

Interview: Simona

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Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Simona

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.

PLEASE NOTE: Some words are missing as the audio quality was low and kept clipping out. They are highlighted in red and written as ???.

LR: Compare to people who you know work 9-5 so I know that we are a privileged category in that respect but on the other hand the teaching is so much that it stops you from doing other things which are also in our job descriptions like research. So I'm really glad that we are managing to do this research and of course we are supposed to be writing in our job but as you know writing takes a lot of time.

S: Can I say mine, because I like to say my opinion. I think that teaching and research are two different jobs and I think you are kind of doing double to jobs so it's not right for a person to teach and do research. When I was teaching I was studying before teaching because I was... [*chuckles*] I had to learn how to teach in Italy and it's very unorganised system so I had to learn day by day how can I research if I was like studying and progressing with the teaching. So it's double the job I don't think this should be two job in a one job description. It should be two different person. [*laughing*]

LR: So anyway we're trying to cope with both stands but we really enjoy doing this study so we are really. That's about me. I live in Aberdeen, I don't live in Edinburgh unfortunately.

S: Do you have like a specialisation like a branch of interest?

LR: Yeah I am well... I think I could define myself as a sociologist of culture because when I was in Italy I was working at this research centre. I was working at university but also this research centre which was about fashion and culture production more broadly so I am a sociologist of culture more or less. I have written a bit about fashion but from a very cultural point of view not from the design point of view. I'm not a designer, I'm not an artist. I don't know anything about design and I about the techniques of designing fashion but I have written quite a bit about fashion as a cultural phenomenon and I also taught quite a bit about it and now I'm teaching modules about the body and I'm also very interested in gender. So I also teach with other modules in gender and sexualities and then a forth year module on the body, the sociology of the body and then my other modules are modules I have to teach but are not specialised on my interests so I teach an introductory sociology course for masters social work students and then I teach another course,

another module for second year students which is about criminology. Not because I am an expert in criminology but because no one else could teach it.

S: Yeah this is what I experienced in Italy, nobody can teach this, can you teach and then I studied and then I taught it. But why are you interested if I can ask, both of you have a background in fashion so why are you interested in the pandemic and the Brexit things. What brought you into this field cause it's very political as a field and...?

LR: Yeah I will answer for myself and then I will pass on to Charlie. Well in my perspective this project came about because it's very autobiographical. So it's about you know some of the things I've been reflecting on as in the wake of Brexit and also when Covid came along this kind of double whammy that was you know kind of hovering over me. So I think this project that we put in last year was really as far as I'm concerned was really something that happened to me that I wanted to investigate more deeply and because Charlie and I have worked together before and we use this kind of mixed method with art and interviews before we thought that we could use this methodology that we have started using the year before. We thought we could refine this methodology to study the emotions of people during this kind of difficult period and in the back of our mind is the idea that for people who are not UK citizen it's a different experience than for people who are UK citizens because they are not affected by Brexit or they are affected in very different ways. European Citizen who live in Britain have been affected by Covid and the lockdowns and in a situation where they had already been affected by Brexit and that's how we came about. So as far as I'm concerned it's quite autobiographical.

S: Ok thank you.

CH: I'm more of an artist social scientist to be honest with you. I mean all my work is focused on social political issues and ideas and kind of research focused. So I'm more interested in why people do things and what people have to say about things along with visual things as well. In many ways I'm more of a fine artist than a designer. Interested in the concept and reasons and thinking behind it. So there you go.

S: Yeah, thank you very much for your explanation. I should not supposed to be the one who ask questions but I just [laughing] sorry about that. Yeah just because you mentioned fresh impressions I was expecting someone who had a background in health or politics so it's kind, it's weird to me but I really like the idea that you stretched from art to social to politics. I am as well I like to be interdisciplinary in my studies as much as I can and in my way of seeing things so I was really happy to get this opportunity to take part today's study. Yeah and I really enjoyed to make my artwork. I know I'm not an artist you can tell in this piece of work but I really enjoyed doing it in a quick way so I find the right time and I've done it straight. So I had an idea in mind when I started and it gets me relief.

CH: Lucia do you want to show?

LR: Yes I was just bringing it up. Just a second I've got it here. Ok can everybody see it?

CH: Blow it up a bit.

S: Yeah I have your letter here Lucia that you sent me so I can show you the sketch as well.
[laughing]

LR: Ok!

S: [laughing] If needed. I also took note when I was doing it so I told you even if the time passed I have written a few notes about the symbols so that I remember what I've done because I've done it with impulse. I think the best thing is not to reason too much but...

LR: Yes that's right. The idea is about talking freely and explaining to us what you drew and explaining your artwork and talk us through whatever you were thinking or feeling when you were doing that artwork and also thinking back at this period. So were you affected by the lockdown at all while in Britain because if you came back...

S: Well my lockdown was in Italy. I've returned only recently so I will try to cut the story really short but I moved to the UK. So I'm born in Italy and raised in Italy. I have travelled in my life but as I never relocated to a place so the first place that I relocated to was the UK at the end of 2014 and I was with my child. He was aged four, he was in school but he has a complex health condition so after a couple of years we had a check and he was not well on his food. He has to do a long term physiotherapy and needed surgery, they were not really sure about what to do and I had a second opinion in Italy and the doctor said, well we don't do surgery we do something else. We do a long term physiotherapy to ease and this was not available in the UK so at the beginning of 2017 I relocated to Italy. I'm also a single parent so it's a very conflictual situation so coming to the UK was possible because at the moment my ex partner was working in Scotland. So he was abroad and it was easy for me to get a ticket to the UK because it was not consenting to us travelling outside. I'm telling you this because once I was back to Italy he didn't consent the care and I started a judicial divorce. It took me a long time to get my child to have health care and he's still having problems with his mental health. Pandemic has only worsened the situation so when we were in Italy for three years I had to battle for the divorce. I'm still on divorce at the moment and this is the fourth year. So pandemic was a big thing. The Brexit also was a big thing. We were living in Bristol at the time when the Brexit was voted and I voted for remain but I was not included in the voting for Brexit and I think this was very unfair to us because I could vote for the public transportation in the city but I couldn't vote for me to stay in the country.

