

Participant 3 – Abridged Transcript

I, I2, P3.

Background

I2: I understand you're from the Czech Republic.

P3: Yes, I come from Prague. I was born there. We came to Scotland – I came here to finish my studies. I studied French and psychology at Stirling University. But I ended up graduating just in French, for the reasons of psychology wouldn't let me go abroad but my aim was to complete a psychology degree. Then I joined a master's degree at the Edinburgh University here for language teaching. Our intention wasn't to stay, it was just to complete my studies and go back to Prague however our son was born towards the end of my studies and we had no energy to move because of the Brexit and everything started to unroll so that's us here. At the moment I help students who are at the college or university living with autism, dyslexia and special needs. So I'm doing study support but on a self-employed basis. So it's quite difficult job wise with children at home helping studies online.

I: So when did you first move to the UK.

P3: I first came here in 1995 but it was to England. [...] Which at that time, I received a stamp in my passport that we were aliens here, because I was from the Eastern bloc obviously. And the only way we could come was as an aupair. For me, the agency contacted- found this gentleman who was in his 40s, disabled after stroke, so I looked after this man who was paralysed in half his body. It was for a year then I switched to looking after three children. After my three years expired I had to go home and couldn't come back.

I2: So where were you looking after the three children?

P3: It was in England. This was in Dunstable, not far from Luton, the north area of London you know, not too far from London.

I: [...] so you have been in the UK since the nineties or you have to go back?

P3: No no, I had to go back. For us it wasn't allowed. We were not classified as French, Italian, Spanish, we were the Eastern Bloc and it was after the Iron Curtain fell in 1989. So there was very limited. However, it was the first time we could go to the West. So I needed to learn English for my jobs in Prague so I returned and I had a job in Prague there. But I got attached to the culture and history so I kept coming back. I used to work as a tour guide and leader so I used to bring students from the Czech Republic who would be in Paris, going to British families to experience life here and learn the language. These were very short-term stays, there would be a week's stays or ten days stays. And vice versa I looked after groups in Prague who were musicians who would be coming to perform in the central Europe maybe during- they would come in April, Austria, Czech Republic, and Italy you know. They

would be from the USA, Ireland, they would be from Scotland, England, this was my job there and teaching English there as well, you know so.

I: So you came here [...]

P3: We came in 2010. But we also came for 6 months in 2006, cause this was our like honeymoon, you know. When I got married I wanted my husband to see Scotland and we came for a year, we returned back for three years in Prague. We were hoping we could bring our children bilingual. Plus our country was accepted in the EU country so you were a bit more flexible and allowed to work here so we accepted this opportunity. Now we may retire here you know.

I: You have been here since 2010 then?

P3: Yes, the longest stay has been since 2010.

I: So well before the dreaded referendum in 2016.

P3: Yes, yes, yes.

[...]

Joining the EU/UK and Immigration

I2: It must haven't been good when you were able to join the EU. How did you feel?

P3: It was amazing I just wish it was in earlier because when I was young – I was 21 when I first came to England and we were not in EU and it was very complex and complicated crossing the borders and immigration. When I used to bring groups for instance the immigration officers didn't have to have a reason and once I had a gentleman in the group who of course after travelling on the coach from Prague to Dover. He was retired and maybe in his sixties. Saving to visit Scotland for all his life, hopefully one day when the borders would be open. But the immigration officers just sent him home and I couldn't do anything. But you know-

I2: Why did they send him home?

P3: He just didn't look right to them. And it was sad. So um, it's not looking the way they would imagine to have [?]. He was a bit scruffy, he had an old coat, you know. But obviously he wasn't working, he wasn't about to work here you know, it was like a holiday which was pre-planned, pre-booked, you know. Visiting Scottish touristic sites, and English on the way up to Scotland, so you know for me this was really the first experience with how tough it is to cross the borders you know. So, um, but your question was –

I2: What was it really like when Czech Republic joined the EU?

P3: So when we joined the EU, in comparison with this experience, I was delighted, cause my parents could come over and see the country. They maybe- they would know, like, a lot about Britain because of the documentaries and the reading.

I2: When did- I feel really bad I don't know when the Czech Republic joined the EU sorry-

P3: It was 2004. And you know we had very good jobs in Prague, with my husband, so the decision was really difficult to quit our jobs and come here for honeymoon and maybe try to find a job. So we slipped of course you know doing cleaning and helping in cafes, just for the experience of life abroad properly without being [?] for £30 a week or so. So it felt very good. We felt like humans not like "aliens" like before.

I: But when that thing happened, sorry I didn't catch, who was sent back? Was that your Dad you said?

P3: No, my tourist. Just a participant of a group you know.

I: Was it from Britain they sent him back?

P3: Yeah they would just take him to the car which had bars and then they would ship you back to France and then just do whatever, you know.

I: And did that impact on your feelings around the UK?

P3: Absolutely. On me, on the whole group, you know. On me especially because I was hoping that - I was explaining to them you know that this gentleman couldn't come here to stay or do anything. He had his home back home, he had his parents maybe his children he had his house probably you know. So, um, this had a huge impact on me. The perception of how Britain- maybe the perception of who works for immigration and what kind of personality immigration officers have to be- or that maybe they don't know the whole story but it's up to one person's decision – does he like you or not, you know? So it was very very weird to me. Also, you know, I wasn't smuggling people here to work. And at that time I was very young so I had no information about smuggling people.

I2: You were in your twenties weren't you?

P3: Yes I was really young. I was still fit and I loved to travel. Yeah, it was very strange. There were no problems with France so we would maybe visit Paris but then there would be problems in Britain.

I: OK. But you still wanted to come back to visit this country when you could.

