

Forging New Identities in the Irish World: Melbourne and Chicago, c. 1830-1922

Podcast with **Sophie Cooper** (01 March 2022).

Interviewed by **Allison Isidore**

Transcribed by **Allison Isidore**

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Allison Isidore 00:00

Hello everybody, and welcome to [New Books in Catholic Studies](#), a podcast channel on the [New Books Network](#). This channel and episode were created in collaboration with the [American Catholic Historical Association](#), a conference of scholars, archivists and teachers of Catholic Studies. My name is Allison Isidore, and I'm a host of the channel. Today we'll be talking with [Dr. Sophie Cooper](#), who is a historian and lecturer at Queen's University Belfast. Sophie is the author of [Forging Identities in the Irish World: Melbourne and Chicago, c. 1830-1922](#). It was published by Edinburgh University Press just this week on February 28. This thoroughly researched book looks at the Irish communities within the cities of Melbourne and Chicago. Sophie explores the shifting influence of religious demographics, educational provision and club culture, shedding new light on what makes a diasporic ethnic community connect and survive over multiple generations. Comparing these two cities and their Irish communities allows scholars to explore what happens when an ethnic group so often considered other have a foundational role in a city instead of entering a society with an established hierarchy. Sophie, welcome to the show.

Sophie Cooper 01:29

Thank you so much for having me.

AI 01:31

I was wondering if you could begin the interview by you know, telling us a bit about yourself?

SC 01:36

Of course. Well, as you mentioned, I'm currently a lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast, I'm actually a historian masquerading as a lecturer in liberal arts. So, I'm actually in the Arts, English and Languages Department. But you know, still very much historian. So, I'm a historian of the Irish diaspora, Ireland, gender, and migration more generally. I started off doing a BA in Exeter, where I was lucky enough to do my study abroad in Melbourne. So that kind of got me intrigued in the city and I kind of got into Irish history through American immigration history. Which was quite fun, I did a dissertation on a — I want to say really cool murder, but like, an important murder. Obviously, almost murder is terrible. But of an Irish American guy called Dr. Cronin, which happened in Chicago in 1889, [Gillian O'Brien](#)'s written a really good [book](#) on it. So that got me interested in Irish American nationalism. And then I did my masters at Trinity College Dublin in Irish history I really wanted to focus in because I kind of got that wider understanding of Irish America. But I wanted to go back to the beginning, but then I studied the Irish American dynamite campaign, that which took place in mainland Britain in the 1880s. And then, from then on, went on to do my PhD at Edinburgh, which kind of carried on to other themes.

AI 03:09

Yeah, you hit on your interest in both Melbourne and Chicago. You know, I was wondering, before we dive into the nitty gritty of forging identities, if you could tell us more about how you came to this particular project. You mentioned a murder in Chicago, you studied abroad in Melbourne. But why combine the two in a study instead of just doing you know, one city?

SC 03:35

Well, I really wanted to kind of compare cities. But at first, I was going to compare Chicago with Boston, and kind of think about secret societies. I really wanted to continue kind of looking at secret societies and bombing campaigns and all of this. And then my potential supervisors, at Edinburgh kind of said, well, yeah, that'd be interesting. But they're both transnational historians. So, they wanted an international comparison. And they suggested comparing Chicago with somebody like Glasgow, and I was like, hmm, I could do Glasgow, or I could go back to Australia. So, I decided on Chicago and Melbourne, mainly because they were kind of established as the cities they are now obviously, both of these are settler cities. They were both populated by indigenous people beforehand; they were kind of big meeting places. But both of them were settled by Europeans in the 1830s. Both became kind of centers, by the 1850s had these massive population booms. And then by the 1880s, they were both kind of the second cities of their countries. So, they're interesting comparisons on that front, kind of we've got a Republican or you know, be U.S. which has been founded from kind of separation — violent separation from Britain. Got Australia or the Australian colonies, which are still colonial settings at the time. So, you've got nationalism, kind of emerging in very different ways. But thankfully, in the second year of my PhD, I realized

that actually, the Irish populations of each of these cities, until about the 1880s, is relative to the total population within about a percentage point of each other. So, in the 1840s, the Irish born in Melbourne and Chicago, they're both about 20%. And this does reduce as it goes on, but you end up with a similar sized relative to population, Irish population in both. So, they actually become really useful comparisons to see what this kind of core group of people are doing.