LR: Because you don't have a UK citizenship you still have an Italian citizenship?

S: Yes I'm an Italian citizen yeah. So 2016 I remember I was on a bus. I looked at other people using the newspaper, you know the free newspaper and the vote was no and I felt so bad because the area where I lived in Bristol and all my friends were like British and International, very mixed. We all support the remain and I was really shocked on the day the voting came out but I didn't understand the consequence because I left the UK before all the European Settlement scheme and before the hostile politics started with Priti Patel. I was into my divorce into my trying to get back into my work and my schooling job as I told you about my teaching job was pretty draining as well. I realise that something were changed. So I tried to keep contact and revisited so in 2017, 2018 but in 2019 I couldn't travel. We had an alternate scheme by the judge so we couldn't really have a long time off as before and I wasn't a primary carer anymore. We went into a split time and this has worsened the situation of my child so... In two thousand and... So when the pandemic started we were lockdown in our house. Me and my family, my ex partner and my child were involved into an investigation for the something they call the parental capacity. Something to judge if you are good parents or not and this was run by psychiatrists and psychologists and lots of people. Yeah lots of specialist and it was very frustrating because we were inside our house and I had to leave our family home which was like a free flow house and only things that I could find at short notice was a studio flat by rented by a friend of a friend and I paid more or less the same rent.

LR: Was this in Italy?

S: Yeah in Italy. In Milan. So this happened in 2019 just at the same time where they requested the judicial investigation. The reason they asked for the investigation was because my child was threatening himself and his health. He wasn't well at all mentally. He did have support but the psychologist said Simona this is not enough he needs some medicine probably, he needs to be... because he was very angry. I know that he was very angry because of the sleep things. It was incredible they asked us to do two days and two days, so two days in the house, two days in another house and three days yeah my ex partner is pretty (???) and controlling so my child has to live in this kind of condition by law. For me as well very stressful but going back to the Brexit thing I realised I could lose my right to come back to the UK when my bank Barclays sent me an email saying that there was no agreement between the European Union and the UK so this was in November 2020. Very late for applying but they said if you are not a UK resident you risk your money. Your own bank account will close and your money to be retained and because I really wanted to come back I only kept my bank account open and I want my bank account to stay open. Then I searched myself what was the meaning of being a UK resident because I never heard of being a UK resident. You are a resident where you lived you know and then I learned about the settlement scheme and I applied. They said that in order to keep my bank account open I need to write, in order to keep my bank account open, I need to write I envisage to come back to the UK as soon as it was possible to travel back. So this is what I've written and I've applied that I'll return and I'll return once the borders were open. Just before coming back. I couldn't travel with my child, I have applied for myself and my child but I couldn't travel with my child because I didn't get the reply on time by the home office. As you know they are very late and there is an enormous backlog for applications for European Settlement Scheme but if I did not return that my chances to keep my rights on and my child rights on were like, how do you say, sinking down?

LR: Yeah expired sort of thing.

S: Yeah you had kind of six months from the application. The certificate of application was something that you received once you replied and they say there is six months for you of absence maximum that you could have so I had to return. I had to make an agreement with his father but his father was not happy for me to come back with my child if I didn't have the rights to stay. Which is reasonable. I said yes but then I had to leave. Not telling you all of the story because it's very long.

CH: No it's ok don't worry. Are you back in the UK now, is your child with you or?

S: At the moment he came to visit for Christmas but I couldn't travel in the last seven months because my application was refused by the home office in May just before leaving so I'd given notice to my Landlord to say I was leaving and that I'd try to make a deal with his father in the future so in six months, one year time I want to come back to live with me. He said yeah we'll see and he also said lots of things but he's kind of a tricky person. He's very nasty, as soon as he knows what I want then he tries to make obstacles and stuff but then yeah so in May I have to return on my own and I drove, it was fantastic. I drove from Italy to the UK on my own, it was pretty liberating after living in a studio flat for the last two years.

LR: I can imagine.

S: Yeah. I really I cried a lot because I was living without my child and I was also unable to say when I was coming back because I had only a certificate of application and a refused application as well. So I travelled through the Eurotunnel and it was all empty, the parking. I was not used to that because I travelled once with my child so when we were back I travelled back to Italy and the parking was full and we had lots of pictures of the whole because when you travel through the Eurotunnel there are

nice activities for kids while your waiting but it was all closed and it was all empty so I had to have my coffee in a coffee machine and I stayed inside my car. I didn't have any problem with the borders check which was again really tricky because my car was full and I risked to be charged because I was carrying my personal belonging. I kind of check every day what was happening because Italians were deported at the border. People were flying to the UK and they were deported on the plane so I said oh, oh my god I have a refused application with me, I had a certificate of application, I have lots of things in my car and I'm a black woman what are you gunna' say. So I found this tricky things. I set myself in my car with little monkeys here, pet monkeys and kind of I don't know it attracted the attention of the police officer who was smiling at me. I gave her my certificate of application and she asked me what are you doing here, why are you coming to the UK and I said, I exactly repeated the same sentences that I was told by the Barclays bank and I said I've applied for the European Settlement Scheme because I'm returning to the UK and I have applied and I said I've applied I envisioned to return as soon as the border was open and now the borders are open. She just look at me, look at the monkeys, the pet monkeys I have here with me and she smiled and she let me in without any check on my car. So they didn't check the value of the things that I was carrying with me. I was supplied the day before a transfer of resident which is something that you apply, I didn't know but I checked full day, full night I was checking, checking, checking and I found out you were allowed to take your personal belongings up to a certain value. So I applied to these and was granted, once I was in the UK but when I was passing the border I didn't have the right documents I think. I don't think yeah...

