

M23-SG6: SHONAGH STEWART INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Shonagh Stewart [pseudonym]
Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interview summarisers: Dr Fearghus Roulston and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks

M23-SG6: Shonagh Stewart	Start time: 00:00	Finish time: 01:01:05	Duration: 01:01:05	Brief summary of content:
00:00–09:59				Born in Sheffield in 1991 to a mother from NI who came to the city to study social work and a father from Grimsby who was a primary schoolteacher. One of three siblings, she describes herself as 'really spoilt' and her parents as 'incredibly supportive'. She enjoyed school, despite being 'very dyslexic', and developed a strong desire to become a special needs teacher, which she went on to study at the University of Liverpool, where she also took some Irish history modules.
10:00–19:59				Explains that she chose to study Irish history in order to learn more about the country, as during her childhood her mother only spoke of the Troubles in 'snippets', even though she lived through them. Recalls how much she loved her childhood visits to Belfast, often travelling there on her own to spend time with her grandparents. States that her grandfather was a Methodist minister in NI and that she attended Methodist church in England with her family until the age of 16. Her earliest memory of the NI conflict is of seeing 'a bloke stood with kind of a massive gun' near a beach. Recalls a later visit in her mid-teens, during which her brother's delayed return from a run worried her mother, who feared he might be mistaken for a British soldier because of his accent, haircut and attire.
20:00–29:59				Recalls how she wished she had an Irish or NI accent when she was younger. Describes some tension between her mother and her father's parents, which she suggests could be indicative of latent anti-Irishness on their part. Says she was unaware of an Irish community in Sheffield when she was growing up, but did have a friend whose mother left NI at same time as Shonagh's and also studied social work. Explains that she considered studying at QUB and that she learned a lot during her Irish history studies at Liverpool. Recalls her surprise at discovering that a Belfast cousin of hers was in the Orange Order and that her mother had been to hear Ian Paisley preach in her youth: 'for me it would be like going to hear Nigel Farage talk'.
30:00–39:59				Reflects further on her discovery of her family links to the Orange Order and her association of Orangeism with bigotry and reactionism. Concurs that her political sympathies lie with the nationalist community in NI. States that her mother had a 'real hunger for Irish history' and would liked to have learned Irish. Tells of how political differences between two NI Protestant women, one of whom is a friend of her mother's, prevented one from sympathising with the other when her police officer friend was killed during the Troubles. Says that her interest in Irish history did not damage her relations with her grandparents in NI. Explains that she now works for a Palestinian charity, through which she has become aware of the extent of pro-Palestinian solidarity among Irish nationalists.
40:00–49:59				Explains how she became interested in human rights issues through seeing an Iranian family she knew being deported back to Iran. This led her to do a masters degree in applied human rights at the University of York, which led in turn to her current post with Medical Aid for Palestine. Having spent three years living and working in London, she is now back in Sheffield. Comments on the pervasive lack

	of interest in and knowledge of NI among English people, which she partly attributes to the education system. Illustrates this with a story about a British prime minister not being able to locate NI on a map at the onset of the Troubles.
50:00–59:59	Reveals that all of her immediate family have got Irish passports since the 2016 EU referendum, and that she and her parents are Labour voters. Sees the importance of her NI heritage in personal rather than political terms, tracing it to the close bond she had with her grandparents in Belfast. States that she is no longer a Christian, but retains ‘a warm connection with Methodists’. Explains that while she has always known that she is ‘half Irish’, she doesn’t feel culturally Irish and, having grown up in England, thinks ‘there’s a bigger part of me that’s [...] English or taken that identity’.
01:00:00–01:01:05	Interview ends with expressions of mutual thanks.