AI 05:52

Yeah, and that was such a fascinating aspect of this book, which was just watching these communities grow with the city's infrastructure, and how they contributed to that. I was wondering if we can talk about your methodology for this book, you're looking at Irish secular and religious newspapers and archival records collected by the Church diocese, to tell this particular history. What theories or approaches did you use in researching this project?

SC 06:28

Yeah, I use a range. And it's weird, I think. Historians are quite terrified of theories. And so, I was quite what, like, I had theories about ethnicity. Obviously, kind of [Kathleen Conzen](#) kind of ideas about where ethnicity comes from, is it a kind of imagined kind of community, bending, understand kind of thing. But how does real life experience actually play into this kind of imagining, and community imagining of ethnicity. So that kind of research mixed with — [Alan O'Day](#) has written a lot about mutative identity to how the shift over multiple generations. So, the kind of this generational shift, really kind of prompted me because at the beginning of the PhD, and you know, when I started, this book — did start as a PhD, and I've kind of changed it over time. But it started off me wanting to look at the secret societies still, but then I realized that Melbourne doesn't have any. So that's problematic. So, I kind of had to expand what I was looking at. And, I was really pleased, like, after a year of doing my PhD, one of my supervisors said to me, like you're lying to yourself, effectively, you're a social historian. And it's really like, and you're good at that. So do that. So, I kind of shifted my view.

SC 08:01

But then I, I know, obviously, we'll talk about the more nitty gritty stuff. But one thing that just I kept coming back to was like, "Where are the women?" and I kept on coming up against this. So, one of the things that kind of frameworks, I like to look at culture brokers, which is [John Belchem's](#) talks about, which we can talk about in more detail. But I think [Avtar Brah's](#) concept of diaspora spaces, is really useful. So, looking at kind of both what the community is saying, and obviously, there's so many — there isn't an Irish community, in each city, there are communities. And these are constantly in flux. And they're constantly working with and against each other, to try and say what it is to be Irish. And this is constantly changing. So, we're looking at what's coming from within the communities, but also how they're responding to kind of other representations of them,

and what other people are doing. We often think of traditionally Irish Americans as it being quite a defensive identity. So, kind of pulling these things together to ask kind of what are they doing? Where is the agency? And I think looking at kind of gender history approaches as well, kind of looking at how all of these things, where is the power? How are all of these different identities being constructed? So, I think that is also a benefit of looking at kind of comparative and transnational and migrant histories is that you're taking from all of these different historiographies and saying, oh, yeah, well, actually, that's a clear tool that they're using. And we can track that across lots of migrant groups. So yes, I would say a variety of theories. But I also have done quite a bit of teaching in urban history more recently. So that kind of ideas of space and how people work with them have come in a lot more than that. I think that's when I became like a fan of theory all sudden, I find myself talking about like Foucault and stuff. I don't know who I am.

AI 10:15

You hit on it a little bit there. But you know, in past studies of Irish communities and migrant stories, the focus has been primarily on priests, politicians, who are, as you said, and mentioned, culture brokers. But as you've explained a little bit, there's a key grouping left out of this historical narrative. And specifically, it's, you know, female religious orders and female teachers. Which you write about — you give a full chapter to in your book. So why dedicate an entire chapter to these women? What can historians learn by including women in these historical discussions?

