchester United were in the doldrums, and he, I remember him saying to me the Scousers, they don't have an ounce of humility among them. I think they just rubbed it, they rubbed it in his face a bit all their success, so I think that might have been, and they probably didn't want to live in a big city, so I'm sure my, my auntie living there was one thing, cos he did, when we moved to Runcorn I think he got a job in Chester, he either got his job in Liverpool or in Chester, **[00:40:00]** both of which are commutable from Runcorn.

BH: Yeah, and during that time whenever they moved into Runcorn did, like, did your mother continue to follow events in Northern Ireland? Would she have followed the politics of the Troubles?

MC: Oh yeah, not in a minute level of detail, but at home we always had newspapers and my mum and dad would always listen to the news on Radio Four back in those days, so we were the, I was quite lucky, you know, growing up, being in a household where, you know, they would watch the evening news, they'd have a newspaper, they'd have Radio Four on in the morning, which I thought was really boring when I was younger and growing up, I just, so we did grow up, you know, aware of politics and current affairs, and so yeah, she did follow what was going on and I particularly remember during the peace process in the late 1990s.

BH: Was that important for her, the peace process? Did she see that as an important event?

MC: Oh yeah, definitely. I remember one time actually, it was when the IRA declared a ceasefire, which I think was 1994, and it didn't last for very long, they broke it, it might've been August 1995, and I just remember her being really upset and crying. I didn't quite understand why cos, you know, you're growing up and you hear all these things like, you

know, IRA or there are all these names in childhood, other things like Bosnia, when there was the war there, and you don't quite understand the significance and what it means, but I remember that happening and, yeah, my mum being very upset when the IRA broke their ceasefire, and I think she was very, I do remember she was really, really happy when they signed the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

BH: Sure, it sounds from that then that your mother didn't attempt to inculcate a particular political view on the Troubles for you or your brothers. It was more, it was you talked about it or you were aware of it, as opposed to being, you know, socialised into a tradition.

MC: Oh yeah, yeah, I wouldn't say my mum's, my mum's not republican at all, I'm not even sure if she's nationalist. It's funny, her view seems to have changed on it over the years, quite a lot.

BH: In what way?

MC: So I remember growing up, my mum had a real sense of Irishness and, you know, she'd always tell us about growing up in these very religious, not so much her family background, but in the school and in the church and how they'd go to, they'd have to learn the mass in Latin and Irish, and how when she was in secondary school they'd go to the Gaeltacht in summer for summer school where they might spend, you know, weeks or a month only speaking Irish, and if you got caught speaking English I think you had two or three chances and you'd get sent home if you got caught. I mean, she wasn't, her family, they weren't into the Gaelic sports. I remember her quite disdainfully saying oh that was a very middle-class thing, to be into all the Gaelic sports in those days, but she, you know, she had a sense of identity about it, but not in a deeply or at least expressly political way, and my mum, you know, she had nothing but contempt really for the paramilitaries on both sides, and Sinn Féin.

BH: You said there that over time her kind of views seemed to change, or I think you were implying to me she had mellowed or something. Was that what you were you going to say, or were you going to say something different?

MC: Yeah, I wouldn't say so much mellowed, but, so my mum might deny this now, but I remember when I was growing up she would say I'm Irish and I'm Northern Irish, you can be both, you know, and then she would say, you know, I'm culturally Irish, I believe in the language and the culture and all the things that stem from it which are part of the Irish identity, and I'm sure at one point she even told me she was nationalist in the Irish sense of the word, but then as time went on, yeah, she's never been dogmatic about it at all, but if I ask her nowadays she seems to be against the idea of Northern Ireland becoming part of the Republic, against the idea of a united Ireland, purely on pragmatic grounds because she says that the the healthcare provision in the Republic of Ireland is really expensive and not as good as in Northern Ireland where they have the NHS, which is free of course.

BH: Mmm, yeah, what about you then? How important was that connection to Northern Ireland via your mother in shaping your sense of who you are or your identity?

MC: Yeah, I'd say quite important. Like, my girlfriend'll laugh at me, you know, she thinks I'm a plastic Paddy, you know, like a lot, you get a lot of second-generation people who have an Irish or a Northern Irish parent or parents, and, you know, it definitely had a big impact on me growing up cos my mum would tell me all these stories about growing up, you know, some things that, looking back on it, are really quite shocking and traumatic for somebody to have grown up in a civil war, and that definitely had an impact on me. I remember, you know, we'd get Ireland football shirts when we were kids and cheer, if Ireland were ever in, that time they were in the World Cup and whenever they were in the Euros, we'd always cheer on for Ireland as much as England, even though Ireland were always the underdogs and rubbish normally, so it did have an impact on me.