CH: Sounds stressful.

LR: Yes.

S: More than this. It's like living under the water and I don't know how to call you know the breathing things they give you. I don't know somebody just exchanging to me but I think I'm living under the water for a long time now. It's long time. [*sounding exhausted*] Yeah completely drained.

LR: What is the situation with settlement now? Have you been given it?

S: I enquire a few times, I enquired also like a charity settled under three million. wrote to me once and he said I'm really sorry about your situation and we cannot help individuals, we can help you as a group. So he's asked me if I was interested getting in touch with the media. I will probably give an interview. I didn't feel comfortable exposing myself and my situation because I feel really fragile at the moment, vulnerable sorry but then he said you've tried all the things. So I wrote a lawyer, he said I don't have big changes to get my administrative review because I've enquired for administrative review sorry. Once I was in the UK, so I received a refusal and you had one month, couple of weeks sorry, few weeks to ask for administrative review if there were mistakes and because there were mistakes in my decision I have applied for administrative review but it should give you a reply in a months time but at the moment they are on a backlog and they are saying they don't have enough resources to go through all the applications of administrative review so I paid eighty pounds and I was pretty sure I would get my eighty pounds back because they didn't count my period of residents correctly and also they haven't applied the rules they have set so this is on the guidelines. They refused my application because of the long absence but the long absence was justified by house care and all the big things so it was written in the guidelines and also it took decision in my child's best interest which again is something that is protected by the convention of the child. The international convention of the child I don't know the...

CH: Yeah human rights.

LR: Yeah.

S: The human rights. So this was what was in the preamble so it's just an introduction of the guidelines. So I was away because of my child best interest and he's in long term health care. So I provided all the documents. I think they're just, the person who was looking at my documents didn't really do a manual check, they do automatic checks so this is the idea because the period they counted is only through the national insurance number. It was very like short period because I have been living in the UK without working for a year to settle down and I had my child into school. So they just missed some bits here and there and also they said I was not continuously a resident. I was I don't know precarious? I don't know what they said but this is not something...

Two people talking LR and HT

S:... They went also against the withdrawal agreement that says you don't have to put unnecessary bureaucratic burdens on the people and you have to give access to the settlement to the people who lived in the UK before Brexit and we were living in the UK before Brexit so. If they refused the administrative review, they don't change the decision then I will go on appeal I think. So it's a long way Charlie to say. [laughing] But I am a warrior I think I am born as a warrior. My family has fight a lot for their rights, their heritary (heritage) and we cannot go back into a country and my family's is a part of a diaspora. We are kind of used to fight for our rights. I think this is something that comes with my family history.

CH: Do you want to tell us a bit about your drawing and why you did it?

S: Yeah. Well I think the heart inside, I tell you from the centre to the outside. So there's a heart which is my child which is the most important in my life and that I've cared of during the pandemic. It was a very hard time with him during the pandemic but still love him very much. So he's there and this is also a symbol of love during the pandemic we all discovered something that was precious to us. We didn't have to deal with the routine because we completely lost our routine in Italy. So we were at home on the sofa just waiting on the next interview the prime minister. The three hairbands you know the elastics are me and my child and his father. I realised we're very connected although I think we all hate each other for this long conflict that we had. ... is born in 2010 and I knew him since 2008. We lived together for only a couple of years and then we stated to fight and it's still going on. It's very bad [voice breaking] yeah I know but anything that can take out of the conflict is interdependent so I just want to reinforce the idea of interdependency. Not because I feel we are a family anymore, not in a good sense but we're kind of interdependent. So my child during the pandemic, the only travel I was allowed to do during the pandemic was to travel to my ex partner's house, at the beginning every two days but we kind of feeling it was too frustrating for everyone so we just decided on our own to change the pattern. So I was doing school days of course [laughing] and he was doing the weekend, long weekend so he was able to get his job and I just lost my job so I just stay for my child. He has also special needs so during the pandemic was really hard to do school at a distance. The arrow and the circle was very hard for us to get outside from the house, to get something inside so we didn't get much help during that period, we didn't get social contacts. At least I didn't have much but also it was a two way, so it was like trying to bounce out and going back to. So I think the arrow means that effort. This was happening to all Europe and all over the world but for us especially from Italy we have European point of view usually information like depicting France and Germany and Austria. So I also drove the European flag around and every star is one of the European countries in the flag. I know that the European countries are kind of twenty four something, I had to count the star and discover they're not included because there was less and every country was bind it in their own place, so they were all we couldn't access them, they couldn't

