

Interview: Franco

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Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Franco

Emotions have been added into the transcript as i.e. [*sadness*] and interviewers have been placed in bold and italicised. Any sections that need to be checked for accuracy such as phrases in other languages or names of places I couldn't confirm the spelling of have been highlighted in red.

Recording starts mid-sentence.

LR:... Quite complicated situation with an American citizen in Italy and you here and Brexit and Covid restrictions yep.

F: Exactly. So like being the only member of my family in this country and I just found myself completely like isolated here in terms of family life.

LR: You had to stay in Lincoln because of restrictions or because you had to work or?

F: Well let's put it in this way. Italy went into red zone, (Italian for red zone) in the beginning of March I think, if I remember correctly. It was around the 9th of March and so on. Here they kept on telling us everything was more or less normal up until about I think late March. I can't remember all the dates correctly so I've been teaching face to face and there was not even a question of actually we were going to move online up until suddenly it was decided that everything had to be moved online and bla bla bla so we know the story. By then you know fights had already been cancelled and so on so we didn't know what was going to happen and also lockdown in Italy was really tough as you know. So the thing actually was to decide to sit down and to wait until the summer. [*chuckles*] When the situation would have been a little bit easier and in fact this is what happened.

LR: Yes it did happen. Yeah we were taken by surprise because here everything was decided really quickly and the lockdown was like from one day to the other so yeah. In Italy it was scary from the beginning. I mean I wasn't in Italy and like you I didn't go anywhere until the summer so I was stuck here as well. It was frightening to see the pictures and the you know the news from Italy was horrible.

F: Also my dad was, he's still alive I just want to make it clear, a GP in one of the worst affected areas (Badedas?) out of Milan so that's another thing to think about. So I had my wife alone in Florence, my parents with my dad you know GP. Yeah it wasn't easy.

LR: So at the forefront. I mean GPs were really exposed, especially at the beginning when they didn't know what it was, they didn't have the protective equipment and he must have been scared.

F: Yep.

LR: Yeah, ok well I will no share my screen with your artwork which is what we do with all our participants so let me just pick it up. Very interesting artwork that I'm really keen on hearing what you've got to say about it. Here we go so.

F: Great.

LR: Ok, so this is alright?

F: Yeah yeah, that is how it's intended to be seen.

LR: *Ok that's fine. So yeah maybe we should start talking about it and what you meant to say with this artwork.*

F: Well obviously it looks like a calendar right? Like a cut off from a Calendar from April 2020 right and obviously you see that there are the different days of the week right but you see that the numbers are not changing. In the sense that the first thing, I'm not really manual so really [laughing] thank you for the art pack but when I was thinking back into and all of these are my pictures, not because they are good pictures but just because are mine. So it's my point of view, it's my life and so on. So the first thing I was thinking is actually to go back to the feelings that I had back then and one of the most striking things is that my life was you know constantly travelling. So time for me was like something that I had to measure because I had to get on a flight and actually in that period I was supposed to go to Germany for a conference then to come back, then I did a weekend here then going to New York for another conference so it was a very busy period and that first lockdown really changed and also the loneliness to which I will come back, changed my perception of time. So it's like you know this Wednesday 8 April which actually was the worst day in terms of death in the first wave which is actually made me realise that this is not going away anytime soon. It's like if time yes was moving forward because of doing writing, doing a lot of stuff, teaching online and so on... but then it was not passing in the same way that it used to pass. So time was not progressing in the way it used to progress before. This is the first aspect. The second aspect is that obviously I've been walking a lot because that's the only thing we were allowed to do. There are two different aspects that I think these pictures are reminding me of. The first thing is the absolute beauty of the place which is not something that I notice all the time in the sense that because of also my life and I live a bit messy. Also this sort of gorgeous weather because the weather here has been amazing through the lockdown and so on, created with the beautiful landscape a very pointing and poignant contrast with you know the reality of those days and those people suffering, those people dying those people taken to hospital and so on so this is the first aspect, the idea of beauty and beautiful and the contrast but there is a second aspect. You want be seeing any other human being in those pictures, simply because yeah that was me. Completely alone, through Brexit, through Covid and so on. Obviously not all things are bad in the sense that being forced to stay put and stay home I realised that I have a home which is this one and this is where actually the bread is coming to and so on and so despite being, I don't know if I can say these things in an interview but I don't care, despite being home owner and so on. So I bought a property back in 2016 and so on. I always felt like my life always like a you know, I'm here during term then I fly back to Italy to spend time with then first my girlfriend as she was and then my wife and then coming back here and going to see my family and so on. Well Covid actually brought everything to a halt and for months it was something like well we will see maybe I think in April we were thinking maybe in June or July and I never had something like this length of time to think about oh, so I moved here. I came back in January and I cannot go back until June. So it was a very strange way of thinking but actually make me yes feel, what I would say home. Where I am and in the walls, the views I have from my window and so on, so in also changing perspective about it. That's all. The final thing is that I wasn't sure how to close it at the project so I decided to put that picture that I was taking on the first way home, finally and you can see that actually that picture is covered in completely the date and the day of the week in the sense that the temporality of time during Covid was finally broken by that event and going to see my wife.