BH: That's a really interesting point actually, because obviously your dad's interested in football, and I'm guessing maybe his parents were interested in football and presumably they would have supported England–

MC: Yeah.

BH: In all those competitions, so was there ever a tension between the Irish side of your identity and your English side?

MC: Not in football because I don't think Ireland and England ever met competitively. Have they done in recent years?

BH: They did, I think did they meet in a European qualifier.

MC: Yeah.

BH: In Dublin one time, and it was a complete disaster.

MC: Oh that was, oh God, yeah, when there were riots, weren't there?

BH: Yeah, people throwing coins and things, yeah.

MC: I remember that was in the mid-1990s, wasn't it, yeah, I think I was possibly a bit too young to appreciate the significance of that, but apart from that, nah, you know, it was, I think you can always, in internationals you can always support two teams, it's fine, you know, but then, you know, growing up I was always acutely aware of, you know, having Irish heritage and I remember even in school some people taking the piss, you know.

BH: Really?

MC: Yeah, yeah, you know, calling names or whatever, although I remember one time in school they'd say things like, oh, you know, you ma's a Paddy or, you know, you're a Paddy, but then one kid saying this to me, I must have been twelve or thirteen in school and teasing me and mocking me, and this one lad, who was the hard knock of the class, he turned round and he said hey you, shut up, my mum's Irish.

BH: Is that right? [laughs]

MC: And I'll knock you out if you say that to him again, yeah, yeah, and so he sort of had, on that front at least he then had my back, and it turned out his mum was also a nurse from Ireland who'd immigrated.

BH: Ah right, there you go then, you were fortunate in that particular situation then.

MC: Yeah, but I think a lot of them in my school must have had Irish lineage.

BH: Sure, yeah.

MC: You know, with a lot of them ultimately being from, their families being from Liverpool.

BH: Sure, yeah, it wouldn't be surprising if there wasn't a strong Irish background to a lot of people going to a Catholic school in the Liverpool area, you would expect. What about the politics of the Troubles? Did you have a view about it yourself as you were growing up? Did you read about it or think about it?

MC: Yeah, I would, I read about it quite a lot and thought about it and, as a I said to you, my mum, she was always very contemptuous of Sinn Féin, just as much if not more than the DUP and the extremist side of the loyalist movement, and her view was that, she just said that they were all thugs and criminals and the people that she knew or that in her community would join the Provisional IRA were good-for-nothings and layabouts and had nothing better, and she said that they were just criminals and thugs and bullies and that they, you know, effectively terrorised their own people. I remember she told me one story, when she was in nursing college and she, or she was, she was either in nursing college or she trained, she'd qualified as a nurse and she came back to see my granny, my mum must have been nineteen or twenty and she was back visiting and somebody knocked on the door trying to sell, what do they call it, *An Phoblacht*, the newspaper for the Sinn Féin movement, and my mum told them to go away, she said we don't want to buy that here and then my granny said to her you should not have done that, you know, we're going to be in trouble now, you know, they're going to know us, they'll have us, you know, down as somebody who's not supporting them, and it turned out my granny always bought it and mum said you should not buy it from them and so she, my mum would never have voted for them once they went down their political route. **[00:50:00]** So no, she was, cos I think in a way, you know, she'd always tell us about the discrimination that Catholics faced and the what you would call really structural prejudice against them in the labour market and in the estates, but in a way, you know, it's to be expected by the dominant group, but on the other hand, in her view, it was the campaign by the Provisional IRA and the other republican groups that, you know, made things worse for her community, so she had a really, she had really strong views against those groups and their political wings, and I, so she'd always talk to us a lot about these things and I felt I grew up feeling very aware of it, but my dad read quite a lot of books on it and he had some, I remember reading a trilogy of books about Irish history that he had, so that felt, it really informed me, I think it was called *The Green Flag* trilogy by an Englishman I think.

BH: Yes, I know it, McKee is it?

MC: I can't remember, it was a very long time ago I read it, but apparently even the Irish think it's a really good account, so I remember reading that, and then I remember doing, we studied the Troubles a bit in secondary school, for GCSE.

BH: Really?

MC: Yeah.

BH: I've never heard of that before, that's surprising.