P3: Yes.

I: Can you tell us why?

P3: Because when I looked after this disabled gentleman, whose name was [redacted], his parents welcomed me a lot, you know? Cause he was 42 or 43, I think his parents were around 70, something between 60, 70, and they had a huge knowledge of former Czechoslovakia, and the history so they would be very kind to me, you know. And thanks to them, you know, and their like- I came here to study so I would look after this gentleman and in the morning I could go to college where I would be learning English only you know. So I had like written – my written English language was really good but my spoken language was difficult because I always had issues with confidence and, you know, it was difficult. But, um, they were great and I met many friends who were very welcoming and very nice, you know, in England. And our first trip, we wanted to, um see Britain- for us it's a different culture- for me it's always been the ruins of the abbeys, the heritage Britain has. Because we are an inland country it's always attracted me because it's an island that has the sea. We don't have sea, you know. It was a kingdom so I wanted to see the castles and the landscape, countryside. And I wanted to see Scotland at that time you know because of the hills and I used to like hitchhiking, so that was the reason. I just felt for it. You know? It somehow stayed in my heart.

Attitudes in Scotland/England towards EU nationals

I2: Was Scotland, as a place to come – you liked the idea of kind of Scotland rather than-

P3: England?

I2: Than anywhere else in the UK?

P3: Um, Yes. I was- it felt a bit different when I compared it with England. You know? It felt- it didn't feel- I don't want to sound strange but it's didn't feel like "number 1". In England I often met people who feel like we are the best.

I: [Laughs] you're not the only one.

P3: [Laughs]. So Scotland was a very different story you know?

I: [Laughs] yeah. I can understand very well what you're saying because you know I lived in England and Scotland and I have more or less the same impression.

P3: Do you?

I: Yeah.

P3: You know I didn't come here to earn money you know. Our family came here to learn about culture, history so that I could then pass the knowledge to my students back in Prague, if I ever go back to teaching you know. So, it's maybe different towards other immigrants who come here to earn money, which wasn't in our case. But Scotland seems to be a bit more modest, you know, and people were nice. We have good experience you know. Of course, now I know the country more, as a tourist, so I know my husband has a really tough job working also with people from deprived areas because my part time job is

cleaning as well, so that I have some income during the summer. Again for me linguistically it's very interesting to hear all their accents, I'm a bit lost with people from [?]. So English language wise it's very rich here for me. But um it's not easy. So of course you would hear racist remarks, like towards my Polish colleagues, if you didn't come here you wouldn't have these problems with your parents you know. It's on an everyday basis.

I: Even in Scotland you've had this experience?

P3: Now yeah. After the Brexit it has been changing I think the dynamics within society, the atmosphere was slightly, just changed, you know. I don't know about your impression.

I: Well, I haven't had any direct experience of this kind of treatment, you know. But I must admit that I do work in a kind of protected environment, at least from these sort of crimes because I work in a university and that way it is kind of like a micro-world where these things don't happen usually. And the second thing is that with lockdown and everything my life has become much more enclosed.

P3: Like a micro space.

I: Yeah, I'm less out-

P3: Yeah so you're not as exposed to people.

I: So I'm only meeting people from my circle of friends or colleagues on the internet like we are now. And also because colleagues are all people from university, so I think I live in a kind of protected bubble at the moment. Also because of COVID. But maybe when COVID is gone – hopefully soon – then I will have some experiences of that as well.

P3: Maybe not Lucia. I absolutely agree with what you have just described because until I worked – until I studied at the University of Stirling, subsequently Edinburgh Uni, I- I was interpreting in hospitals so I was meeting just professors or doctors, GPs, and patients of course. I started to see what it was like to work for a fish factory here, people have been employed for ten years not knowing English, so it started to open up for me and. However my husband worked, has worked for a care home for the whole ten years here and his experience was very different. His language also he met there was very different.

I: I can imagine.

P3: I'm- learned about it through my husband. Now my cleaning has been going on for two years because as I am self-employed I have no job in summer. I learned more there, as I had some cases to interpret where children were- not treated very well within communities here you know- there would be stones thrown at them so I can suddenly see a very rough life here for people from Europe. Very hidden you know. Then the social services come on the scene and they "try to identify the problem" – is it the family, is it the school, is it community? Obviously it's in community because it's not normal to throw rubbish from the windows. In some areas they do it and it's normal- for me it was shocking you know, it's filthy, many places. But um-

I: Was this in Edinburgh?

P3: This would be Stirlingshire. You know the areas where you have drugs. Where children give birth. It's just you know horrible. Some families who, are maybe working really hard, but run into difficulties, are offered council housing there not knowing, you know, what's gonna happen there at school for their children obviously. So I did meet some complicated cases like this. Which allowed me to see society from the very bottom I would say. Cause the very top of the educated elite.

I: And these areas that you are working with, these kids, are they mostly European?

Education in UK and in Europe

P3: This is the job I am interpreting you know. I had maybe ill tourists in hospital so I would come and help. But this job I'm doing now, these are British students you know, who are struggling with English, so I would be helping them structuring essays, I would help them with time management. Come on there is deadline! Just you have it written lets go. Also managing their anxieties, which they have. And it's been offered to me by one lady. I would never dare to apply for such a kind of job, because I am a "foreigner" here with the language how can I help the students linguistically. But I did linguistics you know so-

I: You know what, I've got students from – of course from Britain - and students from Europe and I think sometimes I correct the grammar more for the British ones [laughs] than the European ones.

P3: Yes it's interesting. Cause the university studies are very much based on writing and I've been through the undergraduate and postgraduate which trained me well cause I struggled at the beginning with the structure but I went through all the courses, academic writing you know and it brought me a little job, which I'm glad.