LR: *Yeah very interesting. I thought that you meant almost like the time stopping on the April the 8th because yeah it was a very very different dimension of time passing so yeah. Why did you say that the streets were so empty because here we did pretty much the same. I mean I'm here with my husband and son. So my son slept through most of the lockdown like you know most teenagers do I guess. My husband and I just walked a lot but we were meeting people whereas you're saying that you're not usually meeting many people. I mean not meeting in the sense of doing things with them but we were seeing other people walking around like us.*

F: No. At least in the first stage. I think those photographs, I can even check the dates if you're interested. Those photographs I think taken throughout the lockdown but the first phase was really really weird. I don't know if people were, sorry I'm not scrolling my phone for anything else, just to get a sense of a date of these pictures because yeah I was able to go out for a walk. So Lincoln sorry is a city of around 80,000 inhabitants.

LR: *I think I've been. There's a very nice cathedral.*

F: Exactly and also because you've been teaching in Nottingham which is like a stone throw from there. So the point is there are a lot of students and students are actually the first creatures who have disappeared from Lincoln but for example this picture is a picture of and if you want you can zoom in and so on, this picture here. Oh sorry, the second picture from the top. Sorry.

LR: Yeah of course I'll try.

F: Yeah, now you see a little bit better. That's also the purpose of that, so that, the central. On Thursday the 8 that's the central street of Lincoln the high street and that was on Saturday the 18th of April and I can even be more precise because I think I remember that I was really shocked when I took that picture. It was four thirty pm on a Saturday. So that's the reason I'm saying the emptiness and the loneliness and so on because at least for the first month or so, it was like that. Ahh.

LR: I suppose because that was the city centre so if I remember, think back about that we usually walked in the countryside and so there were more people but possibly even in the Aberdeen city centre it would have been deserted, possibly.

F: Probably. I mean I was also taking walks in the countryside or parks and so on and also parks and countryside were empty by then. They were as lonely as probably everywhere else. It started to become a little bit more populated then. I cannot remember when it was finally allowed to people from different households to meet outside but also as my, lets say close contacts, colleagues and so on were scared to death because you know we are old like around middle aged or more so you know you don't want to risk it so I think the first event was something like seeing a friend from a distance like five meters apart.

LR: That's true. There was a lot of uncertainty and everybody was so careful. So how did you feel about being alone in that situation because I mean, a lot of people ok they were with their households but they were not completely alone but you were alone.

F: Yeah I mean let me put it in this way. Yes I was alone but also I was not alone in the sense that every night I was having dinner with my wife via Skype. I didn't want to insert that because I didn't have any good picture about that. So it was like... and then I don't know there are also many things that I did not include. I mean I found a new dimension in my life and work so I was introduced into yoga that is something that I would never have consider in my life. That was giving me something like the structure for the beginning of the day, every other day. Then I just knocked over and wrote my book. You know the usual academic book that you leave on the back burner for something like five years and so on so nearly finished now. A big chunk of my writing up until then because I didn't have anything else to do. The third thing that I discovered is because we were allowed to walk. So I started walking and another thing that I discovered that I love to death and I didn't know that I love to walk so much. So today was doing more or less the same so yes it was lonely but you know there were colleagues over the phone, there were colleagues over the screen so... Of going back to the academic life then, the academic here was a little bit strange in Lincoln back then in the sense that we were starting early in the year, we had the two semesters and the second semester was starting immediately lets say after Christmas, mid-January and so on. So by the beginning of May, teaching was over and that year because of my teaching loads and so on I had only modules that ended up quite early. So I think by the end of April sorry, my teaching was over. So it was actually another contribution to the sense of loneliness because I didn't even have the screen with my students behind it.