MC: No, no, they don't normally. I remember the teacher getting stuff wrong and I probably came across as a know-it-all, I remember having to say to her miss, that's not quite right, I remember her saying, she'd say oh and the Catholics are nationalists and republicans and the Protestants are unionists or loyalists, which is the more extreme end, and I said not all of them miss, you can't make, you know, by and large that's true, but, you know, it's not that all Catholics are nationalists and not all Protestants are unionists, and, but again, I remember my mum teaching me the nuance of that and then from learning about the history, about how in the Irish independence movement over the centuries there were, you know, a lot of Protestants involved in it from Wolfe Tone through to Parnell, wasn't he Protestant as well?

BH: Yeah, he was, yes, he was, yeah.

MC: Yeah, and then to the Easter Rising as well, I think there were some non-Catholics, weren't there?

BH: I think there might have been, yeah, I'm not one hundred per cent sure.

MC: I can't remember their names. Was there Countess Markievicz?

BH: Ah yes, she, yes, she would have been an Anglo-Irish Protestant, yeah.

MC: Okay, so again I remember in school, I'm just thinking well, that's not right, is it.

BH: Yeah.

MC: My view on it, going back to that question, I remember, I was, probably when I was in university and reading more about it and I thought, I possibly, you know, took maybe a bit more of a naïve view on it and a certainly detached view on it because I, you know, it wasn't something I grew up in and I'd never experienced personally, thinking well, you know, there was a lot of brutality and violence, but maybe an armed struggle against that oppression was justified, and I remember on a couple of occasions having big rows with my mum about it and I was saying but, you know, isn't it right that they did that because you wouldn't have freedom now and you wouldn't have equal rights, and in her view it was just, they were just murderers.

BH: Hmm, that's interesting, so you'd almost arrived at a stronger position than your mum actually had.

MC: Oh yeah, yeah, and I remember her getting angry with me and emotional and saying it's fine for you to say that, you've lived in a peaceful country all your life, you're not from there, you've not had to grow up in a civil war, which is true, you know, it's easy to take a position that's quite idealistic, that can justify violence if you haven't had to experience it first hand.

BH: Sure, and how do you think you arrived at that stronger view, given that your mum had quite a different take on it?

MC: Oh probably just youthful zeal and idiocy, you know, when you're a young man in your early twenties and you think you know everything and you're idealistic, so yeah, a mixture of youthful idealism and idiocy.

BH: Did you ever find when you were at university having to explain what was going on in Northern Ireland to anyone? Did you talk about it really with any other friends or girlfriends or anything like that?

MC: Yeah, yeah, I would do. I actually had a few Northern Irish mates in uni as it happened.

BH: Oh yeah.

MC: So obviously I wouldn't, you know, but I'd talk with them about, you know, I felt like there was some affinity.

BH: Sure, yeah.

MC: But with my English mates, oh yeah, even now, you know, it's amazing, when there was the Brexit referendum I was just stunned about how most English people knew nothing about Northern Ireland and its reason for being and the history of England's involvement in Ireland, it was just stunning, even among my mates, who are generally quite well-informed, educated people, some of them have got masters degrees and PhDs even, and the level of knowledge is just appalling really, and I think, you know, it reflected on the British electorate at large and the vote for Brexit, and nobody had anticipated there could be these problems with the border and the tensions that had settled in Northern Ireland.

BH: Yeah, they, yeah, the complete absence of that from the debate on Brexit was extraordinary really, given that it, you know, it is the main impediment to actually doing it.

MC: Absolutely, yeah, and just complete ignorance and almost a wilful ignorance of these, of just how carefully orchestrated the Good Friday Agreement was and all the nuances and how important the border was, and removing it, to peace.

BH: Sure, yeah, so that was maybe one way then whenever you were at university that I suppose you reflected upon that Irish part of your identity. Were, did your parents ever send you to or were you ever interested in some of those cultural activities around Irishness that sometimes second-generation people become involved in like, Irish dancing, Irish language, these kind of things?

MC: No, cos where I grew up in Runcorn there wasn't any outlet for that. I suppose it could have been a possibility in Liverpool or Manchester, but in a way when you're growing up, even though those big cities aren't far away they feel a bit far away. But I remember like, when I was very young my mum, little things like teaching me my prayers in Irish, I do regret in a way, I wish I'd had the opportunity to learn a bit of Irish cos I love foreign languages, so I think I probably could have taken to it, but no, it wasn't those kind of activity, my mum would bake a lot, you know, and she'd do Irish stuff like wheaten ring and soda bread and that kind of stuff, and she taught me how to do those, but no, there wasn't much by way of cultural activities.

BH: In terms of your political views on the world more generally, within the context I suppose of British politics, do you think your Irish heritage has had any impact on that?