I: Yeah, I feel a bit strange sometimes when I correct the grammar of essays that were written by British students but I can still see that the sentences don't work. So I feel a bit weird cause I'm thinking, oh well I'm a foreigner and I'm correcting a British student's English – in English. And then I think well if it's wrong, it's wrong. [Laughs].

P3: Yeah, yeah.

[...]

I: But you know in Europe. I suppose Jana you might be able to relate with it, I think the kind of education we get is different.

P3: Very different.

I: It's just got a different structure. So we are taught the grammar, we are taught in very traditional ways, and so one thing that comes out is that we usually write grammatically correct stuff.

P3: It's slightly rigid. But there's benefits as well.

I: There's pros and cons.

P3: Absolutely. I find it interesting here because sometimes with my students I feel sorry for them because when you are studying beauty therapy or art why should you be writing as a linguist. You know back home we have oral exams, students with dyslexia or autism, those who can't write but they have so much ideas, they are real geniuses some of them, they could tell you which – [?] but no they have to write it down which is a bit like, interesting.

[...]

Introduce us to your artwork

I2: Do you want to tell us why you chose this picture, this photograph?

P3: Yes. Because now I feel behind the bars. I can't visit family. We don't have jobs which are well paid. We can't really afford to have quarantine because we would lose the jobs and we have two children here so we are done. We can't do anything until the countries would be clean and clear of COVID. Of course, my parents and my husband's parents are getting older. Our children haven't seen them for two years now – this is going to be second summer. Cause we didn't end up going last summer. Cause we had the COVID twice, cause my husband was in the care home it was ridiculous the situation last year there were many dying without anybody acknowledging it was happening the government was acting slow everything like PPE you know he would be ordering it himself and it was ridiculous. So, we are exhausted and um, yeah and also the Brexit for me.

I2: Can you tell us, uh, your husband, was there a care home near Edinburgh he was working in?

P3: Yes, it was a care home in Edinburgh in one of the deprived areas. Lovely care home you know.

I2: That must have been distressing for you.

P3: He was there for ten years. After the first day [?], the big boss of the whole charity, I can't name obviously, my husband- they decided to leave really. The boss is based in England. He is also a blind man [?] who couldn't cope with the management. My husband's very sensitive as well. He wants to go to action, you know so he would be making decisions as the duty manager on behalf of. Because he had pregnant women there, he had people with asthma there, he would have elderly. He was worried. He knew about the virus so he would [?] home. Many workers he put – because they were maybe connected with someone with covid but [?] cared less at the beginning because people were ill already in February. So then he said no to parties and he was the bad guy. He said no I don't want my

clients to die. He had only 11 of them so it was a very very small home so they're like very attached there, like a family. He couldn't- people there with brain injuries, to make it clear, young ones, not only dementia. Everything, maybe there were older ones with other disabilities as well, like autism. It was traumatic for him.

I: So, can I ask because I'm not clear. So in this care home, it wasn't only a care home for older people, it was a care home for different categories of-

P3: Here when you say care home they think this is for people who are old but no you can be disabled after accident, maybe some of them wanted to- you know some of them would be those who tried to commit suicide so they survived and then the brain didn't work they way it did before the accident or incident and there would be people with mental issues who are living with autism but very severely disabled, not having any leg or so on. So you really have to manage the home- so there's no frustration or stress, you know? So the workers they would be worried.

I: I can imagine.

P3: Luckily he managed you know, to keep it COVID free however he was so tired that he decided that we were gonna move as soon as possible cause this was on our mind for years, you know. He was invited for an interview to go to Prague and he tested positive the day of the departure to Prague. So, again it was a big shock for him. Because tests were not available. We had to pay £150 for one. We couldn't do anything you know here. [?] Because then back in Prague, they contained the virus quite well the first [?] took it very seriously. Unfortunately they thought we won't don't have covid so it was really bad this winter back in Prague so, so, yeah my husband's attempt to return [?] back home failed completely because of COVID. But he felt like I have worked for ten years, I have done my duty, I want to do something different now cause we are tired. It's tiring. So he changed the job thanks to this experience there were clashes with management and he just didn't get their thinking. And of course it was his responsibility but he had to obey the rules from the government but they were changing every day he would be reading here until two o'clock in the morning because they would be sending twenty pages to read and he has to interpret it to his employees, to the colleagues, you know it was ridiculous what they expected, you know, with no help, no support, nothing. So he would be staying at work until midnight you know I would be bringing him food really. Not good you know. So it was a wee while very personal, he's very- he was very attached to it, you know. As I say 11 clients, it's nothing, you know. There were about 30, 40 employees in this home and 11 clients but the charity has many homes all over Britain, you know so. Um, yeah this experience changed our thinking you know. We felt like, like the photograph Charlie asked me about, I feel like behind bars here now with COVID plus Brexit, plus earning a bit more than minimum wage. You can never save £1650 and then manage quarantine if you want to visit ill parents first so, so for us it's our destiny we think. We laugh. We think maybe we are destined to stay here, retire, because it's quite good here for children you know. We don't know. Photographs first were the reflection in June [??]. Yeah, it's tough.

I: So, you would like to go back to Prague.

P3: We would like to go yes.

I: If you could do what you would like to do now, you would just go back to Prague?

P3: Yeah the thing is that we were timing it for the children cause our son started P1 here last year. And he- however the system as you mentioned Lucia on the continent is different. He would start in September 21, his P1 in Prague, so you know what we don't want the children to go through trauma too much. They're already missing their parents, their grandparents, you know cause we actually have a very good relationship family wise. So being unable to see the family is difficult although we have Zoom, we have WhatsApp, we have Skype you know, it's not the same. So you can't help the parents. Like for instance, my mum and dad have to do operations, like surgeries, I want to be there for them, you know? So, but uh.