CH: I'm interested Franco the way you spoke about home and Covid. So tell me, did you refer to being in Lincoln as home before Covid or was it during Covid that you referred to Lincoln as home because you need to commute a lot so I'm wondering how this perception of home came about in Lincoln. Was it during Covid or before that?

F: Well let's put it like this... umm... You know I got a permanent job here so in 2015 I bought house the following year so I always felt something like yes, I live in Lincoln but for one reason or the other, you know the fact that my wife was living abroad and my family was abroad and so on, meant that yes it was still home but a little less invested in my home. Let me put it in this way if this makes sense. When Covid happened, something like the five months that I spent here during Covid and so on, actually changed my perspective about living here. So it's like something like something slowly growing on me. So just to give you some idea my front room has been used more or less as a deposit up until Covid. In the sense that I was cleaning it and so on but you know there was a sofa, it was a nice one but we were never sitting there because we didn't use it and thus it

was like a deposit. Then it was only through Covid, probably because I was bored one day and so I wanted to do something different I then started organising that room and I started using that room and now that room is like for us the centre of the home, of the house. So it's like a slow process. So it's not like black and white and some point everything changed. It's more like growing on me and growing also on the conscious about where I am, where I stand, what I do and so on.

LR: So in a way would you say that this period of lockdown had some positive aspects for you?

F: Yeah I mean obviously I can't say these things because I will look like a horrible person but yeah this lockdown, then I'm not sure Brexit because you know. *[laughing]* Even without Brexit it would have been really difficult to travel. Let's say that Brexit really helped, not helped in a negative way, for other things later on and even right now we are a third country. Even when we're traveling back to Italy we have different rules and bla bla bla. So going back to your point, yeah I mean... It's terrible to say because thousands of people lost their lives and so on, many people freaked out and so on but I absolutely enjoyed my time during lockdown. In the sense that it was lonely to death, literally but then my days is like they expanded because I didn't have to travel anywhere, I wasn't allowed to travel anywhere. I wasn't allowed to do anything, also probably because I was quite lucky that my teaching ended a little bit earlier so I literally had something like May and June and already April I've done a lot like writing. Without lockdown probably my book would not be finished because I would have been asked to write the two different papers that it was supposed to be giving in Germany and New York so to some extent lockdown had a... How to explain... *[sigh]* it's something like a holiday that you didn't plan well and which I've been able to personally to catch up with a lot of things and also to change a lot of attitudes in my life. i.e. yoga, i.e. walking which started literally out of desperation. In the sense of I was fully desperate and I was really scared by the prospect of a lockdown. Then it ended up being a transformative experience. I stopped making bread so I don't make bread anymore because...

LR: I think it's really nice.

F: Yes because the Italian friend gave me the pasta Madre.

LR: Oh-kay that's the best.

F: I started discovering all the secrets of bread making and so on and then I realised that...

LR: It smells good though!

F: Well it was a good way to spend my Saturday morning in the sense that everything was like, this is what I do on a Saturday morning or a Friday morning or when and I wanted to do to have some variation. Yes so all I know sounds strange because it was derailed here and so on but it had a very positive impact on my life.

LR: Were you worried about people in Italy during it?

F: Oh yeah absolutely. I was absolutely worried but probably the obsession with all these things like walking, yoga, writing a lot was very much like also as a response to get distracted.

LR: Oh-kay that's really good. That's really interesting as well. So are you talking, seems to me you are talking about the power of structure here in a way. I think because a lot of people got so I don't know at loose ends or like sometimes even depressed during the lockdown because you know, it just seemed like time was completely expanded and they didn't quite know how to fill it and your answer to it seems to have been well I'll give myself a structure and that came out really well. Produced some positive outcomes in a way, including a change in your sense of home.

F: Yes but also, yeah I mean the point is that... um... I've always been productive so that's not the point and I've always been like the sort of anxious person who has to be organised to actually be productive in the sense that you know I'm always like, these are the things that I have to do over the next few days so I have all my list around all the time. Obviously this was like mind blowing also for someone like me because you know what happens when my teaching is over. So that was my question. So I put some structures in place and also because obviously I needed to finish my bloody book right? It's nearly finished, I mean it's not finished yet...

