

Interview: Louis

Date Transcribed: 28/02/2022

Interview Duration: 61 minutes

Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Louis

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.

L: So you always feel why are they asking me this question or?

LR: Yes we don't, for studies in people's experiences we don't trust surveys very much so we prefer to just have you know this unstructured interviews and also yeah I just wanted to say we're not worried about the aesthetics of the artwork so you know if you are concerned about not being good enough it doesn't apply to this study don't worry.

L: Good.

LR: Ok so can you say a couple of words to introduce yourself Louis?

L: Yeah so my name is Louis. I work for a company called (**Name of company**) a French company. Currently in Derby. I'm into procurement so basically buying parts to make and maintain trains and I've been involved or associated with the UK for almost thirty years. My wife is English. In total I've lived fourteen years in the UK of marital life and fifteen years back on the continent. I've got three children, the first one was born in England, the second one was born in France, the third one was born in Budapest so I would class ourselves as very European. I came here 92' and that was the beginning of I would say the European adventure you know, just walked into social security in the UK you know get your social security number, start working. So I'm back in the UK the year of the referendum, but yeah that's all me.

LR: I forgot to say I'm Italian and I've also been backward and forward from the UK. I was in England in the early 90's and I went back to Milan for a long time to teach there and then I came back to the UK and Scotland in 2014 and I've been here since then. So yeah I've also got a mixed family with a British husband and a son who was born in Italy but now lives here and goes to the University of Edinburgh so yeah, mixed as well.

L: Yes.

LR: Right, so thank you for this I'm going to share the screen with your artwork and we'll take it from there. Ok can you see it?

L: Yep.

CH: I think your artwork's fantastic Louis. I've not seen it. It's really amazing. It's fantastic.

L: Oh good.

CH: No it's really good. It's very very good.

LR: So yeah maybe we'll start from there if you want to start talking about your artwork and how you...

L: So I did try to, I mean because you spoke about heart it was just trying to say my, so for me it was about lockdown and Covid but it was about being European in the UK and Brexit in the background. I've just tried to put all of this into an image that could express all the things that I felt. So the person in the middle that's me. I think it's holding my head because I can't believe what's kind of happening. Obviously that's France in the background and I think what I was trying to demonstrate was that France has never felt so far away. So I think Brexit has made France feel far away but the lockdown this is kind of like bombs falling on my head so Covid, lockdown, the settled status all these things kind of happening at the same time even though they are disconnected I think it's made the feeling of isolation which I've never felt before, stronger than ever. France has never felt so far like this and I think that it was a point through the pandemic that it was almost difficult to differentiate do I feel like this because of Covid or do I feel like this because of Brexit and the settled status saga and all this. So I think that's what this is expressing. I think it's also you know the flying, freedom of movement. For me it's clearly something that we are losing that's flying away. That always took for granted. The eyes on the side, that's more to do with Brexit but it's basically I've never felt like a stranger in this country. Never. I've been coming back and forward like I said since 93'. I've always felt at home. I've never really felt like that but since the referendum and since we've been going through the Brexit, coming to life. I've really felt almost self-conscious talking French with my kids in certain places and I know I'm a six foot six guy. You know I play Rugby all my life so I can look after myself but I think it's just more, there's almost been time where we felt uncomfortable and this could be more down to me than really what's happening but yeah a bit of paranoia I think. Which is things I've never really felt so I think I've tried to express it is through Brexit I feel like almost trapped in this country. The settled status thing to me has really been like a slap in the face where do you know like that's where I've seen your add about the research. You know that three million, I'm absolutely gobsmacked that people are willing to pay two thousand pounds to become British. It's almost like I'm seeing a frame of mind where I'm thinking you know, unless you've given it to me, I don't want it. It's just... and I've never felt like that I've always been very anglophile you know. I have always been very you know my kids are bilingual they've got passports. Me and my wife have always tried to bring them up like our house is a mix of France and England to some extent you know we are not... So it has felt like a bit of a slap in the face so yes that's what I've tried to express. I feel that lockdown has made it feel even worse, it made it feel you know I remember when the first lockdown hit we were actually self-isolating two days before because my son had been sent back from school with a cough and there was no testing back then so we didn't know whether it was positive or not. We kind of came out for the first time for shopping after fourteen days of self-isolation, it was like stepping out on the moon or something almost because nobody knew if that virus was everywhere or not and I think that really added some stigma to what I was already feeling with Brexit.