SC 11:01

Well, I think loads. And to be honest, I was trying not to just focus on women in one chapter, because I think that happens so often. And so, there are women throughout, but I thought it was important to have a whole chapter on Education Policy, which is largely influenced well or carried out by women. So yes, John Belchem's idea of cultural brokers, who, as you said, tend to be priest, politician, and publican. They're really important. Like, there is no getting away from that. They're also really important in articulating ways to be Irish in different places. And these people tend to be middle class. So, they have connections with both the elite of society and the poorer classes, which obviously, for Irish migrants, especially in the 19th century is hugely important. But that does — they're only really important — I mean, the priests are important, obviously, throughout life. But they're only particularly important from when people reach adulthood. And they're still mainly important among men. Whereas we hear so much about women or you know, the mothers of a nation and all of this. So, women as mothers are incredibly important. But there are also these key role models in society. And I did kind of use some research from sociology in this when they talk about ethnic mirroring. So having female — well, having role models who look like you and sound like you, and are from a similar background to you — having them in your schools and in contact with people from cradle to grave, is hugely important in encouraging people to kind of

connect with that identity. And, yes, they might join all these clubs when they get to, you know, 15 or 18, when they join the workforce.

SC 13:07

But in both Chicago and Melbourne, you've got specific school and Catholic schooling is done more or less by ethnicity in Chicago, and because it's specifically set up the ethnic parishes, explicitly set up in Chicago, in 1844, to teach children with similar children like so Irish Catholics are taught with Irish Catholics, German Catholics are taught with German Catholics. In Melbourne, most of the Catholic Church is Irish. So, you just have Irish children kind of being taught together. Then in both cities, they explicitly bring in Irish religious orders from Ireland to teach these children. So, you've got a free workforce, effectively, that is key. But you also have women who is kind of similar to their mums. Unless it's just and that Auntie's teaching them, but you're also in these schools, then get these friendships. So, you know, you're only going to school with other kids who are from your community, or you're in the orphanage with other kids who also have Irish names and things. So, you're already part of a community, as a child, as a teenager. And if you think even just your own experiences, you know, those are formational regardless of whether you continue to be friends with those people or not, they do form you in some ways those friendships. So, my kind of argument is that these women are integral to creating a, what I call a foundational identity, this kind of often unconscious or subconscious identity, but one that can then be articulated by other people in the future because you're already kind of in meshed in those networks.

AI 14:59

Right, yeah, and as you mentioned in the book, you know, these schools are foundational on the sense of, they continue to build the Irish communities. I can't, I wrote it down, I was looking through my notes for the quote exactly. But, you know, you say along the lines of, that teaching, like Irish identity is such a foundational part of building this community for future generations and continuing this legacy and loyalty to like a home country. And I found that so fascinating.

SC 15:36

And yeah, it's not just in the schools, and it's less so because there are these female role models, girls, and also because of changes in educational legislation, the kind of rising standards of living, you get girls in both in Ireland, and in the diasporas staying in school for longer. So, then you have a more highly educated kind of second and third generation of Irish girls and women, who then often will go into teaching themselves. So, by the 1880s-1890s teaching is kind of the top profession for Irish American women to go into, it kind of overtakes domestic service. So, it's a way of raising the entire community as well, economically. But then these girls often they, you know, some of them join the convent, some of them teach in common schools, or parish schools,

but a lot of them go into the public school system. So, then you have the kind of adjudication of that kind of ethnic mirroring, which continues. So, it's not like it's just one generation, this is going on and on. And you got women coming in — Irish nuns coming in from Ireland, well into the kind of 1920s-1930s into both Chicago and into Melbourne. So, it's this constant kind of updating of Irish female teachers. And I've got like, they go into the trade unions, like, especially in Chicago, you've got women in the Irish trade unions in the American trade unions relatively early on, and then they kind of an — Tara McCarthy's talked about this recently, kind of they in [her book](#), like they're in the trade unions, they're in that they're in the teaching unions they're all the way through. So, you have this kind of representation across society. But I'd like to think that it's partly because of the influence of Irish female teachers, who, you know, have benefited from [1831 National Schools policy](#) in Ireland, who have been continued that, so this is an educated group of women.