LR: Congratulations!

F: I still need to check the footnotes and so on. I'm doing it slowly and still putting together the conclusions but you know it was something like err, like yes I was also lucky in the sense that I had a book that I'd been writing for something like five years or if not more in which I've been gathering material for and the material is all you know in my laptop and in my hard drives and so on so it's not like I needed to get into a library to write a book. I needed to get access to new documents because I already had everything. So to some extent let's say the positive outcome of the lockdown was also related to specific set of circumstances because honestly if I already finished the book by the time lockdown started then it would have been challenging. Well I don't know probably I would have ended up doing something different or finding a way around it and so on but yes... So the organisation was also the response to us, all the stress and fear I was feeling those are for my family. My wife being alone in a third country and also away from my family. Sorry?

LR: *She was alone as well? She wasn't near relatives or anyone?*

F: No because she's American. She lives in Italy, but in a different city from the city in which my parents lived and my family lived so yes she has colleagues and so on but that was challenging.

LR: *I can imagine yeah. Charlie do you wana?*

CH: *Your piece of art looks kind of like a film script. Like a kind of film take. So each one, it kind of makes me think of Groundhog Day or something. Almost the same day, the same number... Did you kind of see it like that? I mean you kind of research medieval history but do you kind of see when you did this artwork did you see it as kind of a notation of kind of slow down of daily life or?*

F: Oh yeah absolutely. In the sense that I wasn't sure about the product that I wanted to send you so this was one option. The other option was, but it would have been less clear and less visible is actually to show this picture with the same date and so on but adding something like a very tedious music like the same note like bum... bum... and maybe a breath but it was too difficult so I decided to move from this sort of visual thing. So obviously, yeah it's like you know the rhythm of life as I knew it before just changed dramatically. After nine years as an academic in this country you know, yeah. Everything changed. Then, sorry to repeat myself partially because I think this helps in understanding the context. Probably my perception would have been different if we had a different academic year. In the sense that probably if I had to teach for yet another six weeks after lockdown started, maybe I would have had a different experience but as in reality I think I've been teaching for something like a couple of... Actually I can tell you. Pffft. After Lockdown started, everything has been moved online or probably everything has been moved on online a few days before lockdown started. By then I only had two sessions because then it was a shorter module because we had the Easter break and then after the Easter break it was over. It was only a matter of getting marking and so on. So you know it's completely different experience from colleagues who had to deal with yet another module starting in April and ending in June if you know what I mean.

CH: *What was the mood of your parents, where they were in Italy at this time?*

F: Well I don't know if you, eventually Lucia can send you the picture.

CH: *No I saw the picture because I was watching it in early March, what was happening in Italy but I was wondering what was their mood?*

F: They were just terrified in the sense that you know I still have my grandma and they are old obviously and also my parents are seventy years old so they knew all the risks and you know people around them were dying. My dad was seeing lots of friends, close friends, literally dying. Visiting them at home and then giving them the oximeter. I don't know if you know what the oximeter is. It's this tool that reads the concentration of oxygen in the blood.

LR: *I bought one this lockdown.*

F: Me too and you know my dad decided to buy a new oximeter because the values were so low that he was thinking oh it's broken, this is something like bloody Chinese oximeter that cost them five quid and then the oximeter was right. Obviously the mood was just you know super low. Also because my dad was continuing working and seeing people and advising people and they were losing friends and people they knew for a long time. So it hit really hard because probably you saw that you know and also because of all the different things because of the Italian state and what the Italian state has decided and so on. So many people were seeing

many loved ones just leaving the house, going to the hospital and they would never been able to see even the corpse because the corpse would have been incinerated and so on. It was not possible to have a funeral service so it was only a blessing in front of the church and so on. So you know all these things matter and when you start losing people who are... you see young people who are younger than you who are around your age... you grew up with, passing away. It's really tough.

LR: Would your parents have liked you to go back to Italy at that point? Did you have this conversations with them? I mean would they have liked to have you there instead of?

F: Oh no they just told me to be safe in the sense that you know in particular the first phase it was so unpredictable that you know stay safe, stay put, don't... that's the reason why I started walking. My dad told me for a couple of weeks, do not go out running because if you break a leg or something and then you have to go to the hospital and then you will get Covid if you didn't get it yet. So absolutely...

LR: I think he had a point.