MC: Possibly, yeah, I think it's probably made me much more aware about colonialism and the consequences of colonialism and just the, you know, how British imperialism really ravaged the world and caused conflict and oppression in a lot of places everywhere from it's big-, its nearest neighbour all the way to places like India and Australia.

BH: Sure, I take it from that then presumably you wouldn't be a Conservative voter.

MC: Oh no, no, no, no, no, but, and that's something that my family've, has been inculcated in me by my family very much.

BH: Right, so would that be your father's side as well?

MC: Yeah, yeah, my dad is a, he's a stalwart Labour voter.

BH: Right, so there's probably never a possibility that you were going to vote Conservative.

MC: I'd like to think not.

BH: [laughs] Yeah, okay.

MC: No, I would never vote, I would never ever vote Conservative, never.

BH: Yeah, and would that be the same for your brothers as well?

MC: I bloody well hope so, yeah, I don't think my brothers would ever vote Conservative. I don't think they'd vote anything other than Labour.

BH: Sure, and would you follow what Labour's policy on Ireland is? Would that be something you'd be conscious of or interested to find out at any given point?

MC: I don't know what it is right now, to be honest with you, partly because the issue of Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit has receded on the political agenda. I should be more aware of it and, you know, say, a couple of years ago when it was very high up the agenda I was following it and everything to do with the backstop and all the potential arrangements that were being proposed. I'm not aware of Labour's policy on Northern Ireland now though.

BH: Sure, what was your response to that Brexit debate around Northern Ireland and the border? How did you feel about it?

MC: Well, for a start I feel like the debate only really happened after the vote, and it was in the weeks following the referendum that people really woke up and realised how serious an issue this was, whichever way you cut it, whether for the territorial integrity of the United Kingdom or for maintaining the peace that had been achieved in Northern Ireland through the Good Friday Agreement, and I was just, I was, this reinforced just how stunned I was about British people's complete ignorance about Northern Ireland and the entwined history of England and Ireland.

BH: Sure, **[01:00:00]** does your partner have any Irish heritage or Irish background?

MC: No, she doesn't, she's English.

BH: And do you ever talk to her about any of this stuff?

MC: Yeah, I do a bit actually, yeah. Like I said, she'll laugh at me and think I'm fake Irish.

BH: Yeah.

MC: She said oh you're part Irish, are you, you'd never know, I've never heard you say it.

BH: Yeah, do you ever go back to Northern Ireland now or when was the last time you were back?

MC: The last time I went back to Northern Ireland, it was quite a while ago now, it was probably three years ago for my granny's funeral I think, three, three and a half years ago. As an adult I've not really gone there very much. Before that I'd gone probably about six months before to see my granny, she was in a nursing home, and me and my two brothers spent time with my uncle as well.

BH: Okay, and do you have any family who are still alive there now?

MC: Yeah, I've got my uncle, he's divorced from his first wife, my auntie, so I've not seen her for years, but my uncle, yeah, and I occasionally will text or speak with him, and I've got cousins from my uncle as well, three of them, but I'm not really in touch with them directly.

I saw a couple of them at my granny's funeral and I hear about them from my uncle, and then beyond that there's extended family, but I don't really know them.

BH: Okay, I think you said earlier on there you live now in London, is that right?

MC: Yeah, that's right.

BH: Yeah, London's quite a, I suppose it still does, it's quite a, it used have quite a large Irish population and I know there's still, you know, Irish centres there and things like that. Have you had any contact with any of that since you moved to work in London?

MC: No, I mean, I've met a lot of Irish people, I work with quite a few Irish people, so I, but I've not been to any of the, the kind of cultural institutions that I know there are. My impression is that they're almost from a different era, you know, the Irish clubs and the Irish cultural centres they existed for people who were I suppose economic migrants, who had come to a society where they weren't really welcomed or wanted, so they had to form their own places to go and congregate, whereas it seems that most Irish people from the North or South who come to Britain, London, but Britain or the mainland more widely today, they're not necessarily as forced to by economic circumstance and they're more accepted by mainstream society, they don't, I don't know any Irish people my age who go to the clubs or cultural centres, do you?

BH: Very few now, there might be the odd one, but I guess if you mean like, people who essentially have degrees, they've been to university and they come over to England to get a job, yeah, these people tend not to gravitate towards those Irish centres and things like that. So would these mostly be people that you've met at work and things like that? Would these be people from the South or from the North?

MC: The people I've met through work and social channels?

BH: Yeah.

MC: A bit of both really.

BH: A bit of both, yeah.

MC: Yeah.

BH: I was just wondering I suppose, when you're growing up or even now, did you notice differences between southern people and northern people?