LR: Yeah. I mean you very well described basically I think the origin of our research idea. I mean it totally resonates with me and the very reasons you explained are also those that determined me to put together this proposal because this is exactly how I felt. I very much share your views on the citizenship as well. You know I don't want to spend two thousand pounds because I don't even

really want it but I'm thinking how is that playing out in your family because your wife is British. So my husband is British so does it have any impact.

L: No I think my wife has been very very [*heavy emphasis here*] clear from the start. I mean we came back in the UK because my wife wanted to come back to the UK because of her family because she was homesick. I think I'm someone who settles very easily wherever I go but my wife said if life becomes too difficult for me she's happy to move. So my wife is totally on the same side as me in terms of the way she sees it. She's completely does not comprehend it. Most of her family I think have voted Brexit and she just doesn't understand it. So yeah another plus I think going back on the you know, I pay my tax you know I've got a mortgage I pay my house. I'm very aware, very much involved in the society I live in. I coach Rugby, I've been coaching kids to play rugby for the last five, six years you know. I don't know what I could do to be more integrated in the community I live in. My wife is British my kids are British. The fact that I have to go through some application process to be granted the right and on top of that pay two thousand pound to me is completely ludicrous and I understand why a lot of people will feel like that. I mean there are some positives, the only positive I can find is that, I've always found Britain to be very you know, a lot of layers of people. People from Ireland, people from Scotland, people from Italy, people from France you know. If you go in London it's incredible how many people you can hear speak in French and I'm sure you can hear a lot of people speaking Italian and I've never really paid attention before but since the referendum I've really become very aware of my European colleagues and its almost like I make every effort to speak to you know. If I met you on the train and I don't know you and I can hear your Italian I think I would come out of my way to smile or to just to make you say eh, I'm here I know you're here. Which is weird because I've never really felt like that before the need but you know it's almost a need now and I'm always very weary, weary's not the right word but you know there's also I think there is racism behind Brexit. I'm not saying it was a driver for everybody but there is racism behind it but what is incredible as well there's some kind of hierarchy the level of racism of some people. So if you're French you're almost alright you know French is... Italian as well you're alright but if you're Romanian, if you're Bulgarian, if you're... you know if you come from Eastern Europe or whatever the level of tolerance people have with you is different and I'm always saying well why's it different you know. I'm an economic migrant you know. I think that's what I've had to come to realise through all this is that I'm a migrant. I'm an economic migrant, call me what you want but I am a migrant. Why should I be treated different to other people? So it's changed my views and the way I look on things and people and I suppose in a sense it's kind of positive because I would have never trust myself. I'm not saying I'm being discriminated or what but it's just, it's made me feel you know. I make the parallel you know I could have drawn some dinghies on that painting but you know some of those people that are coming through the channel for a better life, why they think the UK's got something that France or Germany can't offer I don't know but are they different from me? Probably not.

LR: No not much I mean I'm an economic migrant as well and yeah I don't know. I was intrigued by what you were saying so this eyes that you put in your artwork is it because you feel under scrutiny? You feel observed?

L: Yeah I think there are times where I do... Maybe a bit less now but when the... You know I would say in the early stages of Brexit I definitely felt very weary. I think what I've tried to do with these eyes is you know if you look at, I don't know if you remember or if you've ever seen these posters from world war two where the (*vishi?*) government. It was even before the (*vishi?*) government. In front we called it the fifth column and the fifth column was supposed to, (*French phrase for the fifth column*) in French. The (*French phrase for the fifth column*) was supposed to be the spies you know

the people that are watching, are gathering information for the enemy and there was a poster where all you could see were dark silhouettes and some eyes and I think that's what I was trying to represent. I think for me it's two things, first potentially being under scrutiny, some people like Georgie he's not British, he's a foreigner which I've never felt before but the other thing is probably me. The way I am looking at people. Less so now but in the early days of Brexit, trying to gauge oh he's a pro-Brexiter or you know. People in (mantorage?), people in my family, some friends, almost trying to gauge you know, is he with me or is he against me? That's what the eyes represent, all these people that I don't know what to make of them. Are they with me, are they against me? Are they friend or foes?

LR: It's almost like the referendum put us on the alert I mean. On the alert about other people like in a situation that we've never had before. Wondering where are they Brexiteers or are they not.