I: [...] It's been really tough.

P3: This is what my husband told me. The hard bit was that because one client died as well, a relative of the client, and this is something new we never heard of. Adam organised a funeral online for the client so he could kind of say goodbye to the relative who died [?] because he couldn't travel, it was limited the amount of people only, so my husband described it ... that you couldn't say goodbye was the worst people [?]. Because in the next care home which was council run, 14 people died within one week, last May. Which was ridiculous, you know. So, people have gone through trauma, here in Britain and everywhere, like the relatives who couldn't visit, who couldn't say goodbye or nothing. Such a shame. You know. Of course we can't do much with the pandemic, it's illness, but still. A bit of responsibility from Boris Johnson at the beginning would be welcome, because he knew what was happening in Italy, France, everywhere you know, so. I think that if he acted slightly earlier then we would feel like no problem. It's hard to make decisions of course. It was new so I wouldn't like to be in his shoes but I don't think he's a very responsible person to be honest.

I2: Can you describe your inner feeling, your mood at the time?

P3: Last year, I was Charlie, too exhausted because I saw [my husband] suffering. Started not- he started not to move- he couldn't move suddenly. He blamed our allotment- our oasis. Our allotment would be thriving. However we found out his mobility issues may have been related to COVID. Because we didn't know he had covid. Because he was asymptomatic, apart from the mobility issues. Then we learned from friends, doctors, that it does affect the body in so many different ways, even skin rashes you know, mobility issues, not only breathing and temperature. So, um, the feeling was frustration, was tiredness, because I was helping shopping our neighbours because I have friends from swimming who are 70. So one of my good friends, her brother was ill with cancer so she wouldn't dare going out at all, we were exhausted really. But we kept going on. You need to for the children. We were very tired. So the feeling was really tiredness, also you feel like you're going against the law [?]. Because imagine you know the illness is there, you have friends on the continent. You have Italian friends, cause [my husband's] dad is an interpreter in Italian language and we have friends, Italian-British couple at Stirling uni. You know how the

people were doing there, it was very complicated. And [my husband] wanted to say no to parties, and it would be “oh no, they can have a party” – it can kill our 11 in a week – as proved very realistic and true in few months time but action should have been taken in February, maybe January. Which, we could see it because for instance in [my husband’s] work one colleague came back from Spain on holiday and he tested positive. Nobody would take any notice. He would just be home but then go back to work, they needed them to go back to work. My husband was COVID ill and his manager brought the laptop to me, and I went to pick it up downstairs, so that he could work from home. So treating employees was just ridiculous. And based on my conversation with his manager, I was very supportive in, that’s enough here, we are going home. Because that was enough. We are not slaves here or anything like that. This is ridiculous. Because he had a lot of overtime which was not wanted so as soon as the company saw that he earned more than he would usually earn, he said no to overtime. He would be doing the job because some people were sick, there was this quarantine for people who had asthma, they wouldn’t go to work and so on. He really experienced really interesting. So a few people, they would take it very lightly. Oh nothing, it’s nothing, you know. So, uh. At springtime last year, for the first time I realised that knowing several languages could be a disadvantage. Because I would have followed the news everywhere you know continent, Canada, US, and then you suddenly know what’s happening in the Eastern bloc you call it, on the continent, like France, Italy, Spain, here, you – no- don’t want to- it was very interesting here. We were just very tired here Charlie. Exhausted. Like stuck. Very. Very, just because of the jobs we were doing obviously you know. Because I had to work from home, with children, and I have 10 students to look after. They were stressed, you know some of them maybe to enter university- these were the college students – they were stressed. Will we pass our graded units you know we need As so that we can start in uni next year, what will happen, this is our future, so the pressure was from every angles. Then from home as well, though Britain was like really doing badly, are you okay, constantly are you okay. And then we have to tell them, yeah we are okay, but are we really okay? It kept going you know, so the job would – maybe stopped us thinking about it, we just had to keep going you know. So. Yeah this frustration also for our children maybe but they are quite little.

I2: How old are your children.

P3: They are 6 and 13 (?). But you feel like who would help them. Because we agreed to interpret in hospital if needed. COVID cases. Because elderly interpreters wouldn’t come in obviously. At the time you would see elderly people die so of course I’m gonna come. Back in the day they changed it so it would be over the phone but I had one case face-to-face, it was a child who was very sick, and I had no one to look after my own children because it was forbidden to me, and because I’m not classified as key worker because I’m self-employed. So wouldn’t have opportunity to have our children in the hub. So, it was just, you know we tested our limits I think. So very interesting experience you know. So far we are still here, you know what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger but, uh.

I: Are you still thinking about going back?

P3: This is the thing you know. I signed the wee one in a Czech school in April. We have our daughter signed there as well, we could go there with both languages. [Daughter] could [?]