AI 17:50

Kind of circling back a little bit to something we talked about a little bit earlier, really just briefly mentioned, was that, you know, these Irish communities are settler communities. But they're not the only ethnic community living in these cities. You know, they're living along with different ethnic communities, such as German, Italian, Polish Catholics and Protestants, right? It's not — there's more than one religion dominating in these cities. But there's also different, racial communities as well that they're living along, such as African Americans or Indigenous Australians. How did these communities interact with each other? Was there any tension between them?

SC 18:39

Yes, in a word that there was tension. So, in Australia, it's largely a British and Irish population, but not only. So, as I mentioned, like, this is [Kulin Nation](#) land, through a series of treaties and very — well a treaty. And then kind of just, you know, colonization, a lot of Aboriginal people are pushed out of Melbourne, to the extent that it's kind of viewed as a as a white city. It's not in any way, but it is viewed in that way, or no, it's represented in that way. But there's also a lot of Chinese people in Melbourne. There's also like African Americans who have come across for the [gold rushes](#) like this is a city that thrived on the gold rushes and that brought immigrants from all over the place. But it is largely represented as white British city, you have there's a lot of worry in the 1850s for example, about Irish women having children with Chinese men, and Chinese people are explicitly ghettoized in in Melbourne to try and kind of avoid this, but the main tensions are between Irish or Irish people, not necessarily Irish Catholics. Irish people and kind of Scottish people in Melbourne. But, and that kind of flares up around the [12th of July](#), and well particularly around 12 of July. So, you have kind of things legislation brought in in the 1840s to explicitly ban parades of a sectarian nature, which means that St. Patrick's Day parade, don't go ahead from 1846 until 1870.

But I mean, that's because Irish people keep organizing [hurling matches](#), like sports matches, where they get to carry massive sticks. Every time there's a 12th of July parade, by the [Orange Order](#) organized. So that keeps getting canceled so that everything gets banned. But you have this simmering, ongoing kind of anti-Irish, at times anti-Catholicism at times, which does, it keeps on coming up, it comes up until and it well it I mean, it comes up a lot, you can still see bits of it, you know, at times more recently.

SC 21:01

In Chicago, obviously, like most people will know by 1919, the racial kind of segregation of Chicago and the tensions is, yeah, its massive. There's not a huge African American community in Chicago until the 1890s, really, with the great migration. So mainly for most of the 19th century, it's competition between nativist groups, and Irish Catholics and German Catholics. So, you do get anti-Catholicism throughout, you get a lot of kind of negative representations of Irish people. But in both cities, which is kind of the point, one of the points of the book is that they've been a very large contingent of the total population right from the beginning. So, they have a certain amount of power that they don't necessarily have in places like New York, or Boston, or Sydney, because they were there from the start. So, in Melbourne, for example, the second premier of the colony of Victoria, he's an Irish Catholic and you have a number of others. All the Archbishop's of the Catholic Church in Melbourne are Irish born until the 1960s. But there's only three of them to be fair, but like they just live for a very long time. And in Chicago, most of the early bishops and Archbishop's are Irish, they start getting into politics relatively early. But you know, they don't take the mare seat for a while. But they have quite a lot of power, especially in the stockyards and places like that.

SC 22:45

So, you do have so — I mentioned ethnic parish. And as this podcast is about Catholic studies, I probably shouldn't talk about the ethnic parish as much. So, [William Quarter](#), the first bishop of Chicago brings in the ethnic parish. So, as I mentioned, his kind of argument is that people should be able to give communion, well give confession in the language that they were raised in, because that made them feel safe. So Irish people did tend to have all the services in English, but that's because — that's English and Latin that's what was in Ireland as well. But German people would speak German, etc. So, there's kind of this split within the Catholic Church. So, you, would know which parish then you would ask someone what parish they're from. And that would give you a bit of information about my class about their ethnicity. So, there are these kinds of separations. And at times that's played up and Irish Catholics, German Catholics really compete for dominance in the Catholic Church. In the early 19th century, this kind of expands as other ethnic groups come in. But you also see a lot of solidarity at certain times. So nativist politicians tend to bring in anti-immigrant policies as they're prone to do. But that often really winds people up. And remember,