L: No but it's funny because I've got settled status but I've never felt so unsettled to some extent because do you know I've never felt I had a problem living here then Brexit is making me ask the question well actually maybe I've got a problem. Maybe I'm not welcome here, maybe I'm not wanted here and these are questions I've never asked myself. I've always taken it for granted that eh, this is Europe I've got as much as right to be here as you have and it kind of feels like Brexit took that away from me.

LR: Well yeah after all I mean before we had a sort of certified and sanctioned right to be here. Now that right has gone away, it's not there anymore. It's not right. I mean the very fact that we had to apply for settled statuses means it's not a taken for granted right.

L: Yeah it could be taken away at any time so.

LR: Exactly they didn't even give us a piece of paper. When we go abroad you know, when we come back to the UK if something doesn't work at the border you don't even have a piece of paper saying I have a settled status which is quite worrying to me at least.

CH: So Louis can you tell us what you felt like. You said you moved back the day of the referendum?

L: It wasn't the day but you know I moved back very early 2016 and uh...

CH: How was your mood when you heard about the Brexit referendum.

L: I think it was a state of shock because I think like most people I looked at the news going to bed and you know we have Nigel Farage saying you know, admitting he'd lost and I went to bed thinking phew we've escaped and then woke up and it was like total shock. I think it was a bit of a sense of denial as well thinking surely you know something's going to happen. Someone's going to tell us it's not happening so I think it's been a slow decent into accepting. It's been a very slow grieving process because I think we always felt like oh somebody's going to change this or there's going to be a curve ball or they're not going to do this and I think it's we are slowly descending into this what I would call horrific state that is Brexit. Plus I think do you know it's also, I mean we are expanding on other things but we are now in an age and I think that's another artwork I need to do but we are in an age where you've got scientists telling people that they need to get a jab and then anybody on Facebook can discredit them or you know and Trump has been elected on that sort of brief fake news. I mean... I'm in business so I do business with the continent. I know exactly the impact of Brexit on the borders. The impact it's had on trading, the impact it's had on customs, the impact it's had on logistics but these people they either don't know or they don't want to know so it's almost like you know, every day I'm seeing examples to justify why that is a mistake but it's almost like I'm almost

mute with it because nobody wants to listen. Not nobody but the majority of people just don't want to listen to it. They just want to get on with whatever is Brexit and...

LR: Yeah it feels like there's no turning back. Even if you look at the media there's not a lot of emphasis about the drawbacks of Brexit.

L: It's a massive sense of you know powerless you know your powerless. You see it happening, decaying but nobody wants to listen. Yeah the media, I think everybody's had enough of it. I think people just want to get on but the thing is there are some clear facts happening that are for me are making potentially more and more, or less and less reversible but more and more a problem. I was talking to people, they wanted to go on Holiday, their passport is less than three months to run out. They cannot go to Tenerife or whatever on holiday, you know like before this would never have been a subject of discussion but you almost feel like saying see. This is another example you know.

LR: Yeah absolutely it's going to affect a whole lot.

CH: How did your children feel? Are your children quite big? Are they quite young?

L: So my eldest is twenty two, going to twenty three. I don't know I think...

CH: How did they feel when they were coming back to live in England?

L: So I don't think they've... So my two eldest were very keen on going back to England. I think they felt you know we've been fifteen years on the continent. I think they felt they were missing out on part of the culture by not coming to England so I think for them whatever was happening with Brexit was completely urm... you know they never thought twice about it because the excitement was we're coming to live in England and that was an adventure in itself. My youngest he's going to be sixteen this summer so he was way too young to appreciate completely. I think as well they've got both passport so I think since Brexit we've always told them that you know they haven't got to que anywhere. They can go out on a French passport and come back on a British passport. They can go and work on the continent. They are the lucky ones I would say of Brexit because they can have the best of both worlds to some extent. So I think, I mean I would like to think I raised my kids with similar values to mine so I think they will see Brexit as a step back you know towards obscurities or whatever. I'm sure they will be against it but I don't think they feel it's affecting them the same way it's affecting me kind of thing.

CH: Do they see that, that it's affecting you?

L: I think they do yeah. I mean it's funny because we haven't really spoken about Brexit together but yeah I'm sure they hear me enough. Complaining, rant about it enough to see how it's affecting me.

LR: You said that they were quite keen to come back to England but before you came back were you in Hungary or in France?

L: We were in France.

LR: Ok and you said because they were afraid of missing out on the culture. What does that mean? Is it because they kind of prioritise English culture on French one?