exams so that when we return she would not have that much difficulties entering the school there. So I desperately keep both languages going. It's difficult and complex language. But now, this is like, you should start in September, but there is no way we will return this year. The little one should start in September but there is no way we will return now. So [my husband] changed job. He changed job to work for a residential school so it's another challenge, because there are children from very complex backgrounds, you know maybe. Drug addicts, beaten, abused, very very damaged mentally Very very very interesting experience. Very tough. My husband's tough. I think, he has been there since August, so it's almost a year now. It's not easy you know. And again, you see the difference between the managers and the lowest of the workers who are with the children. This new job for instance, next to our daughter we are too responsible maybe, we tested her when she went to school, and my husband was showing her how to do the test. And this test came up positive. And I said look your test is positive. And he was just feeling unwell, a bit, but maybe, he didn't have the listed symptoms, so they wouldn't talk to you. They wouldn't even invite you for the test. And I said, but she can't go to school, so I didn't send her. He booked for PCR, proved positive, so we started safe house, isolating [?]. However it was four days after the test, I felt very sick. And just a few hours later my daughter was sick. And it took me about three weeks really to pick up because you can still hear my voice. I'm being funny you know, I have energy levels like here [lifts hand up high] and it goes really down. My brain is very, um, funny, I must admit you are working the uni, you write a lot. I can't believe what I have written sometimes when I check it later. So this new company, because it's a posh area, they thought COVID didn't exist because for a year they never had a case. When they started, based on [my husband] being ill again, he could see that the children were sick, they probably brought it from schools when they opened the schools in April for just a few days before the Easter holidays. The whole cottage [my husband] works for has been COVID positive. Apart from those vaccinated like [someone] had two vaccines, they were fine. They never got it. Unfortunately for my husband and his two colleagues, because it's a residential school it's not classed as a care home, they didn't arrange the vaccines for them so my husband wasn't vaccinated. Every other worker was. He was pushing for the vaccine since January. Unfortunately he was offered to be vaccinated two weeks after we got ill so we had to postpone because you can't be vaccinated. It's all a mess now, like you know. This is the bars [12]! It's complex.

I2: I see there are metal flowers. Why did you take this photograph?

P3: Because for me like bars I hate. I like, um. I always try to see the positive side. In everything negative there is always something positive, I think. Or something you learn from maybe from bad experience which, um, which can enrich you. For me nature is very important, like flowers, plants, you know so this is to soften it.

I: It is a very beautiful picture. Really nice. Aesthetically as well, I think aesthetically it's really interesting.

P3: I am glad you like it. It's just something I spotted and suddenly I remembered your research and I thought "oh THIS is how I feel". I had my phone with me. It's not a good quality one but I thought this is how I feel, I'm not going to draw anything. So um, I opted for the photograph. Plus the reflection, I like taking photos when there is reflection of water

or. With the bars you feel. You always reflect on something. Like the past here. We've been reflecting on our experience a lot, you know. The allotment obviously [I2] was our oasis. It helped us a lot you know just going. Maybe because by the flowers. And I've always liked historical buildings and architecture has character. It's just something interesting. Ordinary school building you know. Very dirty, very filthy but the sunshine and reflection and shades you suddenly see it very pretty, so. That's not that bad what we are going through you know. So hopefully, the sun will shine soon, you know.

I: And [I2] do you want to show the other picture?

[...]

I2: Okay do you want to tell us about this P3? [54:09]

P3: Yeah. Um. I didn't know what to, uh, with my husband's got birthday in February, wintertime and we were locked down, he had to go into work, and he came home with scratches on his hands and one of his colleagues had broken ribs based on the job they are doing, you know, she is a teacher. And, um, I found this art company where you can send photographs and they will give you feedback. [My husband] used to take really nice photographs. This is how we met. Through taking pictures in Prague of the lamps. So this resembles the old gas lamps in Prague, you know. So, um, we went for a walk one winter. We couldn't stand it at home anymore. We felt like – I took a tablet which was like old and I thought, hm everybody's taking pictures with tablet, I'm not very good with technology, I'm going to try. And he had his camera you know doing other things. And I've seen this lamp, you know, and I loved it and with the Scottish flag, I- at that time it was very shortly after the deal Brexit so with the red line[?] and I suddenly felt, that, where are we going? Like there's something brighter behind us but we're heading into darkness. Cause nothing was so clear for, with the settlement status and all these things so, um, I just felt, I loved this one you know. And I found it. I couldn't find a better- When I sent you the bars [I2] I realised this one would depict better my mood with the lockdown, like the darkness. We couldn't go home again. We had tickets books for March because last year we were hoping it would be better but the situation in Prague got very bad over winter you know so. Um. My sister's husband had COVID but very bad, badly unwell. He's just 58. But um- he made it but it wasn't easy, you know, so.

I: So this picture is from this walk that you had in Edinburgh during the lockdown in the winter?

P3: In Winter 2021. It's very new. When I started the walk we felt so happy you know, you just got the fresh air, it wasn't raining, the wind wasn't blowing, the sky was just perfect. The air wouldn't move you know. As I say again, the picture's not perfect, I'm not an artist, but it's just really really- It was very powerful you know and it gave us energy to keep going. Again. So there is a number on the lamp. So I have more of these pictures but like I say it was just tablet – I couldn't do any fancy tricks with it but uh, it gave nice reflection of the number against the wall of the lamp you know so it was so beautiful.

I2: Was there a number on it did you say?

P3: Yes, I don't even remember which one- It's on the shore you know. You may see it.

I2: Yeah I live near the shore so I must check it out.

[...]

P3: Yeah so that's our atmosphere during lockdown. A bit of light there but darkness.

I2: [...] How did you feel the day after Brexit was announced.

P3: you mean now or before?

I2: No before.

P3: We felt. Um, maybe, I would say. For me it was sadness you know because- because of the friendships and also because of the community of British people I know in Prague. My former boss was English, he set up this Prague concert company bringing tourists in Europe from all over the world, like Anglophone world, now he suddenly was dealing with, oh I will have to apply for Czech citizenship. Because he's near retirement age now and I was like well we here we will have to maybe apply for British citizenship. To be on the safe side. Because he has his business there, we have work there. So, um, it felt like a nonsense. Also, like, why? Life is difficult enough and at the time- then of you know all the terrorist attacks which affected France badly, there were quite horrific results in Lyon, in Paris. In London as well. You think like come on we should be together, not splitting apart, showing we are the best again, why? You know, how can one country be the- no! You know? For me it was like, urgh, unbelievable. Of course the friends I have here are university professors who are dealing with colonisation, languages, you know- they are writers dealing with history, they needs to travel to Greece and everywhere. For us, it was like oh my god what about the students – the Erasmus program- you know all the good things, you know all the- what would you call it.