access to us. So I just want to remark by putting each star on his own space like a cage. Well you can tell in the landscape you can see the UK flag. For me it's a very meaningful legacy with the UK. I'm not a British citizen but it was liberating for me to leave Italy in 2014 after my separation and being able to travel. I travel only with two luggage and once arrived in UK for me and for my child our life just flourished and I was with my family in London and I spent there three months with them and then I realised that London was not the place for me and my child. I didn't like the way they were living there and also because I had this dream in my draw to do a PHD and progress with my studies. I kind of find it impossible to live in London and study and work with a child in preschool. It was impossible so I had to find a place that was more sustainable and I made a list on a post-it. I made a list of places that I would like to hit during the easter holidays. Because of the school terms we couldn't take, so my child was in school in London and we discovered we could not have absence like in Italy because we want to go visit his father in Scotland. They say no you can't do that so we found out about attendancy (attendance) rate, that you have to attend the school although you are in pre-school. So I took the first holiday break we had in Easter and I made a list of places I wanted to go just for a couple of days. The first on top of my list was Bristol. I was advised by friends, and I asked lots of information. The first one on top was Bristol and I booked just for two days and once I arrived in Bristol I found the place where I want to live. This place has everything that I really want. For me the UK is a big big change. my child was finding his happiness and he was much relaxed here. We lived in a beautiful neighbourhood, we had friends, I had a job. I couldn't start the master, I've applied for a master at the University of West England because I wasn't sure that I was able to cope with a longer course like a PHD was really like eh. At the time I didn't teach so the teaching things when I started teaching in 2017 so before that at the time I've done a few jobs but I wasn't really sure about if I was able to study for long hours and having that commitment of a PHD. I was outside my contacts at academia so I said I maybe need a short term thing. So if I master I will be able to prove myself that I am able to cope with the burden of the study. I applied for a master but when I arrived to Bristol I also discovered that has a big big problems with housing and because I have a child I have to rent a big property and I have to pay the rent up front so I end up spending all my savings for renting but at least for one year I was covered. So I started to work full time, I worked for my first job. My first job was actually baking cakes at home, over summer [laughing].

LR: Great! You must be really good.

S: No no, I just have one recipe so [laughing]. It was really funny so with my child he was pretty easy going and my child is just very charming with other people. With me he can be really horrible but with other people he can be so charming so he got food from everyone because he's very little. Now we discovered he has a deficit in hormone growth so its like kind of, on his genetics but he is kind of handsome and charming so we were going to this pizza place. He knows what he wants and how to get it so for me I gave it everything like an Italian mother and also an Eritrean mother, we give everything to our children. So we were going to this pizza place that used to be by the round about. It's like one of the first point you see when you arrive to Bristol, the bear pit, it was the bear sculpture. Now they take it out and put flowers and plants. It's really [laughing] not really alternative. At the time it was really alternative and the Bear Pit said something like system change and I don't remember what it was but it was a big statement on top and by this round about there was a pizza place, an Italian pizza place and I talk to the Italian guy. He said my wife is pregnant at the moment she cannot bake on a routine but I'm happy for you if you like baking and I kind of like baking and cooking vegan. If you like these kind of things I can give you the opportunity to do baking, you can come here once a week and I said oh! I cannot do that my child is only to school. He said we can find a way, don't worry if you want to do it at home. So with the money that I was buying every week I was buying my shopping by buying his shopping. So every time I was doing shopping every

week, sorry I will say this again because it really makes, but you understand that. So he was giving me a certain amount of money for every cake and every week I was able to do my food shopping from the money I was getting from the cakes thing. So it was ok, I felt myself a little bit less useless than before and it was my first job. So then I did volunteering so I would have references and in September once my child was into school I found a job in seven days. I remember I was crying the first time I got a call back was from an agency in London after one week I was looking. I got an interview over the phone and I remember I cried. I understand the place was right to me because in Italy I spent nearly six months sending a curriculum and didn't have any reply, any phone call or anything. So once I had my child into school and within a week time I find myself working for first bus which is the company of the public transportation and it was brilliant yeah. I really liked that job. It was a temporary one, I really felt welcome. I couldn't understand a lot of what they were saying because lots of the drivers were Bristolians and some of the driver were Polish and this makes the things harder and me and myself I was just arrived so I couldn't understand but they were fantastically helping me and they were doing, I understand even the job can be challenging and they make it challenging for me so I could learn more and more. It was perfect yeah. After that I had a few other jobs and I work in places where I could never access in Italy like for example I work in South New Hospital which is a university hospital in Bristol. So you don't really come to, in Italy it's really hard to access to the public services and because I love working for the community and doing something good and I was really happy to get money for my job because in Italy you get lots of volunteering jobs although you are not young anymore. I was happy that my job was paid and I was useful for other people. So the flag is really important to me what's the name.

LR/S: The Union Jack.

S: Yeah Union Jack. It's really important to me but then I also find myself this as a liberation but also, I'm sorry. Can I take this call quickly because I was waiting for a call sorry.

LR: Yeah.

CH: Sure.

S Speaks to someone on the phone and there is a break in the interview.

S: Sorry about that.

CH: No problem.

S: Yeah it was the journalist that I was expecting so I'm really happy that I can tell my story a little bit more. I'm kind of feeling that I have very low energy but I'm kind of feeling that this is all I can do for my child is just trying to do... Trying to talk. Not to live this on my own. So yeah coming back to the flag as I told you is kind of a sun for me so it's like a liberation and this is what I used also like this shapes but then it becomes a prison. Once I came back and I told you about this liberating journey like Thelma and Louise [laughing] monkey friends but then it was also like living in a prison because I learned later that the rights were not really equal for people who were like pending and my status of settlement is refused so I couldn't, really stupid things but I couldn't say to my friends when I'm coming back. Of course my child didn't know when I was going back to visit. I was planning to visit every month and I couldn't do that. Luckily I didn't find problems with finding a place to live which is this one it's very small house but it's very friendly place. It's a guardianship scheme it's not a tenancy. Again I've found that saving money now is better than, because I learnt that living in the UK is really expensive. Saving money now for sharing is better now having now a property and not knowing where my child will come to live with me. At the moment because lots of months are gone I

plan to stay here only six months at the beginning. So I didn't plan to stay here longer because I knew that my application was not possibly successful but at the moment because I've had my roots back into the place I don't want to leave really. So I've, Lucia you probably know about the (IRE?) like the register for foreign residents so I've applied for the (IRE?) in December and I'm really happy I've done this. Last time I didn't apply because I was scared about what I was losing but I now know that I'm not losing anything like I'm still an Italian citizen and this can just make my life easy because I have all my bureaucracy here I don't have a double system like before.