L: I don't know. I think my two eldest, my eldest is born in Wolverhampton so I think he always felt he was, even though he spent only the first like not even two years of his life. He always felt he was more English than French I would say and my daughter even though she was born in Grenoble in France, I think she was just attracted by, you know she gets on well with her cousins in the UK and all that so I think... do you know I don't want to make it any worse than it was but I think they thought

that UK was maybe cooler than France on the education front and the way that France is quite formal in the Education system you know it's very much driven by whether you're good or not in maths where I think the UK is a lot more, you know you could fail at something but still succeed at something else. Plus when we lived in Budapest my eldest went to the British school of Budapest because it was a way for my wife to also you know make some social contacts and friends so he had an understanding of what British education system was like and I have to say I think you know in France somebody would say oh your child is crap in maths he'll do nothing where I think in the British system someone will make a drawing like mine and some teacher will say wow your child is so talented. I really think that's the difference in approach.

LR: Yeah I know what you mean, I know exactly what you mean.

L: So I don't know what the Italian system is like but the French is very much academically driven by the maths. So I think that's what they were aspiring to. I don't think they had a clear understanding of what it was like but I think I would like to think what they found was actually what they expected it to be like.

LR: Yes the Italian system is much more similar to the French. I mean I don't think there's a predominance of the importance of math but whatever your studying you have to yeah reach some standards and nobody's really beating around the bush very much if you're failing. There's no sugar coating or less sugar coating than there is here. I noticed that with my own son who did up to the secondary school, well the middle school in Italy and then we came here when he was in middle school. So quite a different style.

L: When we left France my eldest was you know beginning college and was basically being said he was going to fail and then he came to England and then he went into art and now you know he's finishing his degree in Nottingham University in animation and you know for him it's a dream come true and I think he feels if he stayed in France that dream he would have never had the opportunity to live that dream. My daughter is probably different but yeah again I think, kids are kids. I'm sure mum and dad influence somewhere will play a part.

LR: Well there must be some fascination with the UK because I always remember not long ago like two or three years ago when we were coming back from Italy to the UK in the summer, when we landed in Edinburgh my son said oh finally back to civilisation. Now I was going to ask you do you still have family in France though?

L: Yes, yes I've got my mother, my sister you know, all my family is still in France.

LR: How did you feel about it in the first lockdown when nobody knew anything about the pandemic.

L: No it's been... I mean we are to some extent still going through it. So I did not see my mother for eighteen months because the last time she came was two years ago around about now and then I only managed to go last August. She hasn't been back because of Covid but also now my mother needs a passport to come to see me in the UK because the French ID card is not enough so we need to sort that out. Plus my mother is seventy eight or more so for her to come I think we're coming to a time where it's going to be more and more difficult but she hasn't seen my kids in two years so we are planning to go this summer. So we're still going through it. It has been really difficult you know we've gone through my mother coming once or twice a year and us going once or twice a year to like nothing in two years so thank god we have Facetime and things like this but yeah it's been very very difficult on that front. Plus not knowing with Covid what's happening.

LR: Exactly. What kind of feelings or worries did you have? I mean were you worried when the lockdown stuck, like when we first went in lockdown about your family in France?

L: Yeah because I think the thing I was the most worried about is if, you know now with the vaccines I think we are a bit more relaxed but yeah at the beginning I was like my mum could die or you know or I could get seriously ill and no possibility for me to go there or for her to come here. I think that was the most and I mean again I try to be a positive person so I don't really dwell on things like that but yeah I think if I was, when I was sitting down and thinking about it like that, that was the thing I was the most worried about. That something would happen to my mother or my sister or my uncle or what and that I was stuck here impossible to go back, not even for the funeral. I mean someone of the stories you were hearing, people not able to attend funerals or going back to see family, that was the horrible thing. I've got a friend she's Italian but she's been raised in England. Dad died of old age but again wanted to be buried in Italy and they had to watch it on facetime because they could not go back to Italy because of Covid and all that so that's the type of things I was really worried about.

LR: Yeah actually it happened to me. My dad died in December 2020 with Covid. He was very old so but I just made it. I was lucky enough to just make it for the funeral but there was no way I could go and see him before you know.