I: The bonds.

P3: Yeah, the bonds and the kind of freedom as well in a way of movement, and of bringing friends here, and flourishing friendships and enrichment, mainly cultural, as well as emotional, you know, humour [?] across the continent that was just culled really so.

I2: Did you say your husband experienced some not very nice commentary or whatever as a result of Brexit.

[...]

P3: Yeah, always. Yes, yes, yes. Of course. He felt it a lot in the previous job. He doesn't feel it now anymore. Cause it's a bit different area where he works, but when he worked in the care home which was built in a deprived area, obviously the carers were local, you know. Um, but maybe they wouldn't even know [?] what's behind the border of Edinburgh so their

point of view came to be slightly restricted, you know, um. For them, they maybe would travel to Spain to Benidorm and get drunk that was it and come back. So they wouldn't, um, they felt that the foreigners are taking jobs here. The Spanish especially. He had an Italian colleague as well, Polish, but there was maybe only four foreigners and the rest were Scottish but some were excellent you know. There would be colleagues who would maybe work for newspapers in Britain but they maybe wanted a career break and wanted to see what this job was like so of course the guys who were open minded who maybe travelled and met foreigners, they didn't have the comments but those people who lived in very- you could even call it ghetto, like the [?] is certainly ghetto but here in Edinburgh [?] it's very complicated, [?] as well. These areas are not easy, you know, to, to – I've had colleagues from [?] and their opinions are shocking sometimes for me. We've both experienced not nice comments of like-

I2: Racist comments?

P3: I would call them racist yeah. Also um, they may feel endangered you know cause, working moral is not there. They would get drunk and call in sick, they are not sick they are drunk. So then I understand the managers who would rather take someone from Spain, Italy because they have the morals to come to work at 8, you should be there at 8 and they are there five to 8.

I: So how are you feeling now when you read the things in the newspaper that in various sectors there are moaning about not having enough staff and of not being able to be economically viable because they are looking for staff – what is your reaction to that?

P3: You know, since Brexit I have always to have this magic ring which would bring all the so-called foreigners somewhere from Britain. Then Britain would see what would be happening. I mean there are excellent people here, of course many emigrates away for whatever reasons, Australia, Canada, lovely GPs they couldn't stand the healthcare systems here they went to Australia or Canada, so it's very complicated. You know it's just. How do I feel when I read it? You have what you wanted and more of them will go – because many of the people I knew I interpreted for they are already gone. There were people here for a time and they went because they couldn't cope. Also, some doctors I know who were German and Spanish they couldn't cope, they decided to go. So they left because they felt humiliated given the pressure from the management would be these papers, you don't have citizenship, they would be like we don't want British citizenship, we want just to be at work and we've been working here for ten years as doctors. They are helping people, some of them who were proud, they couldn't stand it so they have been gone maybe for two years. So it has had an impact, I think, on the European community working hard being [?] in Britain, it's not fair, you know. Is my feeling, obviously you know.

I2: [...] What would you say- what would you advise the British government to do to hold onto people from Europe who are working in the UK who are-

P3: This is a complicated question because the mess is so big that it will take years to clear up, you know. And uh, I think, firstly because there is no morals within the government. The values I always liked on the British Isles seem to me to be gone. Like the politeness, the you

say something and you really do it, for instance Boris Johnson says something and does something different you know. Uh, so, um, they should, how can they, they don't have the understanding of history, or the knowledge, they are just so narrowminded they are focussing on- they think it's about money not about people. I don't think they know – or Priti Patel herself, the comments she makes, uh, like we needed to stop students coming here- this is ridiculous cause look at the universities now. I think that, a change of government is needed but uh, I don't know I don't think this is- I don't know really. I'm talking about Britain really, obviously the Scottish situation is something more extra here you know with the possible referendum and maybe independence. I don't know really, I just feel um, um- somebody wants to come here and pays for visa but for instance from my point of view, I never liked the fact that whoever came to the Eastern bloc and spoke English was very welcome, you know. The teachers without qualifications, they would be so welcome, you know. It's vice versa here. It's just, uhm I don't know, I don't know really. Hard to say.

I2: ...you said something really interesting to me when we were in the croft the other day, and it kind of, it's kind of a theme that I think's interesting. You said you came to the UK so that your children could be bilingual.

P3: Yeah, there is huge pressure back home on English knowledge, you know. And the language shifts have been ongoing for the 25 years I've been an adult, so I was educated I had to learn Russian for example you see. And then there was a switch to German you see because then the borders were open with Germany and then. English overtook because we are in the centre of Europe so international companies would be having their like bases in Prague, because it was cheap, it was good quality, they could have luxurious homes for nothing, as opposed to London, Paris, Milan, or so they would go for it and um, yeah, it's just um. I wanted to make it easier for the children because for me and my husband we had to waste, not waste, but spend ages learning English to have a decent job. Without languages we couldn't do in Prague what we were doing because we were not involved with manual things, we were working with language. My husband was writing for TV, he was working as a correspondent. I was involved with companies, with lawyers and so on, we needed good quality English. Having both languages. Also when you meet people from Switzerland, it's natural to be bilingual, trilingual in three languages and it's more easier. So life is easier. So I was hoping to make life easier for my children but it's not happened. It's more complicated.

