

M18 + M18-SG4: LAURA AND PETE HODSON INTERVIEW SUMMARY

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| Interviewees: Laura and Pete Hodson |
| Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley |
| Interview summariser: Prof Liam Harte |
| The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks |

| M18 + M18-SG4: Laura and Pete Hodson | Start time: 00:00:00 | Finish time: 01:48:03 | Duration: 01:48:03 | Brief description of content: |
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| 00:00–09:59 | | | | Laura was born in Newry, Co. Down in 1961. She lived in Newtownhamilton in south Armagh, ‘one of the border towns that was quite heavily bombed in the Troubles’, until the age of six, when her parents moved to Belfast. She explains that her mother was from farming stock and her father a mechanic who worked as a vehicle and driving examiner in the NI civil service. Recalls having to be cautious when visiting family in Newtownhamilton because her father had been in the B-Specials and later the RUC police reserve. States that cross-community relations in Newtownhamilton had been good until the advent of the Troubles. |
| 10:00–19:59 | | | | The Cregagh area of east Belfast where her family settled was ‘completely Protestant’ and ‘quite sheltered’ from the violence occurring elsewhere. Comments on the securitisation of the city and how it became normalised: ‘I can’t say it affected me that much at that time because it was normal, it was all that I knew really’. Remembers going to Orange parades, but notes that her unionist parents were not in the Orange Order nor were they ‘staunchly anti-nationalists’. Remembers return visits to Newtownhamilton and her mother’s fears for her father’s safety, given the prevalence of IRA roadblocks in the area. |
| 20:00–29:59 | | | | Recalls her mother’s stress when her father attended Masonic meetings in Newtownhamilton and her own anxiety when he was on duty as a reservist. States that the year she spent working for a Belfast estate agency aged seventeen was ‘an eye-opener as to actually how much the Troubles were affecting Belfast’. Started her nurse training at Purdysburn Hospital in 1979 with a ‘very mixed group of people’, including some from ROI, which discomfited her at first. Explains that while she was ever alert to danger when socialising, she was also keen to ‘get on with my life and try not to let the Troubles impact me’. |
| 30:00–39:59 | | | | Recalls forming a close, trusting friendship with a Catholic girl, while remaining distrustful of her wider family. Discusses her hospital placements and how she gravitated towards mental health work. Explains that her decision to leave NI in 1984 was driven by her desire for greater independence and freedom, and a wish to escape the shadow of the Troubles. Her choice of Manchester was quite arbitrary, influenced by job availability and her wish to be within reach of a ferry route to NI. She found the move difficult, but soon settled in. Felt homesick for family, but not for Belfast: ‘it was great being able to go into Manchester and walk in shops, walk around, not being searched, [...] not waiting for the alarm to go off [...] because there was a bomb scare or whatever’. |
| 40:00–49:59 | | | | Reveals that she stopped going to church in Manchester. Recalls an occasion when she was goaded about being from NI and told ‘that you really need to go back home, we don’t want people like you over here’. Felt it was pointless trying to explain the NI conflict to those who hadn’t lived there ‘because they weren’t going to understand’. Notes that she was often regarded as Irish rather than Northern Irish owing to ‘people just not knowing the difference’. Recalls being taken to an Irish club in Rusholme and leaving when she witnessed people |

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| | fundraising 'for the victims of the soldiers' in NI. States that her sense of herself as 'as being from Northern Ireland and British' remained unchanged during her time in Manchester, and that she had few Irish friends in the city. |
| 50:00–59:59 | Having never intended to stay in England, she and her English partner moved from Manchester to the Isle of Man in 2008 and from there to NI in 2019. States that she was reluctant to move back to NI earlier because she wished to shield her two children from the sectarianism she experienced growing up. Accepts that the peace process has brought positive change, 'but there's still that undercurrent'. Her son Pete now joins the interview. Born in Stockport in 1993, he lived in Hazel Grove until the family's move to the Isle of Man, where he finished his schooling. Moved to Belfast in 2011 to begin his degree studies in history at QUB. Describes the city as his 'second home' owing to his frequent visits to his grandparents in east Belfast when growing up. |
| 01:00:00–01:09:59 | Pete reflects on how his accent has been shaped by his NI heritage and bears traces of NI colloquialisms. Recalls enjoying youth summer schemes in Belfast and being teased about his Mancunian accent: 'nothing too serious, but I was always I suppose othered'. Attended Methodist church in Hazel Grove until his early teens, when he chose not to go anymore. Describes an incident from his childhood when his mother was called a 'Paddy' by a neighbour, which was the first time he became aware that she was 'perhaps a bit different'. Recalls watching his grandfather's VHS tapes of Troubles documentaries as a young boy, but explains that he didn't appreciate the depth of the sectarian divide until he moved to NI aged eighteen. Reveals he originally planned to study at the University of Chester. Admits to having little affinity for Manchester. |
| 01:10:00–01:19:59 | They discuss how the Mancunian side of the family felt about NI and the conflict, agreeing that Catholics were perceived to be the 'troublemakers'. Pete states he had limited awareness of the conflict when visiting his family in 'a cultural and social bubble in east Belfast', and had met few Catholics until he came to QUB. He suspects he absorbed his relatives' anti-republican views and sometimes felt guilt-tripped by 'Sinn Féin-oriented' students in history seminars, where 'you were defined by your Englishness and how you sounded'. Explains that he would say he was from the Isle of Man, partly because it is 'not British or Irish', but also because it is the place for which he feels most affinity. States that he is 'pretty ambivalent' about the constitutional future of NI, adding: 'it's not my fight really'. |
| 01:20:00–01:29:59 | Laura states that she was pleased when Pete decided to study history at Queen's and reflects on the positive changes she witnessed when visiting him in Belfast. He valued having a family support network in the city and mentions that his best friend at college was the son of an English soldier who served in NI in the 1980s. States that living in NI has led to him holding nationalism and unionism 'in equal contempt'. He identifies more with the Labour tradition and voted SDLP in the 2019 general election in order to prevent the election of a DUP candidate. |
| 01:30:00–01:39:59 | Laura states that she would have voted as Pete did in 2019 and feels that 'both sides are equally horrible'. While she grew up opposed to Irish reunification and still 'wouldn't like to see it happen', she feels that good healthcare and quality of life are 'more important than where the border is'. Her views are influenced by her having lived outside NI and by Brexit, which she opposed, as did Pete, who believes Brexit will harm the NI economy. He recently acquired an Irish passport 'as a reaction to potential travel disruption going forwards rather than any affinity towards Irish nationality', adding: 'I certainly don't feel Irish, but nor do I feel particularly British [...]. I think when you've led such a nomadic existence growing up you don't have any fixed sense of who you are really, [...] so my sense |

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| | of who I am in the national sense is a bit blurred, to say the least'. He admits to being a left-leaning 'political geek' who follows Westminster politics closely. |
| 01:40:00–01:48:03 | Laura believes that leaving NI was a good decision, but is less sure about whether migration has changed her: 'I don't necessarily think that it did, I'm still sort of who I was when I left'. Pete feels that the Troubles have had little personal impact on him and thinks NI has shaped him 'in positive ways'. His description of present-day NI being a pleasant place to live, where 'you can divorce the politics from the people', is shared by his mother. |