L: I can imagine if you did not go plus and I am sure you will be like me on this, when you live abroad, when you live away you always kind of carry a sense of guilt. I mean I always carry a sense of guilt that you accommodate and you live with but yeah always feel guilty that my mum needs something I cannot be there to help her. If my sister is doing something for my mother I always feel guilty with my sister because I'm thinking she's got all this you know. So I think to live through something like this will really top it up in terms of guilt. You know you lose a parent and you cannot even go there because already you feel guilty because you know you were not there for the last few days. These are the things I think you have to live with and that's the kind of things that was playing on my mind. Thinking you know if anything happens then you have to live with that for the rest of your life, think shit I did not even...

LR: Yeah there always is this sense of guilt. That's why Covid or not Covid I've been managing to go back to Italy quite often, exactly because of what you said because I feel I have to help my mum so I spent a helluva' lot of money with all the test and all the pre-departures test, return test and all this but yeah like you say you have to live with that somehow and this has been my way to live with it.

L: Yeah I don't think there's any right way or wrong me. I mean me I think at the beginning your thinking is it worth me taking the risk because potentially I go and see my mother and I bring her the virus, then after we realise. Then after I've got a family, you know I've got three kids. Then you think, the cost of the test is you know... but yeah it's a difficult one.

LR: Yeah it's a difficult one definitely. Charlie do you want?

CH: Yeah Louis your wee, I presume that's a portrait of you is it?

L: Yes.

CH: So I noticed you've not put a face on the guy?

L: Yeah because I'm looking at France.

CH: Oh looking at France ok.

L: I'm looking at France getting further and further away.

CH: Ok. Like I see the wee French flag. Everything else is very dramatic and the French flag is so perfectly done. Are these meant to be bullets coming down the side?

L: Yeah the bombs, you know the bombs falling on our heads.

CH: Ok. Is that what you felt like? Almost like a warzone?

L: Yeah I think it was a bit like a... yeah like bomb. I don't know if warzone is the right thing but definitely like a bombshell falling on our heads and you know like something you potentially see it coming and when it's there it's like the repercussions are massive.

LR: I was going to ask you. You live in an area of England that I know voted to leave because I was in Nottingham actually in the 90s so I know the area quite a bit and I know the culture of the area as well I think. At least when I was there I got an impression. I was there for a few years so have you ever experienced around you anything like you know kind of hidden discrimination or a change in the attitudes of people.

L: I've got to say I've never... I mean... I fell out with some friends and some friends from many years in the summer of 2020 because and then again... and it's funny because I never thought about this until you asked me this question but these people are friends from twenty odd years, English people, not necessarily people that have voted Brexit by the way but the discussion started around, and again, English humour about people in dinghies crossing from France and all that. Call me overdramatic but I do feel there are things I'm not sure I want to joke about. Plus this was around the time when there had been like some family drowning in the channel but then the reason that we fell out was because I was being told by somebody that I thought was a friend that I should not think like this because I'm here now. I should think like them you know I should think like... [*inhale of breath – discomfort*]. So I would say that's the only real, and it's been said a couple of times like you know if I share something on Facebook... Clearly anti-Brexit, some friends will crop up and say you know if you don't like it you can always go back... Which again is probably fair enough but and I know I can always go back. But yeah I think, I would say that's the only real... I've never felt this... I have felt worried about what will people think if we speak French but I've never... Like I said I'm two meters tall, I'm a big guy, that's probably you know. I'm not going to be the... I think there's going to be other people that feel victimised at work for being European before me so I've not really felt like that but through people that I would have thought were friends I have got a few comments like you know if don't like it you can always go back or if you're not happy you can always go back. So we know the words shut up and you live here now and you have to accept it and almost you have to embrace it. I would say that's it. Like I said, my neighbourhood I've got no problem but then again I live in rural Staffordshire and I'm very involved in Ruby because I coach, I play. Again I've never really had any issues with anybody.

LR: Ok have you ever thought about going back to France or to Europe anyway?

L: Yeah I don't know about France but yes I have. I have clearly thought a lot about going back and I think, yeah I think it's a bit like a... The love story I have with England has been stained a bit and you know it's funny because I definitely see Scotland as different to England so it's not so much with Britain my love story has ended, it's more with England.

LR: So you think Scotland. You look at Scotland as a better place in that respect?

L: Yeah I think the people there... Well the majority of people there seem to have a different outlook on it.

LR: I mean I've met a few Brexiteers even here and I had you know I had trouble from stopping myself from falling out with them. I tend to get too involved with things I'm passionate about so in general in Scotland I mean a few weeks after the referendum results we received a letter from the Scottish government with Nicola Sturgeon's signature. I know it's only a symbolic thing but it was a letter saying keep in mind that you are welcome here and we want you to stay and stuff...