I2: Are your children bilingual.

P3: Yes, but it's hard as I say. Not being able to come home, here only my language and my husband's language. Plus, of course I show them the folk stories. They prefer English now because as soon as they go to school they don't want to be excluded, so, you know. They are watching English things. My daughter, I tried, because she is a keen reader in English. Unfortunately in the Czech language, she can read a story to her little brother, this is how I keep the language going, but she wouldn't read a book in Czech for pleasure. She finds it more comfortable in English. Also, from my perspective, when I was young we had no access to literature I wanted to read for instance you know. So knowing English allowed me to read certain things I couldn't if I had just Czech. Because it wasn't yet translated or might

not ever be translated. Now the situation is different but, so that's why I wanted them to be bilingual, so that it is natural to switch from one to another. Cause for me it's not natural, as you can see I'm still looking for words, you know [laughs].

I2: Your language is better than mine my god.

P3: No of course not. It's tough and when I'm tired I switch off.

I: Yeah same here. I've known English for a long time but I'll never be bilingual, ever.

P3: And with the children the problem is [I] that when we come to Prague, when they speak, no one can tell they don't live here. They don't have accents ok. However, I can see how lost they are. They are lost for two weeks. Because they don't know the language of the children. Because we are elderly parents so.

I: No I am too. I was a bit – not hurt- but a bit surprised when one time we were coming back from- I think it was not longer than a year or two ago – we were coming back from Italy – and we had been there for a month or so – and when we landed in Edinburgh, my son turned around to me and said, back to civilisation. And I thought well Italy is not that bad! Come on!

P3: It's like my parents they tell me, mama I don't want to live in Prague because people are grumpy, they are always grumpy there.

I: In Italy it's the opposite. In Italy people are more cheery, here they are more grumpy. I think it's because of the weather. Because here the weather is positively shit whereas in Italy it's nice. So I think that really affects people's way of living and moods. It certainly affects my mood. I mean today I'm just not in a very good mood because it's just a horrible day.

P3: That's what my husband says. If it was sunny here I would never move. You need the sunshine and you can cope with anything. Because life is difficult everywhere. Not just here. In Prague life is not easy, you know.

I: And there's no amount of vitamin d taken by pill that's going to make up for the sun here. So I really miss that. But yeah I know what you're saying about children. Yeah, I mean the place where they live is always prevalent.

P3: An you brought your children up here?

I: I've only got one son. He's twenty now. Well no, because we were in Milan until he was about 13. And then we came here when he was 13. And now I can say, now he is bilingual, because even when he was small, we were always coming- like you said the lack of travel is very bad because my husband is Scottish so every summer we were coming back to Scotland so he was always exposed to English. So when we came to live here, in a month's time he was bilingual.

P3: Because his Dad was English. Like we have an Italian-English couple here and even their children experienced a little bit of bullying you know they would be laughing at their accent, which was Italian- it had Italian touch. They come from Pisa. And [one of the couple's] English was very gentle, she was a psychologist, she used to teach English in Italy, so her children's English was beautiful, but her boy's English had like this Italian intonation which I found lovely, but at school he was a target of- you know they laughed at him. They found it very funny. It was difficult for a child. We wouldn't laugh, we are adults, but-. So he went through tough times, he was half Italian, Half English.

I: My son might have gone through more tough times than I know because he is very private, he never tells you. And I think he did have a hard time when he first came here for about a year I think, then he started having a good group of friends.

P3: This is important, to have good group of friends, this is important so. Yeah.

I2: Have you got British citizenship now? Or have you applied for the EUSS?

P3: We- due to the situation I – due to the example I gave you at the very beginning – my experience with immigration officers, plus some of my friends who were young in 1997 when a boy was also shipped to France because he would be working here and they give him stamp no for ten years. Then he wanted to work in Australia and because the only flights were through London he couldn't go. Then he had to deal with the British Embassy and they actually scrapped it but they could see he wasn't about to work here he needed the language really. So we did apply for citizenship. Which was huge financial strain on our shoulders. For a family it was over 4000 British pounds, 4500. You can imagine how hard it is to save it. So, it was against my husband's will I would say. Because we were kind of bound here with the jobs, and my pregnancy and everything, and we just went for it.

I: So you have British citizenship.

P3: We do. But I feel for those who had to ask for the settlement status because I also- we have a Czechoslovak community here – a Czechoslovak Scottish community – which was found in 1968 when Russians invaded Prague and the first refugees they were offered asylum here. There would be guys like you working at the uni or the research centres in Edinburgh or Cambridge. So we kind of met those emigrants or immigrants whichever way you want to take it. And there is this teacher who received a letter. She is only young. Even younger than me. Who received a letter that said she has no right to reside here you see. And her husband was Scottish, she only separated from him because he wasn't working and he stopped working after she gave birth to their child, he suffer depression but never bringing any income, and she was brought up the way that women work. You know it's a socialist education, women always work at home, so um, they split up. I think for some time she had certain benefits but she was teaching at the university, evening course. She was working as a cleaning, she was running the Czech school and she received this letter. And we felt like what a girl, who really is helping on every side, you know and she received this letter. She took it to court that time, it was shortly after Brexit. And as [I2] asked, I think it's always about the job, the immigration office is to Home Office people, oh good we will get

them out, take this one out you know. There may be some people with ill thinking, you know. So, um, yeah.