LR: Yeah I didn't do it right away when I moved back to Scotland. I think I did it after a couple of years or maybe a year and a half or so after I came here. To be honest I was particularly honest about losing the health service in Italy. I don't know you mentioned maybe some experience of this concerning your child's health.

S: Yes of course he was in care and we used the national health care system once we were back to Italy so the first appointment we went privately by his doctor from the hospital because we didn't have much flexibility. He was in school here and we had only Christmas holiday to do all the check but once the doctor said he needs to come back and we need do recasting so he has to do casting in September and he has one month in a wheelchair maybe more. A couple of months in a wheelchair but it was horrible because we all try for our children to fight and you don't physiotherapy after the wheelchair time. Because I was working at South New Hospital I learn how was the working the health care system and for the physiotherapy they only do trauma but my child didn't get a trauma he was born with that leg and he needed to have casting and two years long physiotherapy in order to avoid surgery. Children in the UK get surgery for his disease which is flat foot and if you do that really early in the development you could probably have more relapse if they are treated with surgery then you cut a tendon, it's like cutting a chord and then you cannot fix it anymore. I'm really happy because now my child is out of the relapse and we didn't have to have the surgery but I would probably choose to stay in England if I can get back into time because I have horrible time in Italy and with my family things. I completely lost power when I was in Italy I was treated like you know not even a human beings or something. Coming back to the UK I feel powerful, I know where I am, I know what my rights are but this gets into also prison because I cannot travel and I feel I don't know... I feel really bad leaving Italy but I feel liberated coming back but it was like passing from a cage to another so I'm again into cage.

CH: Is that why you've drawn the lines on the side there?

S: Yes.

LR: So what...

CH: Can you... Yeah go on Lucia.

LR: I was going to ask what would happen if you went back to Italy now?

S: Is that they're not sure if I can re-enter because it depends on the border police and they do random decision because I have a certificate of application but it was refused on my passport I don't have a settlement it's refused. I know they can check that my application is on pending but I request lots of time all this question to all the people that I know charity, lawyers and the only person who could get me a real answer was the MP Daren Jones and they enquired to the home office and they say we cannot do anything for the que but we can tell you cannot travel. This is really unfair because even working is hard. So I've applied for teaching and after I say what is I've done all the training for teaching like further education as I was teaching in Italy in a college. They were very happy about my

application and I've done all the training and I scored eighty percent, hundred percent in their like training things and when it comes to documents and into my qualification I said I'm Italian from the beginning so they knew I had an Italian graduation, I have an Italian experience but I really felt the problem was about being European and not having this settlement. So not being able to check my status with the share code because I cannot do a share code. I tell you this funny story, I was how I got the first job because actually I found like casual work so I am not employed yet but not like employed like long term employed but I have done the casual work. I was volunteering in an area which is an advantage in Bristol it was in (Name of place in Bristol?) where the Caribbean communities but its also very gentrified area. So in the same place, really close by there is this youth centre where I was volunteering for a couple of hours on a Saturday and then a friend of mine's housemates asks me in the house if anyone's wants to work for a couple of you know... it was a catering service for a wedding in the same, the exact same area the (name of school??) school. I was like oh I was wondering what they are doing in that place if there are any black person a part of the community. So I just said yes I have time and she said oh I'm sure nobody on Saturday wants to do this job and I said no I'm an immigrant [laughing] but joking and said immigrants never say no to jobs they never turn down jobs. Uh yeah funny. I said yeah I can go there and I was really happy to also have a social contacts because I spent most of my day studying at home and I don't know much friends apart from the old friends that I have. They all very busy with their lives so I said yes I come and work and I took this opportunity to work. I didn't say and they didn't ask because it was urgency. They didn't ask about my settlement status and I said well if I didn't get any money that's fine I've done volunteering for a long time no worries but if they find out that they need to prove I have right to work and wants to pay me then I will finally see if I have right to work or not. If my national insurance number will work and it worked so it took a long few weeks. They were not very happy when I said oh sorry I don't have a share code you have to do manual check. I've done a tutorial for the admin because she was very frustrated, she couldn't have a share code so this is things is impossible. It takes her longer than what the home office said. It's not five days, it takes probably a couple of weeks to have the reply that I have right to work but that was smooth at the end. I had my first pay slip and I'm quite happy that all the information were working so I didn't disappear as a person in the UK I still had my national insurance number working, I had my bank account I can set my life here with. I now need to find a place for my child because I want him to stay because I don't know if I will let him out from the cage I'm not sure if he can get out from the other cage because it's that kind of two prisons. So I'm getting in touch with a charity who do I think this is what's suggested by the MP they do support families with domestic abuse. So I'm in domestic violence and domestic abuse. So I'm doing this. I'm just enquiring. I don't want to do anything that harms to my child so I want him to stay better, a little bit better from what he's now experiencing in Italy. Also Italy now has really strict rules about green pass and super green pass and his father wants to vaccine him. He said that it was safer to come to England with the vaccine.

LR: And are you against it?

S: I am against the ignorance. If he documents the need of a vaccination to travel to England then it's fine. We have lots of arguments during the previous, before Christmas for three weeks. It's really draining, I can't tell my energy to look somewhere else. I think this is one of the power that I should not allow him but he knows that I really care about our child so I cannot him doing any treatment if I'm not in agreement. So I said to him if you prove me that Covid is in England, it's just in England and the vaccination is useful for him not to catch Covid then it's fine and he also needs to prove that Covid will harm him because Omicron variant is not very harmful to children whether the vaccination is still on experimental phase or not. It seems that doesn't really work but I said this over the phone then I restated this on an email because we have to write things. We can tell anything but

we have to put it in writings to make it clear and I think I've already been labelled by him as a no vax which is kind of an enemy at the moment of Italy.

LR: Yes I'm aware. I'm just back from Italy I was there for the Christmas holiday to see my family.