F: Yeah they absolutely told me to stay put and also to my wife. Just to avoid any risk and it was so... let's say strange because my wife was visiting me... actually let's say my wife then got a job here so she moved to the UK finally. YAY! Even though this is opening another nightmare for Brexit related issues and so on but let's keep it for another thing. Well I cannot remember what I said, what I was saying.

LR: You were saying about staying put in Italy and your wife...

F: Yes staying put also where she was living, in the sense that the point was just to avoid any contact with anyone. Sorry that's a point sorry. So my wife was visiting me, just imagine this, on the seventh of March. So she came over at the end of February and then she had to fly back on the seventh of March and this is Brexit and also complex legal issues and I told her to actually leave and to make sure to get back to Italy because we didn't know what the implications would have been if we ended up being you know cut off here. Also in relation to her rights because she didn't have any, and rightly so because she was just visiting me, she wasn't moving here so she didn't have any paperwork or visa because she didn't need one but she didn't want to put herself where I didn't want her to be in a position in which she would have been illegally here.

LR: Of course.

CH: So how did you feel about that then because that must have been because of both Brexit but also because of not being European either. So how did you deal with that kind of relationship?

F: We spent twelve years together, back then it was ten years. Yes it was ten years back then, in the sense that yeah we know that these things are difficult but we also need to think about these things. So in the sense that we know that this is not the most straightforward connotation of our relationship and so on but we're perfectly aware that we have to respect the rules and so on. So that was not particularly disturbing because if you know how difficult is the same sort of stuff done in Italy you know, it's to some extent you know she's really happy that she's going to get pre-settled status through me because in comparison with what she was doing in Italy and she had one page job and very important job and still she had to wait at a public office at the police in a line, was wasting a day in a line, paying money. *[mutters in annoyance]* A very sad experience so yeah, obviously it was sad obviously because I would have said no stay here, don't worry about it and so on. Unfortunately it was not possible. But yes being American we know all these things. I mean I cannot, you cannot even imagine how much paperwork we had to produce to get our wedding approval at the Italian embassy in London. It was like a nightmare.

LR: I know because I'm married to a British person too and we lived in Italy together. Yes it wasn't immediate to get our wedding certificate accepted and kind of certified there. It took some time and it took some bureaucratic nightmare. It was a long time ago now so I don't quite remember where but I remember bureaucracy. Even though I mean my husband is British so at that point he was European. So something must have been easier because at that point the UK was Europe. Now I think it might have been more difficult now that we're out. Maybe we should start talking a little bit about Brexit and how did you feel about Brexit. I mean it's interesting that you bought a house in England in 2016, the same year of the referendum so how do you put that together?

F: *[long sigh]* I mean I'm sorry. I've been really upset. People have been lied to so I'm sorry for my students. Now my first year students were only thirteen years old at the time of the referendum so that's a decision been taken for them, on their behalf that they didn't want to. As an Academic I feel like I'm being cut off for a number of reasons, the last one being having Erasmus students coming over to us and being able to send Erasmus students abroad to Europe. Having Erasmus plus corporations, internships and so on. In particular incoming Erasmus plus. So obviously that's a massive defeat of the country but you know, that was the first episode of I think post reality war in which anyone could say anything they want in particular the far right and the more the scream the more people are following them. So you see Trump and so on, so maybe the virus changed a little bit these dynamics but I doubt. Some people will just never change their mind in relation to this.

CH: How do you mean the virus changed the dynamic sorry.

F: Oh! Simply because I think that the virus made for some people, not everyone, at least changing the balancing thing. How people were reacting in the sense that you don't need to be a scientist that to actually see that Donald Trump was saying the virus does not exist, we are safe and so on and then himself ending up in hospital with the virus or seeing people dying around you because of the virus does not exist. So I think this is just one of the examples in the sense that hopefully the virus is killing... I don't know... Probably people are going to forget about it very very soon or rather they will still remember the implications that they had in their personal life and their professional life and so on but it will probably forget what people say, how people acted, how particular parties acted, how Cummings went to Castle Lower to get his eyes checked and so on. Parties. So obviously as we know all this things, it's really difficult to disentangle one aspect from the other so obviously if a person is housing parties in his house and office during lockdown then if the same person is actually the main actor of Brexit, well one plus one is not really difficult to put together so.