I: Can I ask if when you got British Citizenship, did you have to give up your Czech citizenship? No we would never do it. We have dual citizenship. We would pack it even in the middle of the birth and went if we had to do this. But for me, it felt that we have to do it because how would they feel, like identity-wise. My son was born in Livingston and if we return to Prague, maybe when he is 16 he would ask me, Mum I was born in Livingston because we lived in Scotland I would have to tell him we can't visit because it's not possible anymore. You know what politically happens, we may need to pay visas, but, we don't have enough money so you can't visit. The situation may change and then I would feel so sorry that he cannot visit his home. Because we always felt he had two homes. You know. Like you with your Scottish partner, it was nice, an enrichment. It was a bit. The decision was really because of the money. That maybe contributed to our exhaustion I have to say, and tiredness, because I feel that I have been dealing with papers constantly, and reading the news and government websites, and they're never clear, and they say something on BBC and then Priti Patel says something and Theresa May said something nasty about students and I said what? They are bringing so much money, you know? For me like, because I sold my flat in Prague to be able to come here, so we spent so much money here the first year. And also raising our family, they go to swimming classes, you want them to be active. You pay contributions to the allotment, but they don't see it this way. They see it as we are taking jobs. It's the circle of life, people are moving, they have always been moving. You know, so for me, it's sad. And it will always be sad. And even my friend, who is British, and his uncle lives in New Zealand, after all these things, because personally he was involved with the Prime Minister Boris Johnson through the jobs when he used to be mayor of London, we discussed the situation and it's honestly, the situation does not reflect what maybe the middle-upper class feels. The current situation, I think. It's really still half and half. Although the Brexit is there, I think many British people are not happy either. And those poor British living wherever, Italy and France. Because I think the relationship with Europe is horrible now. I think it's very tense. Whatever they tell us on the news its tense. In whatever language I watch it, it's not nice. Because Britain started to show the imperial past. And Europe is not having it. Any more.

I: No. And rightly so I think.

P3: You know it's silly because it's hard. Life is difficult. And then COVID came. So. But we do have British Citizenship and I don't really know how it's going to work because to be really on the safe side, I don't really trust the institutions anymore. I've seen too many injustices from the officials. And all these nasty letters. I've seen them personally from this girl you know. She took it to me, it was very confidential, I'm hoping this is confidential what I'm telling you.

I2: This is being recorded.

P3: Yeah I see it but still I'm not giving you any names. You know the letter was just something I wouldn't expect. When I read it I was- I thought I was dreaming. The wording of the letter, like similar what it used to be like. You'd have to see what it was like in the past.

We were joking this time, of course when I first came to England I never knew what alien was ok. I just put you clear. My friend was joking you alien in Britain. Somehow started to understand when I was older that it had an impact I was bringing business to Britain. You know, for years. So. It's sad. It's stopped. Like my friend who runs this company who would be bringing students here. He is almost. Bankrupt now. Because COVID stopped travelling and exchanges are 0. And, uh, yeah, so I'm just thinking of the language shift. If English will stay the language of the EU or it will switch to German or French. You know it's interesting. It's not what you are interested in but. It's just weird, I think English will always dominate because it has easy structures although it's really difficult as well so.

I2: Do you feel that both Brexit and COVID has affected you actually staying in the UK?

P3: Um, we tried to return three times and it always failed. And I don't know why it failed for the first- my pregnancy. So I had very complicated childbirth with [my daughter] in Prague. I thought I'm going to give it a go here this time. So we stayed for one more year. Then I became unwell and health prevented me from moving. And the biggest one we feel really sorry was what [my husband] through, last year, not last trial but the trial to return home because the job was quite interesting you know. He would be involved, could be working with languages again. We could do something to do with the EU. The ministry of foreign affairs of the Czech Republic and the French connection because in 2022 when they will have joint, not presidency but- so cause he couldn't go for the interviews, it was very official, he had to be present, the COVID stopped it. Um. Yeah. I feel like maybe like Scotland is our destiny you know? We love the country don't get me wrong. We love this country. Here I love it. I don't like the wind I don't like the weather but because of the weather it is so beautiful I think. It rains, it's green, we love it. But um, we miss the family you know? We miss them. We loved the freedom of movement so our parents would come for Christmas, so we could still enjoy the celebration together. We would come there the other way for summer so. Um. We miss the family. My husband is a patriot so, um, what is preventing us now is like because the children- our daughter is now in S1 you see. So that's tricky you know. She is just entering S2. She has just five more years. How are we going to do it? Because the system back home is so tough. She would now have to work on her Czech really hard so she passes the exam, to enter secondary school, otherwise she would be scored XXX because she's not excellent in writing you know. I'm sure she would pick up but her energy, it would be wasted. So.

I: I'm thinking could you not send her to a British school?

P3: We can't afford it because what they ask for is 500,000 per year. We investigated everything. This would come up to a lot of money. About maybe £20,000 a year for one child. We will never earn the money here neither there. So, if we could have them in bilingual school it would be ideal. You know but we can't afford it. And even the job for EU wouldn't provide that much money.

I: I thought they would be a bit cheaper.

P3: Unfortunately not, because of all the diplomats from all over the world. Like Korea, South Korea, these countries. I used to teach in one I was helping students there but wee

ones, little ones. And oh the prices were ridiculous at that time. I check the prices now, of course they went up. The schools are quality schools because they have the language. The same system as here like the education, I like the way children are taught here you know. In a way. It's not rigid. If you like your field you can go for it. But I like, I really like the way of thinking in Britain. The traditional one. For me, the values, you know.

[...]

I2: So this fantastic image that you took. Do you see this are representing both Brexit and COVID in a way?

P3: Absolutely. This one is depicting both. It's portraying Brexit, COVID, plus the Scottish situation a lot. Because at that time Scotland wasn't that happy you know, as you see the flag, is it going with the country, is it maybe one day going to be independent? It all depends on who is ruling the island. The politics it's just so interesting. So yes, it does depict.