L: I think that's great because in England we got nothing and do you know some of the thing that really shocked me is I remember the first testimonies of Europeans. I remember a lady in Edinburgh, a French lady who'd married some major from the British army. I mean the guys' been a body guard to the Queen and she's got three kids, clearly French British, French Scottish. So she applied straight away I think for the British citizenships or something and she got the letter saying that it was refuse and because it's the same letter you get whether you are from Zimbabwe or you are from France. It was saying be ready to be deported at any time and I remember that was something I read in I can't remember which newspaper the Times or something but I was absolutely shocked by this. To think somebody she's married a British soldier, the guy was a war hero from Iraq or Afghanistan and she was being treated like that. I remember there was another lady, I think she was Norwegian or Danish and she'd been a counsellor and again the same story happened to her. Now me I'm lucky I've always worked fully employment so you know my settled status was like a formality and I'd like to you know, I think we've got to be careful. I still believe and see in Britain a strong democracy. There's a side of Britain that I admire that I don't see in the French democracy and all that. You know I think the British have a potential to debate about very difficult things which we don't seem to be capable to do in France. I still think Britain is, you know is a leading democracy. I mean there's things I don't agree with, I'm not a royalist. You know there's a few things I don't understand but I think the democracy you know Britain has been leading the way in many things like abolish... Even though they have been culprit of some horrible things as well but you know they are one of the first nations that have enforced you know the abolishment of slavery. Over the years they have been a leading example in what they have done in world war two and things like that so I still have faith in that country but there's other sides where that love story has kind of been broken by Brexit.

CH: You talked about UK being stained by Brexit and I'm wondering if the people you knew that social media had a lot to do with kind of propaganda?

L: Oh definitely. I don't know if you've seen the movie urm... The uncivil revolution is it, which explains all the mechanisms behind.

LR: I haven't seen it but I know what you mean yeah.

L: Oh it's, you gotta' watch that movie because I mean it's a movie so there's an element that's probably a bit romanticised but it just explains to you exactly and like you were saying yeah I know people. I remember in the, you know just after the referendum I was doing a course to be a qualified coach at Rugby and I was talking to some guys and they were talking to me like I was English in a sense or British you know. Justifying the reasons why they voted and this was in Stoke on Trent so all these guys were clearly motivated because they... and again I can see that some people would be worried if they saw their society change and like I remember you know loads of Polish people... I kind of get that but like I said to them like hold on I am a foreigner as well. I heard it's different you're French but... I forgot where I was going with this but yeah I think there's a ...

CH: Are the people in Stoke on Trent saying what they felt about?

L: No but I've forgotten the question you asked me Charlie.

CH: Propaganda to do with social media.

L: Yeah so clearly social media definitely played a part and I think that's the scary thing of it and it's the same with Covid you know and all that. There's so much stuff pushed around on social media. Even my mother sometimes will share things and I will say mum you know, do you know what's behind this, have you researched? I think people stop researching the sources of the information and they just take things for granted and so yeah I think social media is a massive driver in most of the crap we experience and many things.

LR: That's why politicians are so keen on kind of riding the social media in a way when they are involved in some kind of campaign.

L: Well just look at Ukraine and Russia. I mean who knows exactly what's going on in Ukraine and Russia unless you're a specialist. I haven't got a clue but every day, every day Joe Biden is telling us through social media, oh they can attack any day, oh they can attack any day and I would love to see what social media is saying to those people in Russia. It's going to be saying the opposite. It's just... we are in a state of manipulation so for me Brexit was clearly... I think no or yes. Yes to Brexit was a very simple answer to such a such a complex set of completely different questions and I think people voted yes to Brexit for so many different reason that you know, Fisherman was for the quota, some people their Polish neighbours or the guy who got the job instead of them, some others were for completely different reasons for having a blue passport or whatever. You know there's so many...

LR: To me it means that people, I mean I'm not trying to be snobby or anything but that says to me that people don't really understand politics because you cannot make complex decision on the basis of what's happening in your own little life.