MC: Yeah, well, I suppose more as a young adult, people from the South of Ireland, they don't really seem to care that much, not, I don't mean this in a flippant way, but, you know, they don't seem to care that much about the Troubles or what's going on in the North and it does really seem like a different country and not something that they're really invested in, whereas, you know, the northern people, you know, it's, it's something that's far more prevalent in their lives and, you know, has a direct impact on it, also the sense of humour's

quite different, I've always found, the, while the South, it seems to me they're, you know, they're a quite self-deprecating, the North, they've got a harsh sense of humour, it's a bit like Scousers, you know, they will really be quite cutting and you have to be on your toes and cos, you know, they will, they can really lay into you, the Northern Irish, but, in a way that like Scousers do, it can often be, it's testing the water and seeing how you'll respond to it and in a way it can be a kind of a back-handed compliment or sign of respect.

BH: Sure, yeah, I think you mentioned there that you knew a couple of northern guys when you were at university, is that right?

MC: Yeah, yeah.

BH: What were they like?

MC: Oh they were great, yeah, I knew, there was a couple of girls on my course and a couple of guys on my course as well, yeah, they were, and we bonded quite a bit cos, you know, I'd say oh my mum's from Northern Ireland and they were great fun, you know, they've got a really, they always have a really good sense of humour and they can laugh at themselves as well, as well as being quite cutting and sharp they can always, I find the Northern Irish can always laugh at themselves. To be honest, I'd say I'd relate to Northern Irish people far more than Irish people.

BH: Sure, and were these people, did they care about the Troubles like, did they, were they emotionally invested in its outcomes and so on or was it something that they were weren't, didn't want to really talk about?

MC: They would talk about it and they cared about it, but I don't think they, those that I was friends with they didn't have what you might call hardline positions.

BH: Sure, yeah.

MC: There was, you know, they were a mix of Catholics and Protestants. One girl had actually been involved in a bombing when she was younger, in the Enniskillen bombing, she was, she wasn't hurt by it, but, you know, she was a little girl when it happened and, no, they were, they had no sectarian sentiments about them at all and they weren't bigoted. I think they were very invested in the peace process working, continuing, but, you know, none of them had, none of them would support the DUP or Sinn Féin and certainly not the paramilitaries, but they would always, and it's always struck me this way about Northern Irish people, they can look at it with a bit of gallows humour, you know, despite how grim the history of their country has been.

BH: Yeah, and were they law students then as well or were they–?

MC: They were, yeah, they were law students, I'm not really in touch with them now these days.

BH: Sure, I guess there's quite a few that come over from Northern Ireland to Liverpool and Manchester to study.

MC: Oh yeah, there's loads, in Manchester there was loads of Northern Irish people I can remember.

BH: I think I'm down to sort of the last few very general questions now, so I'm just going to go through there last few ones and these are sort of a bit more reflective I suppose. So first of all, how would you describe your identity now, English, Irish, Northern Irish or some combination?

MC: I'd say I'm English, but of Irish heritage. I actually, I have an Irish passport, so I'm legally a citizen of Ireland, but that wasn't because of Brexit, I had an Irish passport years before because I lost my British passport and I was going on holiday when I was about nineteen and I needed a passport quickly and it was much quicker to go down the Irish route.

BH: Sure, yeah, and very handy now obviously.

MC: Oh yeah, yeah, it's turned out to be.

BH: Do you think the Troubles in particular has had any impact on your life and if so in what way?

MC: I'm not sure it's had a direct impact on my life, but it has definitely shaped my worldview and my understanding of British history and the things my mum's gone through as well, when she was younger, and even, you know, in the past few years I've learnt new things about, from my uncle or from my mum, about what happened during these quite traumatic experiences when she was a little girl, when the Troubles were kicking off and she and her family were kicked out of their home, so it's definitely shaped my worldview. I wouldn't say, and, you know, I suppose as well in forming my identity as well, but not a direct impact on my life, my life's course, if you like.

BH: Sure, and would that feed in then to how you think about politics, for example, and things like that?

MC: Yeah, I think so, although what's always struck me is that Northern Irish politics, it doesn't really follow the normal left-right spectrum that you get in, certainly in England and a lot of other European countries, but definitely when it comes to things more broadly about the legacy of colonialism and the influence that British imperialism had on the world, both close to home and far away.

BH: Yeah, do you think you see things differently, I'm talking here about the Troubles, by comparison with your mother?

MC: Possibly, but I'm sure that's because I've got a very detached viewpoint and it's not something that I lived through.