LR: That's true! I never saw it in that light but it's very true and I think the two things keep on connecting to each other like it's a tangle now. Cause I think a lot of what the government is blaming on Covid is actually a result of Brexit as well.

F: In reality it's a combination of different factors in the sense that then I'm not an expert in this particular field but I think that... I mean I can tell you just to give you an example that you know, even in the US the supply chain went completely like crazy and now paint things in the US. I know this from my in-laws, is like the most expensive thing that you can get.

LR: Oh right.

F: It costs less to have champagne than paint right. So let's say I don't blame Brexit at all, I just blame, completely, I just blame the ruthless way in which leaving the EU was actually done and again I repeat myself. It's the same man. Praising Brexit, delivering Brexit, having parties during lockdown.

LR: How did that make you feel as a European. Did you expect the result in the referendum in 2016?

F: I feared it because Lincolnshire is a rural county and I had a conversation with those who were leave at the bank in the city centre, just out of curiosity and you know they were repeating the same lies. You know, money for the NHS, Turkey's going to join the EU, other countries are going to leave the EU and obviously it was just a mountain of lies. *[sounding shocked]* *[chuckles]* We are never going to leave the single market. That's for sure.

LR: So did it make you feel different about this country, this Brexit because I probably live on a different planet. To me it was a completely unexpected result but perhaps because I live in Scotland and Scotland was absolutely pro-European and it still is. So I didn't feel it around me, I didn't think it was going to happen. I felt quite safe that the referendum was not going to decide for the leave. So to me it came like a big surprise and also a very negative one but a shock I would say.

F: Yeah obviously shock yes. Absolutely shocking, I was leaving back to Italy the day after the referendum so I wasn't come back up until August so that probably helped me you know. Just getting a distance between myself and the country and then coming back. I decided to buy the house before the referendum in the sense that I wanted to see it as something like you know disconnected and also you know academic system in Italy is difficult in the sense that it's very much dominated by (French persons?) so it would have been really difficult to go back to Italy for me as an academic. I had a permanent position so I risked it and also as my wife is American, with a PHD and so on, so around similar things. For a possibility getting an academic career would

have been here more than Italy even though she had a parallel academic in the sense that researched based career was in Italy at a foreign institute. The point is that [sigh] yes I've been upset but then you know what really changes, what changed in my being upset is actually to see that people who are still nice, in the sense that people have been lied to. Some are recognising this lies, some are not. Then I'm blessed because my job is to teach students. Teach eighteen to twenty years old so, well then MMA, MA students bla bla bla. So obviously you know they are going to suffer more than what I did. So it's like at the end of the day I will say it's fine in the sense that yes I'm still upset, yes I still believe it's a very stupid decision, yes I still believe that some claims not maybe investigated but it's very unprofessional for politicians to make claims like that. We see that also in Italy there are parties that learn now to make similar claims which are going undetected and so on. Now let's say I'm at peace in the sense that I hope I will still be able to get Italian (wine?) without paying a fortune and god we don't have the same system and it's just confirmed where you have to pay for the units and you know the settled status at the end of the day was not a big deal in a sense that still it's easier than the previous version. Now I'm dealing with a delay in my wife getting her pre-settled status, I guess simply because there are tonnes of people or there is a backlog of applications and so on. We are patient, honestly that I can also tell you that for her getting this kind of visa, let's call it visa. The pre-settled status to me is much cheaper and gives her more rights than getting the other visa.

LR: OK I see. For you it's better than getting a visa as an American citizen.

F: Exactly because the pre-settled status is a sort of already indeterminate leave to remain which is going to be confirmed at the end of the five years as we know and so on. Those holding another visa have to pay to get like the NHS or something like £200 a year so it's not like mind blowing but yes, the offer is not bad and the process honestly was not bad because as I know what I'm talking about because my wife has to go through something similar in Italy which involved getting to the post office, getting a module, going to the office, I think it's the (Italian word) Police office. Leave the module, then at some point receiving a text months later with an appointment when your visa was already expired to go for another one and wait again, seven hours in line, in a public building in Italy, smelly and so on. At least here she got a VIP appointment in Italy because she had to do two different applications, one to get clearance to enter the UK as my wife and then from here she had to do the pre-settled status but in perspective it was much easier because in Italy she booked her appointment to get her biometrics and to give the passport then she received the passport in the mail. I think it took a few months rather than I think they were saying at the beginning it was going to take something like six weeks. Then it probably ended up taking a little bit longer, a couple of months but not the end of the world. Then she flew over here, they stamped the thing she got, she paid for a second biometric appointment in Nottingham. So we went to Nottingham, she got her biometric appointment, the pictures and so on. She had her passport so if she has to travel she can. It's a little bit annoying that it's still taking so much time to get results but at the end of the day we're so happy that we live together now.