the 1850s, over half of Chicago's population is an immigrant pocket part of an immigrant population. So, when they try and ban immigrant workers from getting government contracts, then the Irish and the Germans regardless of whether they're Catholic or not work together, because they're in similar kind of occupations. So, you start to see this you see it throughout the 19th century into the 20th when it comes to you know, oaths of loyalty and things like that. So, although you do you see quite a lot of friction at times. You also do see solidarity and that is often on religious grounds, but also if we talk about [St. Patrick's Day](#) like we — you see that a lot as well.

AI 25:02

That's a perfect setting. Patrick's Day, my St. Patrick's Day question. You know, I really like your last full historical chapter, right? Not your conclusion, because it talks about this performativity or performing all these different parts of St. Patrick's Day. And, as an American, when St. Patrick's Day rolls around, I see the news coverage of [Chicago's giant parade](#), or, you know, I live relatively close to New York City. So, like, the [New York City, St. Patrick's Day parade](#), and all the festivities that go along with that all the men dressed in what is seen, as you know, "traditional Irish wear", right? What do these performances tell us about the Irish diaspora and the formation of an Irish identity in these communities?

SC 25:57

Quite a lot, I think. But we also need to be careful that like St. Patrick's Day is one day. And so, some people will only be Irish on that day, they might not even have any Irish heritage, they might just be like a party. So, St. Patrick's Day is really important, that does only give us a fraction of the story. But it is important, largely on telling people who, who the kind of people in charge believe are Irish or are not. And this shifts over time, sometimes it's a really inclusive identity. So, you get times, especially in Chicago, where they kind of it's a moment of showing solidarity. So, at times, they have kind of Italians, or Polish people marching at the front of the parade, because they're showing solidarity with small nations or Catholic nations. There's even talk in the 1860s, that the [Fenians](#) have invited a so-called colored regiment, to march with them, they're kind of like, "oh, they didn't actually organize in time. But we did try, because everyone can be Irish on St. Patrick's Day." So, at times, it's a really about showing that the Irish are friends to all.

SC 27:16

And this is often kind of politically motivated, or making a point, but it's still there. So, it's kind of saying, you know, this inclusive identity. At times, it's very exclusive, though. So, and you tend to see this over. So, in Melbourne, for example, because the parades get canceled or banned for a good kind of 30 years, what 20 years, all the kind of St. Patrick's Day events are the official ones are behind closed doors, that these balls and these banquets that you have to pay quite a lot to go

to. So, and all of these speeches are made, and they're all reported in the newspapers. So that is when the middle class particularly really tried to hold on to this is what it is to be Irish. It is a secular, it is middle class, and it's respectable. And it's not particularly — it might have flavors of nationalism, but it is definitely not kind of a threat to the colonial authorities. And you get that a bit in Chicago, once you get into the 20th century. Not so much the not nationalist thing, but this really kind of tight control over who gets to celebrate with kind of official in the official way. And so that's why it's quite interesting to see who is organizing St. Patrick's Day events, because they're the ones who are kind of dictating what it is to be Irish and who gets to be Irish on those days. I mean, you mentioned the New York St. Patrick's Day parade like this is still an ongoing issue over who gets to be Irish and claim that narrative.

SC 29:00

In Melbourne after 1870 There's a real there's a wider awareness of it because if it keeps being too inclusive, you're going to alienate people that's not going to get younger generations in so then they start having parades again, and they have these big fairs and you've got like kids having Irish dancing competitions and things like that. So, it becomes of this big festival that is kind of politicized in 1918 with an onwards with [Daniel Mannix](#), who becomes the Archbishop of Melbourne. He's quite a controversial character. He's an interesting one. But he really takes this kind of performative control to heart so in 1920 he organizes his massive parade that's televised — well, it's not televised there's no TVs — but it's filmed and it's all of this and they've got winners are recipients of the [Victoria Cross](#) marching on kind of great are white charges. And it's this big thing about look, Irish men died in the First World War. They're incredibly loyal. But now is the time to grant Ireland its political freedom. And it's this massive celebration. I mean, this guy had been kind of almost banned from leaving for — well he was banned from going to island during the [War of Independence](#), because he was seen as too political to Republican. So, he's a very interesting character.