BH: Yeah, in what way do you think your perspective is different? **[01:10:00]**

MC: Well, as I mentioned, my mum has a very critical and disdainful line of the paramilitaries on both sides, and I don't justify or condone the violence at all, but I can see why the historical forces conspired to lead to an armed struggle, given the discrimination and prejudice the Catholics faced. I don't think, nearly all of what they did I don't think was justified, a lot of it was cold-blooded murder and thuggery and criminality, but I do think that the status quo ante was just intolerable really.

BH: Yeah, sure, and how did you arrive at that different interpretation from your mum? Because obviously some people might say you would get your views directly from your parents, but actually you have evolved, you've evolved your thinking on it.

MC: Yeah, I'm not sure really because I suppose my understanding of the situation in Northern Irish society as it was in the 1960s and seventies was very much formed by my mum's personal experiences, and another thing like, my grandad, for example, came to England to work quite a lot because the, I think there wasn't as much work in Northern Ireland, but also there was prejudice and there was, there were fewer opportunities, so he'd go and build roads and work on building sites in England, so that probably informed the basis of it, and again, I don't, I'm not in favour at all of the Provisional IRA and the other groups, what they did. I suppose, you know, my mum's just got the bitter experience of living through a civil war, but it's quite funny, I've got a mate who's American and he's, you know, proper plastic Paddy, as the term goes, and he must be about fourth-generation Irish and he's, he's really invested in and embedded in and steeped in all the mythology of the Irish struggle. He's got the tattoos, you know, he, he idolises and lionises a lot of these terrorists, frankly, and I find it a bit odd and alien, but again it's probably because he's so far removed from it.

BH: Yeah, I can see that. What about your dad, did, like, has your dad formed a view on it?

MC: Again, my dad's quite a moderate person and I don't think at all that he, no, he would never justify murder of, the cold-blooded murder and bombings and punishment beatings by paramilitary groups and their executions, but I do remember my dad saying to me once, that during a war attacking the soldiers of the other side is part of a war, so I think he seemed to think when the IRA and the other republican paramilitaries hit military installations and targets that was possibly justified, but certainly not the bombings of civilian targets and the murder of non-paramilitary or military actors or even, you know, the murder of police officers, he certainly thought that was abhorrent.

BH: Yeah, do you think you see things differently, again, by comparison with your mum, as regards what it means to be Irish or what Irishness means?

MC: Oh well, that one's harder to say cos I don't, I don't really feel like it's my place to have a very strong view on it in a way because I was born in England, I grew up in England, so yeah, I don't feel like I'm in a position really to say some, to say what it is to be Irish.

BH: Sure, sure.

MC: But maybe on the politics, you know, in principle I would be in favour of a united Ireland, and my mum seems to be against it nowadays purely on pragmatic grounds cos she worries about both the provision of healthcare, which is free in Northern Ireland and by all accounts it's very expensive and patchy in the Republic, but then I remember for years she would always say laughingly why would they want us in the South, we're just a load of trouble, and again I've heard similar views echoed by people from the South, what would we, why would we want Northern Ireland. For them, it's something from a century ago. When I speak with Irish people, you know, it's, you know, oh that was back in 1916 and '19, and the Civil War and 1922, but it's not something, it's, well, I'm sure there are people in the South who have strong views on it, but those I've spoken with, you know, it's historical.

BH: Sure, yeah, one final question, I've kind of asked it before in relation to football. Have you ever felt a tension between on the one hand those identifications with your Irish heritage and perhaps your subscription to a certain view of Irish politics or Irish history, and on the other hand your identity as an English person?

MC: I suppose in a way, yeah, if I feel a tension it's that although I claim an Irish lineage and heritage, I'm not really Irish, I haven't done enough to investigate my background and I haven't spent enough time in Ireland. That's something I regret actually, having not really spent enough time in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.

BH: Okay, that's interesting.

MC: It feels like a bit of a deficiency.

BH: That sounds like part of being authentically Irish requires effort to be put into it, you have to do things in order to cultivate that, is that right?

MC: Yeah, it feels so, even if it's just something as simple as spending more time in the country.

BH: Yeah, okay.

MC: And, you know, getting to know and just knowing more people there. Like I said, I've got my uncle there, but I don't really know anyone else who lives there nowadays, and considering I'm lucky enough to have an Irish passport, I feel like the least I could do is get to know the country a bit better, both in the North and South.

BH: Okay, that's interesting. I mean, some people would say simply by virtue of being the son of a person from Ireland, that's qualification enough, but it sounds like as an identity for you it has to be, has to be worked on, it has to be, effort has to be put in to creating it.