LR: Yeah, I can imagine. Charlie?

CH: Yeah. I'm thinking, what was the mood in Lincoln, the day that Brexit was announced? That the referendum had been won to the leave group?

F: Honestly I cannot tell you because I was leaving the city literally at eight o'clock in the morning. Let's say that what I remember very clearly is that not being able to sleep in the sense that I was waking up every hour, trying to read you know the news and so on on my phone and back then I was living in a flat, a conversion of an old house and under me were a couple living and she was like normal and so on, around the same age if not younger. He was a little bit like the leave guy, saying that's all wrong all the Europeans and so on and yes they had a massive fight on the day. Then the other thing I remember is that the train, I took a train to get to Stanstead and on the first train there was a... actually the train manager of this local train company was actually saying something like well do you trust Boris? Do you trust Boris? He was making something like this comments that Boris wanted to fire everyone in London and so on back then. Yeah it was like, well actually probably this is the reason why I wasn't feeling so upset because I saw so many responses like people were absolutely angry. There was an old woman who left a bag while waiting for the train and she started walking towards the train and then I ran behind her and said this is your bag I think and she said oh sorry I was so shocked because of the vote that I forgot about it, something like that.

LR: I know there were massive fights in the same families. I got good friends in Nottingham actually who I visit every now and again and she is among the most European person that you can imagine. She was a teacher of modern languages. She speaks all the European languages, she's English and her husband is quite

a bit older than her and he's a bit one of these old people that's saying we're better off on our own. So anyway the upshot of that is that my friend told me that well I didn't let go to the polls. So she actually didn't let him go to vote because she knew he was going to vote for leave. So him being an old quiet man he didn't want a fight so he just stayed home. I suppose it was very divisive also in the same family but... Did that make you feel different about the UK thought because I mean we spoke to a lot of people, quite a few people in this study, actually we are towards the end of our interviews. So we spoke to quite a lot of people and some of them were saying like oh gosh but it was so shocking and also a heartache for me because I love this country so much. You know I was in love with this country and Brexit and the result of Brexit or the referendum changed my perspective. So I don't know how you feel about it, did that changed what you think or feel?

F: [sigh] Yeah I mean exactly in the same way which I was so upset about my, not really my American family but friends of the American family for voting Trump in November. So you know it's the same sort of thing. Obviously [sigh] immediately I was really upset. Literally upset and then you know you reflect and you see that you are feeling sorry for people who have less rights than you because I still have a powerful passport I can get eventually become a British citizen once my the situation with my wife is clear in terms of I don't want this to have a dominant effect on her. Then I must admit that people have been really nice and also people have declared that they have been lied to and so on. I got really excited when back in 2019 it looked like the parliament was in control of what was going to happen with Brexit and obviously I got super upset when because of the stupid decisions of some parties to actually you know play the role of the strong one and going down to the elections and so on and losing dramatically. So by then I was saying all right so [big inhale of breath] but let's say I don't want to assess a country based on a mistake because if that's the mistake I would need to hate my own country because the reason why I emigrated was because the rules for getting into University and so on as an academic changed dramatically so it was not worth it for me to try it. So I started trying my luck somewhere else.

LR: You mean back in Italy?

F: Yep.

LR: Yeah I know. I know all too well how bad it is and how bad it can be and even being in the University then in Italy I decided to go away because although I managed to get in, I just couldn't tolerate the way things are run.

F: Exactly, for me yeah. I don't want to say it's the promised land or anything like that, it's still too cold so let's hope the global warming is going to change some things so we can have proper springs when it's like 15 to 20 not 10 to 12 and then proper summers. So sorry it's recorded so it's really rude to say this but at the end of the day I'm really grateful so I do understand how people make mistakes, we see that in Italy, you know twenty years of (Italian prime minister?/party?) then something like the self implosion of terrible things going on in the world of Politics and so on and also because society is different here. When I discovered I was paying too much tax at the beginning because I didn't understand what a tax code is so I put zero. Then in Italy it would be like oh you need to fill this form, this form that form, then you need to take that form to a solicitor, who's going to send it to the embassy and then coming back and bla bla bla.