S: How was it?

LR: It is like you say there is this very quite, very kind of stark contrast between the majority that is vaccinated and a minority of no vaxers of people who feel strongly about not getting a vaccine. I think in Italy there is this widespread idea that vaccinations really do protect people although I think that people also know that you can still catch it but you can catch it in a lighter manner so you're not going to get really ill. So there is this kind of quite harsh debate or conflict between.

S: What he said to me is that his family will exclude him from the after Christmas holiday because he was supposed to stay here only for a week and he said if he is not vaccinated and he come to England then my family will not see him when he comes back so they will exclude him and also his new partner is pregnant and she says she will not get outside from the mezzanine because they have more floors, that's my house *[laughing]* so they have more floors. So she will hide in the mezzanine for ten days and I said yes if she wants to do it then it's fine for me but I don't want my child to feel all this social pressure so I am happy for him to stay longer as much as he wants. Again he didn't give me the time to arrange for a new house and I also am not sure if he can stay here because the problem is that if you don't make contacts with the other parents then you're found guilty of things like parent alienation or other stuff. So the problem is that if he stay here he cannot leave and how can I do this to my child and his father but I know that I need to protect him so it's a bit tricky. Now this is why I'm asking advice to somebody else because sometimes when you speak to somebody else you get that more information and you can process also your opinion.

LR: Yeah I know they are very strict in Italy. Stricter than here about the vaccinations and yeah.

S: I didn't say no forever I just say be reasonable, try to get information. He didn't get any information about the pro vaccination if not the family being scared and fear and the social exclusion he mentioned he would be excluded by all the activity. I said we can tell about these things when he will reach twelve years because at the moment it's only from twelve years that they have some of vaccination. He's under the age.

LR: Yeah I think most kids that go to school over the age of twelve have been vaccinated. Most of them because there was this problem about keeping schools open and not having too many cases and all that. So I think yeah there's a tendency in Italy to vaccinate more than there is here and also to impose this kind of vaccination. I know that now for the over fifty year old it is mandatory to have the third dose otherwise...

S: Yes I learnt this but not really for children. At the moment the children are ok although they have to wear the mask in school and this is I think a kind of problem for some of us. I cannot wear the mask for long.

LR: Yeah it's very tiring isn't it. You can't breath properly.

S: Yeah they have to wear it while they were playing soccer over the summer with the thirty degrees outdoors and my child plays soccer with a mask and he was ok. I was really amazed by his able to function. I cannot do my shopping in the supermarket, so I'm just taking a trolley because I cannot walk with the burden and the mask.

LR: Yeah I know.

S: Yeah they don't know really.

CH: Can I ask Simona why have you got one yellow band and the other two are red? Is that just because you got that in the pack?

S: I'm not sure, no no I had more I could choose different colours but I thought I'm not sure about this symbolic because it was certainly me, and his father. I'm not sure if to me and together because sometimes we were like oh like. I was called like a symbiotic mum but I don't feel like I'm a symbiotic mum so I would say that the two red are the men and I am the woman. I would say just as a general thing. Yeah not as a mum and child. I feel we all care about, we just care in different ways.

LR: Yeah I think I wanted to ask you so between the two things Brexit and Covid it sounds like for you the big thing that really affected you more is Brexit. It doesn't sound from what you've said that Covid really had a big influence on what happened to you?

S: No Covid was very horrible. I gained lots of weight [laughing] but also I found myself on the 25 February in 2020 I had to ring my student because I was both a teacher but was also a programme tutor at the watch making course. So I had to ring the student and say, it was a Sunday I think, I had to say sorry on Monday don't come back to school because the school is closed and from that moment I didn't know what was my future about my job because I was self employed and my hours for the tutoring was especially in the class and in the office so helping students and organising info sheets and all this stuff but also I had only had a few hours of teaching in the same course as a communication. So my subject with them was communication and I basically my lessons were very interactive. We do lots of experiments, we do like presentations and so I did need the interaction with them so I think that hit me really much because I lost. One day I found myself as both unemployed and full time carer. Yeah that was the bit and also we were like through the what I told you, I don't know exactly the name in Italian it's a (Italian phrase). It was postponed because of Covid, because of the lengthy of the Italian decisions procedure so our family was requested to do this investigation in July 2018, but it only started in December 2019. First appointment in 2020 so we were at the very beginning and it ends at the end of the year. It was very bad yeah I've reported during that time to the police I've reported domestic abuse of my child because he was beaten by his father and he didn't even say no I wasn't. So he found it right and this is not right to me. So it was yeah a very stressful period because I found myself in the house in a small studio flat trying to compromise between the school commitment, unemployment and my child really angry on me. He put all the anger his father kind of get to him, he just pass it to me. I had a psychological support for my child and once a week I receive a call from his psychologist. She was very helpful because the hour in when we were talking most of the things were about him being violent to me and how to deal with this problem. More of a parental guidance rather than, because he didn't want to talk much. She talked a lot with me and I think this teach me a lot during the hard times also the one I'm living with at the moment. This is why I always end up with a question mark. I never say its right for him to stay. I would probably say is it right for him stay and... yeah... It helps me a lot to reflect the pandemic I think and the fact that what are the most important person in your life and what are the most caring. I had very few contacts and I have my first birthday like on a skype what is it, zoom call and I had it once on my second birthday this year. So the first year was weird but this way I was so enthusiastic and it went amazing because finally, because I have friends all over the place it was so nice to have you can invite. So I put like a Facebook invitation and very different peoples show up just for you know a cheers, just a toast and it was amazing so when I had this birthday. If I was able to travel I would probably go to Italy and have my birthday there. It was nice anyway. It was nice.

LR: Ok. Charlie?

CH: Yeah sorry I wanted to go back to the drawing again. It sounds like you've had a really really challenging, stressful time and in the centre you've got this big yellow sun.