MC: Yeah, I think, you know, just to understand your cultural background, cos like I said, I never went to any Irish clubs or institutions or took part in the cultural activities when I was younger, so while I've always had lots of stories and anecdotes recounted to me by my mum, I think you do need to invest time and effort into learning about your background if

you're from, if you have different nationalities from your parents, whereas if you just, the country you're kind of raised in just by default that forms your nationality identity, but if it's from, if it's an overseas country then I do think, or at least for me, I feel like I ought to have invested more time into it.

BH: Okay, so in relation to that question about the tension between English and Irishness, it's not so much a tension between those two competing things, it's more, I think the word you used was a sense of regret of having not kind of excavated this more.

MC: Absolutely, yeah.

BH: Okay, I think I've asked most of my questions. Now is there anything else you want to add or is there anything which I haven't asked about which is important, which you want to talk about?

MC: Well, I've kind of alluded to this before, but I'd probably just say, you know, I think as an English person if you've got Irish heritage it's quite easy to wear it on your sleeve. So my girlfriend laughs at me a bit, you know, cos she thinks I have pretensions to being Irish, well, not really, some of my friends probably think the same a bit as well, and I'm sure it's probably tiresome for Northern Irish and Irish people when you get English people or Americans or whatever, you know, claiming to be Irish when they're not really, that's one aspect of it.

BH: I mean, there's a debate about this, I mean, you've used the phrase plastic Paddy a few times, what–?

MC: Is that offensive by the way, for Irish people?

BH: No, it's not offensive to Irish people, no. In fact, one of the debates, you know, for people who write about the experiences of second-generation Irish people in England or Britain, they often find the term offensive because it implies that maybe Irishness is hierarchical, as in like, you need to have, need to be closer to the blood **[01:20:00]** and the soil to be Irish, whereas a lot of people now would say that national identities are imaginary, they're constructed and so you don't have to be born there and you don't have to have a bloodline, it's more of a cultural idea. So it's quite interesting that just what you were saying there about your regret and so on, and the fact that you'd used that term plastic Paddy, you know. Is that the way you see yourself, a plastic Paddy?

MC: A bit, I do, yeah, but on the other hand it's, I think it goes to the idea of authenticity in an identity, and there's another term which I think you can draw an analogy with, which is plastic Scouser, have you ever heard that term?

BH: I haven't, no, I haven't heard it.

MC: So where I grew up was a town twenty miles outside Liverpool, as I mentioned, a lot of the kids I went to school with their parents or their grandparents were from Liverpool, but growing up in the town I did, a lot of the kids seemed to have this cultural chip on their

shoulder where they identified as Scousers, but they weren't really because they weren't from Liverpool, they weren't born there, didn't grow up there, and they would have these thick, almost exaggerated Scouse accents, and they really cleaved to an idea of Scouse identity, the Scouse identity is a very strong and fiercely independent one, and these kids would cleave to it and they would, they would call us woolly backs. Now a woolly back is a derogatory term that people from Liverpool use for people from places outside Liverpool, like the surrounding towns like Wigan, St Helen's, Warrington, and to be called a woolly back in their eyes is a, it's a badge of disgrace, it's really a, you know, an insult, so the kids in my school who weren't from Liverpool yet thought, seemed to think they were Scousers would call us woolly backs, and I would think so what, I'm glad, I don't want to be a Scouser and, you know, the term for those kind of people is a plastic Scouser, they're seen as fake Scousers, you get them everywhere, you know, the Wirral, parts of Cheshire, north Wales.

BH: That's, I didn't know that, I've never heard that plastic Scouser before.

MC: Yeah, yeah, look it up.

BH: And I wonder did that, I mean, was that something that was transferred from the idea of plastic Paddy or did plastic Paddy come after that, I'm just wondering?

MC: It could well be that plastic Paddy was a term first.

BH: Yeah, and then they've adapted it for, to talk about Scousers, that's really interesting.

MC: Yeah, so it all goes I think, you know, it all comes back to people's sense of identity and whether it's authentic or not. If someone called me a plastic Paddy I'd just laugh about it because I'd know it's true. My brother, my middle brother, loads of his mates at university were Irish, from the South I think, and he said he got, he got into a fight with one of them at a wedding and he said, he said eff you, you plastic Paddy and they started swinging, he said you're just a plastic Paddy anyway, and they started swinging punches at each other.

BH: Wow.

MC: I think it was all fine in the end, but they're hard-drinking lads.

BH: Yeah, well, actually I was going to, that's what I was going to ask you next. Did you ever encounter any kind of like, hostility with another person from Ireland or Northern Ireland, either when you were over there when you were younger or over here in England?