SC 30:34

But you also start seeing St. Patrick's Day as a real fundraising moment. So, this is where I mean school, start putting on fundraising kind of plays. And then so you, and these plays obviously have to appeal to the local community. So, it's really interesting looking at those because then you can start saying, oh, okay, these are put on by parish schools, they're organized by the nuns, and they've got a very clear nationalist kind of message to them. So even if these nuns aren't really saying very much for themselves, they are you can kind of track this kind of multi-generational engagement with Irish nurse, which means to be Irish, and who gets to be Irish throughout. So, I think St. Patrick's days are really interesting, especially because like, you'll have all this going on in Melbourne, for example. But then, but they all stop when they see the [Governor General](#), and like all, say, "three cheers for the queen," and then play the British national anthem, and then continue

and then like, have all these other things. So yeah, it's an interesting day to consider and the politics behind it and who gets to control? And where the Catholic church comes in? Like, do you start with a mass, because in Ireland for most of the 19th century, St. Patrick's Day was you went to mass, but you didn't have this big party. This is a diasporic celebration.

AI 32:07

Yeah, and I thought it was also really interesting insight to see like, an insider/outsider perspective of performance. Because you know, you have this very own classification of, okay, I'm going to say Person A is Irish enough to be a part of the parade in Person B is not. So, you can't, but you can like watch from the side or like, be a part of the picnic later, that's outside. But you can't come into the like, private party, though. So, I thought that was really fascinating. And that kind of leads me into my next question, where you have these two chapters dedicated to these Irish associational clubs. And one is about the secular clubs, and the other is about these religious oriented clubs. Can you tell our listeners about these and how they play this significant role in cultivating an Irish identity?

SC 33:09

Yeah, I think associational culture is really interesting, personally, I'm glad you enjoyed it. But I mean, the two chapters secular and religious, it's kind of a false distinction, because there's so much kind of interweaving between the membership of each of them. You have people who, you know, on the committees of both types of clubs, they intersect, some start off as secular and become religious and vice versa. So, it's not as separate as the chapter titles would say. But, I mean, they're hugely important, especially if you're thinking about these kinds of cultural brokers and the middle class. As kind of the voice of ethnic identity, or kind of community organizing, and I've tried not to focus just on the middle class, but they tend to be the ones with the money and the time to set up and participate in these, both of these types of clubs. But it's really interesting because you have, so the St. Patrick's Society in Melbourne, hugely important. It's sort of an 1842. And it's one of the first — well it's the oldest kind of ethnic club in in Melbourne. And it is actually set up by a very mixed religious wise group of people. So much so that when Catholics start getting a bit more of a foothold in it, a lot of the Presbyterian founders leave and set up the Orange Order. So, it's quite interesting to see this kind of shifting identity of who and what is Irish. The St. Patrick's Society in Melbourne. Keep hold of kind of Irish community life, especially for the middle class well into the 20th century.

SC 35:06

But this is where I mean, this is a very elite club, as it goes on, you have, you have politicians involved, you've got ex premiers. But they, they say they're explicitly secular. So, for a while, in the 1840s, they become very Catholic, and then that causes so much outrage and problems, that they