LR: You give up.

F: Yeah so here I just make a phone call and I say look I'm not sure if I did it right and they fix it and they sent me the money they owe me. Something like this.

LR: Yeah for us Italian it's always amazing.

CH: Can I ask you Franco, do you feel in terms of European or Italian? Do you feel British, do you feel?

F: Oh, I'm feeling European. I mean I'm not British for sure. I'm not even kind of going there. For sure European, also because I grew up in a European family, in the sense that you know the best friend of my mum was from Luxembourg. So I grew up that our summer holidays always included one week in Luxembourg for example or other places. So yeah I grew up European and I will always feel European. More than Italian I will say.

CH: What does European mean?

F: For me it means just being you know that the differences between feeling Italian. You know I only feel Italian during the world up. Strongly.

LR: And the Europeans!

F: And the Europeans yes, and the Eurovision and all these sorts of things but in general you know being European means to understand that we belong to a sovereign national identity which is also a sovereign national structure which gave us, or still gives us missing advantages amongst anything else. Having only one currency between all the different countries, now it's something like you have to pay exactly the same amount of money, oh sorry you won't understand this because you won't pay for a bank transfer. In Italy we do. So for example if you're sending a bank transfer abroad, is the same, the idea that ok there are still strict rules but you can apply your Italian PHD is recognised without any problem to University in Germany. Also the examines of what it means to be European. So ERC, European Research Council. The sort of project the fund. I've been a finalist for such a project so I know the potential they have. So that what I think it means to be European.

LR: Yes and how do you feel now that the UK is not part of it anymore?

F: I'm still European in the sense that I'm sorry for the missed opportunities of my friends, of my students and so on but really from a personal perspective I can still enjoy all these things and my wife is going to apply for an Italian passport so she will be European as well.

LR: Yes of course. Ok.

CH: Another question sorry, looking back at your photographs again, they're all looking into the distance.

LR: Apart from the bread.

CH: Apart from the bread and the last one. Is there anything in that or did you recognise that when you were putting this together?

F: Well yes, it's looking into the distance, it's simply because it's through the distance that you can see the emptiness and the loneliness. So it was obviously spectacular but also extremely extremely sad. I took this picture mainly to remember in the future what was like because literally the second picture you see from the top, what it would be like with hundreds of people on a Saturday afternoon and it's now going back to that sort of normality.

CH: Would you, sorry I'm jumping in here, when you say the distance you can see the emptiness and loneliness, is that how you see UK.

F: No! In the sense that honestly you know I've been welcomed in this country and I know that I'm not the only one upset about Brexit. So to be honest I don't want to judge a country simply because a wrong political decision. Irritated and many many lies, in the sense that I still see a country with all it's complexity, all it's contradictions and so on but also I see a lot of friends. I mean now this is my home, also that my wife has moved here so yeah I don't see it empty. Absolutely.

CH: I mean you're in a cool Medieval town, city, whatever.

F: Absolutely!

LR: Yeah it's beautiful. I vaguely remember. I remember the cathedral but yes I remember it was an interesting place anyway. Yeah, really England England.

F: Yes! [laughing]

CH: England England. England's great pastures or whatever.

F: Yes! [laughing]

LR: Yeah, absolutely. Ok I think for me it's goo enough?

CH: Yes thank you very much.

LR: Yes, and I think what strikes me about, what really says with me, I mean of course we're going to listen to the recording and everything but what's really striking is this idea about time which seems to be one of

the dominant things. Yeah I think it was worth really reflecting on it I think. It's almost like time stopped but not really stopped but yeah. Different dimension I agree with that.

CH: No yeah very interesting.

LR: Thank you so much and I think we've taken enough of your time and I think Anke will send you this Amazon voucher if they've not done it yet.

F: Oh great!

LR: Well it's only twenty pounds but it's better than nothing I suppose and I'm happy for you that you're finally reconnecting, I mean living with your wife again, it must have been tough you know being away for so long and good luck for everything. Are you going back to Italy soon for a visit?

F: I have no idea because my wife is still waiting to receive her biometric residency card and in the documentation it's written avoid travelling so it's fine we're...

End of recording.

End of Transcript