S: Yeah I think this happens by chance because I had this, this they were all yellow.

CH: But you spoke about it being a sun did you not?

S: Yes I found it fantastic you know sometimes when you do unconscious things, I think this was pretty unconscious because if you look at the drawing it's like it's a sun. I will always see the positive. I don't know it's like something I was gifted I think my mum gave it to me or somebody I don't know who gave it to me. My aunt who named me Simona. Simona means light I think in Greek and I think it's just a sun. It's a sun, if you can tell you have like the big circle and you have the I don't know the symbol of the rat. It's like a country things like a regional things like the red, what's the name, lines.

CH: Yeah and also makes me think of the Olympic symbol for some reason.

S: Oh ok! Ah I didn't thought about that. The Olympic one oh yeah! I just think about interdependency, positive and negative interdependency really.

CH: Ohkay.

LR: Yeah and I found also going back to the picture again. So it's almost like the circle and the starts is the symbol of Europe right? The European Union.

S: Yes.

LR: And it feels like it is trapping you. It is a cage for you, or it was a cage for you when you were in Italy. It's almost like a circle you in so that you cannot get back to the UK where you really want to be or am I reading too much into it?

S: No no it's true. Well we didn't know much about the reality in every country. When I was at home last December I had to decide and I had terrible nightmares. So me driving with my child to the UK just to hit the right day, the 30 December 2020. So I had nightmares for the previous three weeks thinking me, myself and my child and then what should I do with the house, what should I do with everything. I don't know what they will do legally I will be parental abducting my child. I will be like blamed because I no guilt. You can go to prison for abducting your child so it's very bad but... So this was only the end of December but already on the TV and our newspaper... I don't want to call that news informational, the media because they're not really informative. They were depicted in the UK as very dangerous, they were saying as one out of three people has Covid and the NHS cannot cope with that and Boris Johnson was saying better let people die and not putting too much pressure on the NHS and you know our budget. I was pretty scared of travelling back but then I discovered that this was just an idea. It was not real. So this winter I was here and it was all very normal, everyone was very cautious and sensible but people get sick and they stay, maybe just isolate at home. It's very normal and same with other countries. So the European countries like Italy depicted us as country that were going... So they were justifying restriction on Italy in order to put more restriction on us. I couldn't cross the square just downstairs. I was stopped by the Police and they were saying go back into the other side of the street because it's longer than 200 meters and I said here I have light in my side of the street there is only shadow and my child needs to have some air and also some sun. They said I have a daughter as well at home she stay just at home and I said this doesn't applying to me. So the idea in Italy they put more control and they show the other places are worse than your place so they are allowed to do the worse on you. So this is the idea and then I don't know

in Bulgarian, I don't know it's somewhere else. Like I said Spain was depicted as a very sick country. France as well, Germany, Netherlands. So we had all this sort of information but England, Great Britain was the worst place to go. I couldn't find the energy to check better.

LR: Sorry.

Phone ringing in background.

S: I feel foggy I think. I think we all felt really foggy and I think the fogginess is continuing now in Italy it is.

LR: I'm really sorry. Sorry I think it was one of those nuisance calls that I get almost every day or nearly and I already reported some of the numbers but there's always new numbers calling you. Cause I do recognise the number at all so sorry about that. I just have the phone here so.

CH: I'm also interested as well. I'm interested in the way you spoke about the connection with your son and your partner and things like that but you still kind of seem to be connected in this big sunshine and you're like interconnected. You know you kind of spoke about this love hate thing kind of going on. It's kind of interesting.

S: I've done lots of therapy. Like psychotherapy and this is why I think I'm ready to talk about these things because I've processed this information since the beginning of our separation. I don't know what to say. *[nervous laugh]* Did you have a specific question?

CH: Well no the question was you still seem to be very interconnected with your ex partner in the drawing that you've done.

S: I don't seem or I do seem?

CH: You do seem.

S: Yes absolutely. I still do because everything we decide for our child has to be decided together, has to have the compromise. Every time I had my child back up to two days with his father, I had to reset it, *(phrase in Italian)* Lucia you know. I don't know how to say it in English, but it's a way of saying in Italy when you go and collect something that is...

LR: Been broken.

S: Been broken yep, every two days. I don't know how to say. I tried all the strategy of blame him, excuse him just defy him.

LR: You had to comfort him?

S: No no this was his father because my child didn't really do anything he was just him. My child just behave as a child, a very smart child but also a very abused child psychologically, physically also. I think you can never detach to a person until even if you will die, sometimes I really hope that he will die in an accident or something before we get the divorce because in Italy I will get the pension. *[laughing]* We're still married. This is really funny like in Italy you go to vote and you still have the person that you hate under your name. Oh god we don't have a surname, luckily I don't have my partners surname but yeah we're still considered married couple although he has a new relationship and he will be father again in a few months. I also didn't expect him to be a father in a few months. I just hope the worse for all of them *[chuckles]*. Sorry I have to be honest with this kind of stuff. I hope he will have another opportunity to live with a child with high care needs. I hope he will do right this time. I don't think we could really. Although if you're separated legally, you're never separated from

your unity as a family. I'm also a child of separated parents and my mother suffers from domestic violence. This is why I put a question mark at the end I'll never be sure until my child tell me something and I also doubt his words because sometimes I feel like he wants to say something just to see my reaction and to see if I will involve him, if I will support him or not. So I was never sure and the things I reported I'm pretty sure this was happening but I also know that violence in family are like trespassing, passing to generation.