kind of lose that and they become the secular club. It's interesting, because in Melbourne, I would say until the late 1860s, you can be Irish, and be very involved — well and after the 1860s, but especially earlier on — you can be very involved in Irish, kind of have a very strong Irish identity, and not be Catholic, you can be kind of separate. Because the whole Catholic Church is Irish effectively. So, you can separate out those identities. So, you've got this kind of mixing and this kind of freedom of Irish identity in a way that in Chicago, you don't because of that ethnic parish. So, the St. Patrick's Society keeps hold of kind of a lot of organizing, it's hugely influential in saying who is Irish who isn't. In Chicago, you have this constant kind of turnover of associational culture, that's partly because the people moving to Chicago tend to be poorer than those going to Melbourne in part, mainly because it costs a fortune to go to Melbourne. So, if you're going, you're either relatively wealthy, or you've been funded by parishes, or workhouses, or family members. Whereas in Chicago, it's largely — there's no emigration schemes to Chicago, you're going there, because your family have funded you effectively.

SC 36:57

So, there's a lot less kind of disposable income going around in Chicago in the 1850s, and 60s. So, you've got this turnover, it's only in — and a lot of the organizing that comes out in Chicago after the 1860s, especially, is to do with nationalism, in a way that isn't in Melbourne. But looking at religious organizations is like, all of a sudden, you start seeing women organizing a lot earlier. So, you've got these modalities, you've got women, fundraising, fundraising, for women religious to come over or to set up schools and things like that. So, you've got this wider agency, if you look at religious organizations, but also, it's quite fun, because if you look at secular organizing, you're like, oh, okay, so that all those men are going to have, you know, dinner again, again, to make some speeches, again, great. But also, you've got things like the Fenian Brotherhood, and all these kinds of friendly societies where you can see the connections. Like at one point, there's a building collapse during a meeting. And so many men from the same street, all of them are horrifically injured. But because they're members of these organizations, there's a bit of medical insurance for them. And there is this kind of community, but also, like the Fenian club has a dramatic society. And apparently, they're terrible. But they are all putting on these plays. And then these clubs, have their own newspapers, which then write reviews, where it's like, oh, they tried their best, like, clearly a lot of heart there. And you've got women writing in saying, "Well, if you guys would let women kind of be part of the Fenian Brotherhood, you'd be a lot more successful, because we're better." And so, you've got this whole — these conversations and these communities that you can see, and it's an insight, yes, they may, a lot of them may be led by middle class people and all these things. But there are also opportunities to create these networks, and kind of move through society. So, they're really important. They're not the be all and end all and they often do seem to be just men. Men are important, but they're just not the whole story. And so, I think looking at these

two things, and the connections between the two is a useful way of again kind of expanding this kind of idea of who is influencing society and who is influencing the presentation of Irishness.

AI 39:44

Yeah, and so, one thing you briefly mentioned a while back in connection to these clubs, right is the respect that comes with being a part of it, but there's also a [respectability rhetoric](#) attached to this and the culture that's going on at this time, and you know, that makes an appearance throughout your book, especially when it comes to discussions of women. And so, for those who might not understand what we mean by respect or respectability in the context of this book, can you tell or explain it a little bit and the impact of this rhetoric and how it impacted the people involved in the diaspora? And, you know, as I said, what aspect of this rhetoric is gendered?

SC 40:33

I'd start off by saying, It's hugely gendered, it's also hugely classed. So, when we're talking about respectability, at least in in my kind of reading of it, a lot of this is inspired by kind of British norms of respectability. And these are often ideas, you know, this is the height of these ideas of civilization, and rationality. And so, it's about kind of acting in a very particular way, which I mean, we still deal with, like the whole idea of your hair, like if you go for an interview, you're having to look a certain way. And like these are racialized, they're gendered, they're class. It's about how you are presenting yourself and how that fits in with expectations of what the status quo is, who the leadership should be, what it is to be kind of a good person, or, you know, mild mannered, polite, all of these things. And this is kind of the mid 19th century. Well, the second half of the 19th century, it is kind of the, the epoch of this kind of ideas of respectability is often around whiteness, as well. So, these are both settler cities, as I said that they're growing very quickly, that kind of also comes into these, this whole idea of this being the frontier. And that these are wild and slightly savage places. And you definitely get that with the gold fields. And so, there's this kind of attempt to put the kind of the norms of middle-class genteel society in Britain, for Melbourne, and like New York, and Boston and places like that, onto this kind of rapidly expanding, often very male areas. Where you have to kind of adhere to certain expectations, to be to be taken seriously.