MC: Never when I was over there. I was probably too young to remember, although I do, I did get a sense that maybe my dad was a bit circumspect at times when he was on visits to Northern Ireland, but yeah, I have on a few occasions, I've had an impression that Irish or Northern Irish people can get a bit sick of non-Irish people claiming ancestry to Ireland, but not too much.

BH: Yeah, where did you get that sense from? Was there a particular incident?

MC: Not a particular incident I can recall, but just from conversations sometimes, you know, cos it's, in a way, the Irish are loved around the world now and I think maybe you get the impression sometimes they tire of that.

BH: Yeah, I just–

MC: Just being seen as the stereotype, you know, of like, good times, drinking.

BH: Yeah, well, that's, that's, it's interesting you should say that because when I asked you about that question, you know, what does Irish mean to you now or what would be the, what would be your, what would be the associations you would come up with in relation to Irishness which may be different from your mother, a lot of second-generation people will come up with that, that kind of set of associations around drinking, fun–

MC: Really?

BH: Yeah.

MC: I definitely wouldn't.

BH: Yeah, sure, yeah.

MC: I remember my mum actually taking umbrage with the way that St Patrick's Day had been so commercialised and just turned into a booze festival, she really takes exception to that.

BH: Yeah, and that's something that happens in Ireland as well as cities in England and America. It's not something which is just specific, you know, to the Manchester St Patrick's Day festival, you know, it's, it's everywhere, really.

MC: I used to find it a bit distasteful actually when it was St Patrick's Day and everyone was going out and getting really drunk and wearing the big hats and drinking loads of Guinness.

BH: Yeah, yeah, it's definitely not what it used to be anyway.

MC: No.

BH: It's definitely changed. Okay, so I think I've covered everything. Is there anything else at all that you can think of?

MC: No, I think that's everything.

BH: Okay. Okay, listen Michael, thanks very much again–

MC: No worries.

BH: For agreeing to do this, that was fantastic. I know you're busy, so I really do appreciate you carving out a bit of time for this. As I say, going forward, various things'll happen to this transcript. If there is more developments in the project, for example, if we do something on Radio Four or whatever, I'll be in contact again about that, in addition, and there'll be academic articles and things like that, so if you're interested, you know, drop me an email and say, you know, have you published anything or whatever. I can give you an update or send you some stuff if you're interested in reading it. We've also got a website, I don't know whether I said that or not.

MC: Oh no, I've not come across that yet.

BH: Yeah, if you, it's called, I think it was, just see what the address is, it's something like conflict, memory and migration dot org, I think it's dot org. Is it coming up there?

MC: Yeah, looks like, oh yeah, yeah, it is.

BH: So yeah, that's something else to have a look at, we've got some stuff on there, but not very much at the moment, but presumably when publications start to come out some of them will be put up onto that. There'll also be updates about various things that we're doing, but as I say, yeah, any time you want to hear more drop me an email and, yeah, I'll let you know what we're doing.

MC: Great, yeah, I think you can use whatever you want with my name. Just one thing, where I talk about my political views and British party politics, I just wouldn't want my name put to that, that's the only thing.

BH: Sure, well, listen, I mean, it's very easy just to give you a pseudonym if you prefer that, you know.

MC: For the rest of it I don't mind, you can use my name, I just don't want it, you know, being out there that I would never vote Conservative just cos I work for a newspaper and I don't want to ever be accused of bias, not that I'm a politics reporter, but just in case I was writing something that was critical of the government.

BH: I would maybe recommend using a pseudonym purely because it's okay, it's possible to give basically pseudonymised extracts in an article, but the transcript as a whole will go into an archive, you see.

MC: I see, okay.

BH: And when it's in a file it'll be labelled, you know, Michael Cassidy's transcript, so in other words you would need to have a pseudonym for it to go in like that, if you get me.

MC: Yeah, okay, yeah, I mean, you could use my mother's maiden name. Is that fine ethically?

BH: Well, that's, I mean, for what you've just said that's recommended, yeah.

MC: Yeah, okay.

BH: So what is your mother's maiden name?

MC: Cassidy.

BH: Cassidy, okay, that's great, brilliant. Okay, I think that's it.

MC: Alright then, thanks a lot, it was interesting to speak with you and I look forward to seeing what comes out of the project.

BH: That's brilliant Michael.

MC: Okay, cheers a lot then.

BH: Cheers, thanks very much.

MC: Alright, have a good evening.

BH: Have a good evening, bye bye.

INTERVIEW ENDS