LR: Yeah. I have a different kind of question that, it's more about your experience between these two countries or between Europe and the UK. Have you ever reflected or can you elaborate a little bit why the UK gives you this sense of freedom. What is it? I mean in your situation, since what you've been through you know my instinctive question is, why not going somewhere else in Europe where you won't have all these problems caused by Brexit it you know. This bureaucratic sort of nightmare cause by Brexit. So I am curious to see what really is that kind of you know giving you this sense of freedom in the UK. Or what is it about the UK that is so good for you?

S: Urm I don't know like. I probably need more time to think about this answer. The first thing is that English is my third language. It's the language I learnt in school and it's also the language of music and I love music. I'm singing in a choir and I think that for me English give me access to the information that I couldn't access with Italian. The way of thinking also. I feel much closer to the way English people think. The work culture for example is more rational than what I've experienced in Italy. I didn't feel Italian like I feel more German than Italian but then I find myself coming to Britain and have more opportunities and being able to do little progress but do it because I deserve it. In Italy you do things and you never get anything back. You don't even get a thankyou back. I really like the way they ask please although sometimes it's a bit hypocrite. It's kind and gentle but sometimes it's hypocrite. It's the same diversity, I thought that England was a black country, like mixed black and white country when I was a student in my high school and then I went to London in 1998 with one of the first chartered flights, like the very cheap flight. I didn't like London. I went to London to visit my sister so. Maybe another reason sorry, I said language, the culture of work so for me coming here for research was the best place because it allowed you as you explained to me, it allowed you to stretch from social to politic, still fashion and come back, how many times you want and I want something like that for my life. I also study a very tricky subject. It's immigration, it's very politicised and I didn't realise that I was in that kind of system. I have to write about immigrants, poverty while I did never consider myself as an immigrant, as not a poor but I was still looked at as an immigrant and as a poor person. I want to change and I think people who comes here have more opportunity so I say language, culture of work, culture in general although there's a little bit of this kindness which becomes hypocrisy. You can tell I never tell anybody because I cannot, I cannot say the words. *[laughing]* So it's more about the kindness, I really like the kindness things and also because of the family connection. I have a step sister, I have two cousin, their children here. A cousin who is like a sister who lived with me in Milan, she moved here with three daughters. The three daughters, one of these I'm a grand eh, one of them and they moved in 2012. I'll show you something, just because I like show you things but not sure if you have, oh, sorry.

S dropping something

S: Yeah I found these, pretty. I don't know you know when you have memories you don't realise until you find them and then I find this oyster card that I used the other day. It's from 2012 and I think I bought this when I went to visit the first time I went to visit my cousin who just relocated to London with the three kids and she moved here because she has three kids and one of this has downs syndrome and she couldn't have access to the school. They postponed the school primary school because they didn't have support in the school for her and now she is, she is brilliant. We

spend time together and she is in secondary school. She is very independent, she can speak Italian, English a little bit of Taberna which is our language and she can spell a little bit of Spanish too. She is uhh... I don't know I think this country give the opportunity to the right persons and I don't say it's like the American dream, never seen like that. I like the tradition as well, I like the architecture, I like the landscape. I like so many things about England *[laughing]* I don't like the weather but in the south west I need to say it's even better than Milan. Milan is not really a good like happy city for weather although we have a short distance we have mountains, lakes and the sea but if you need to work full time and you need to stay in the city you become really like sad in the winter where the Bristol. I have a park just in front of me in my house now I'm like facing a park and in 20 minutes you are out from the city and I really love staying here. It's not very sunny but with my passport and with my settlement I could go as other people do like over the winter I can go to sunny places.

LR: Yeah, sounds people and some people manage.

S: Yeah so I'm not sure I said everything but yeah.

CH: Do you feel yourself, do you feel you're Italian or do you feel British or English?

S: I will not fall into this trap. I did say to you I was in Italy. One of the duty of the second generation is association of second generation immigrants and at the time people ask me do I feel more Italian or more British and a friend of mine just said, it's like asking to a person who you love more your mother or your father. *[laughing]* I don't know. Somebody just reply you feel like you're a citizen of the world. I don't know think like that because now I'm forty although I promised myself I will live my thirty. So this year I've turned thirty again, because I want to live the years that I haven't lived and I'm more into a more like diaspora now. I'm learning about diaspora and what it feels like being in a diaspora and Italian. So Eritrean born in Italy who are Italian of course citizens have moved away during the 70s and the 80s so most of the people like me you cannot see them in Italy in Milan because they emigrate somewhere else. I don't think they really realise and we never really talk about being a double diaspora. Also because lots of Italians are my age they migrate somewhere else but we kind of feel different because once you are growled you look for your roots. So as I'm looking for my roots into the black community there is no Eritrean community here and also because all the politics that is in Eritrea, there's lots of hate between Eritrean, (*Trivrai??*) and Ethiopian and there is a war and a long lasting war. I don't want to enter into this kind of conversation and I prefer talk myself as Italian of black African heritage but I know my condition depends a lot on me being part of a diaspora so I cannot really find a home in a place but all the places are home.

CH: Ok, that's a good answer. Thankyou.

S: Thank you Charlie, thank you Lucia. That's really like is, it's a really tough interview. You know what I'm thinking about I'm struggling a little bit with my PHD proposal as I said to Lucia but I found a way to interview people, maybe in the future, we are not really ready. Is to use storytelling and I learnt about storytelling in real life and how this can be therapeutic to some people but I'd like to use the storytelling approach to Eritrean diaspora to the Eritrean double diaspora because sometimes people don't really want to reply to direct questions. They rather prefer to tell their stories rather than an...

LR: Yeah.

S: Especially Eritrean people.

LR: This interview that we are having with our participants tends to be as non-directive as we can. We also don't like to ask very direct questions, sometimes we do but as I hope you could see it's quite loose, it's more like a chat. It's not even semi-structured.

S: What I would say is that you can structure storytelling as well because it needs lots of skill to be a listener.

LR: Yep.

End of recording.

End of Transcript