SC 42:30

And this is both nationally, like domestically and internationally. So, in Melbourne, for example, this is obsession with respectability, that they are a — when they set up their government, for example, that they are kind of following what Westminster do, and that they are equal. Even though they're colonial subjects, they're equal to what is happening in Britain. Same in Chicago. Added to this, you've got national stereotypes. So, this whole idea of Irish and especially Irish Catholics, as kind of, well, you know, you think of William — [Thomas Nast](#) cartoons, they're often [simianized](#), got theater production, showing Irish people is kind of wild and often drunken. And so

Irish men are shown as both kind of wild and violent, but at the same time, kind of useless and kind of naive, and will follow a priest wherever they go. So, both of these kinds of things. They're both, like violent and helpless. With Irish women, you have the similar kind of tropes, especially Irish Catholic, and again, this is classed, but kind of that they're violent, and domestic servants are kind of threatening the kind of middle-class Protestant white people. So, you have these kinds of [cartoons](#) of African Americans and Irish Americans on weighing scales, kind of who is the kind of bigger threat in the 19th century.

SC 44:11

You've got those similar kinds of tropes happening in Melbourne to a lesser extent, and again, this is usually classed, middle class, Irish Catholics get it a lot less. But it's something that people are always kind of worried about. In Melbourne, for example, you have [Earl Grey orphan girls](#). So, these are — its misnomer but if 1848 to 1850, you have 4000 Irish women and girls from the Irish workhouses sent out to Australia to be the kind of the mothers of the nation. Again, there's an emphasis that they are white and therefore a very important in this kind of new White nation. But when they arrive, there is this fear that they're kind of the rubbish of Ireland and Ireland's already not great. This is the view of kind of Protestant — well, not just Protestant — but mainly, like Scottish Nativists, especially. But there's this fear that these are prostitutes or kind of women who don't have these kinds of genteel sensibilities. So, there's this constant fear of people, especially if they're from an Irish background, especially if they're women, especially if they're working class, that these people will be dangerous to the success of society, both domestically and internationally.

AI 45:40

Yeah, that was such an interesting aspect of your book, this concept and rhetoric of respectability. But as I look at the time, and see we're running out of time, I want to wrap things up, with a quick question, probably not a quick question. But what projects are you currently working on? That's probably not great, since you just published this book. It just came out this week. But are there any lingering questions that remain from *Forging Identities in the Irish World* that you plan to pursue on? Or is your work taking a new direction?

SC 46:19

Well, this so I'm like a magpie. So, I'm like, yes, there's so many interesting things to do. But the kind of spatial aspect of it has really kind of captured my imagination. And that is because I was based in a Center for Urban history for a while. And so, the whole expansion of them as cities is really interesting to me. So, one of the things that I'm kind of working on at the moment is this whole idea of how space like the built environment effectively gives migrants space to well, how that transforms migrant communities, but also how migrant communities, especially female, Irish

communities, transformed spaces to make it so that they kind of they belong more to them. And this can be kind of big building, like fundraising. Or it can be kind of more these kind of temporary shifts in space. So, kind of since I've been writing this, I published an article on Limerick lace and lace vales and how they're used by religious orders, but also Irish Australian women, but also that whole idea of yeah, just the built environment. And I've been doing some work on history of emotions, and the built environment. So, it's like, yeah, it's kind of coming together. But there's lots of different elements of it. And I think that there's still a lot to do effectively. But yes, it's exciting though.

AI 47:51

All that all sounds super fascinating, and I can't wait to read more about it. Thank you, Sophie, for being on the show.

SC 48:00

Thank you so much for having me.

AI 48:02

Forging Identities in the Irish World is out now. And this has been New Books in Catholic studies, New Books Network podcast.

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