L: But again I think, I mean if you look at you know Politicians have been explaining to people that most of the evil that we're feeling was coming from Brussels. This has been the same in French politics I mean you are the (*niquouis aquise?*) have been using Brussels as a scape goat to explain some of the things. So British politicians have been using Europe as a scapegoat. I remember my wife asking her cousin why she was voting Brexit and her answer was because I want my kids to respect their elders. Now what has that got to do with anything to do with Brexit and I think that's the problem and if you watch that movie. You gotta' watch that movie because they are taking pools of people, like doing some workshops to try and understand what the mood of the population is. This was done by Jeremy Cummings and then you can see all of a sudden there's this woman she's like exploding and she's basically, this is my wife's cousin. She's just expressing she's fed up about something, she doesn't know what it is but she's fed up and that's what people behind social media on Brexit have tapped into. They've tapped into people's being pissed off. In France I can't remember there's a politician that said about France, a politician or philosopher or someone but somebody said about France and this is applicable to all of western society, somebody said about France said France is heaven inhabited by people who believe they are in hell. For me this is the summary of Brexit is that people in the UK they're fed up, they don't know, they are convinced everybody's got it better than them when yet we are in a country that's rich, you know we have a health care system and that's the victory of Brexit. That's the victory of Trump as well. What the Americans complaining about, but still they want to complain about things they got it worse than ever and if you look a bit on the political spectrum with what's happening in France with Eric Zemmour, Marie la Penn, that's exactly the same agenda these people are having. It's convincing

people they are unhappy, they are fed up and because of that they should do something radical about it.

LR: Yeah. I've got two things to say one is a comment about what you said that it's true there are also politicians who are actually kind of criticising Brussels and blaming Brussels and the European Union for a lot of problems inside the country. I mean this is happening in France, it's happening in Italy, it's happening in a lot of other countries. The difference that I saw for example in Italy where I follow the politics more is that differently from Britain those arguments didn't really have a great appeal for the population because in the end Italians always kind of showed that they were keen on keeping in Europe. They always thought Europe was a value and I think also in France that's the case. There are people that are criticising you know Brussels and the European Union bla bla bla but that doesn't gain the majority of the population yet whereas in Britain it did so I think that's a difference.

L: No but think UK, again I think the UK is an island and I think that insular mentality has been a saving factor. You know if you look at world war two, the entire world collapsed around Britain and Britain stood alone and I think there is, there's always been probably entertained by some politicians and all that but that insular mentality has always persevered. I mean if I speak to my mother in law she's born and will have lived all her life in Wolverhampton, big Brexit place and I'm sure she voted Brexit even though her daughter married a French guy you know. She hasn't done it against her daughter or against me. I think she's done it because she thought that's the right thing to do because, but my mother in law, even though that empire where the sun you know never sets or never stops setting, even though that empire has decayed, my mother in law is one of those people that still believes that the UK is some sort of an empire and then part of that is a bit of ignorance but I think there is a sense of... I mean I don't know Charlie is the closest thing to English out of us three so I don't know how he feels about that but there is I believe a sense of, and you know as well there's another thing. It's that I find that, and I'm saying this in the love of my English friends, I think British was invented by the English to kind of be inclusive for the Welsh, the Irish and the Scottish but British is an English invention and now where there is devolution in Northern Ireland, where there is devolution in Scotland and Wales. The English are feeling left out and if you speak to a lot of English people they will say where is the English parliament and you say it's the house of commons that's your parliament oh no but it's the British parliament. To some extent it's a fair point but I think to me it kind of illustrates a lot of all the British thing, the United Kingdom thing to me has gone full circle where you have English people feeling left out. Feeling like they are outdone, out of something that to some extent was created for them.

LR: Well they lost their position of dominance and I think they maybe feel it more than you know being completely aware of it and this feeling of having lost points or having lost this kind of superior position that they had during the Empire is causing a lot of frustration that they can't really define.

L: For me what's a complete paradox in all this as well is that I remember when all the trouble was happening in Barcelona you know with the Catalan dissidence and all the British people, or English people should I say were like very supportive of this, yet again will not accept that Scotland may want to go independent which to me is a complete paradox. Now don't get me wrong, for me, and we are the same in France to some extent, we have regionalism, I know you have the same in Italy but for me this is completely going against you know. We should be Europeans you know and to me to some extent we should be contemplating, I don't think it will happen now but we should be contemplating a federal Europe. You know a federal Europe where we are nations inside.

LR: Like the United States?

L: Well yeah and why wouldn't I want to have a Belgian Prime Minister or whatever or Swedish or Italian or even English. Regionalism for me is kind of going the other way on it.

LR: Yeah, last thing I wanted to ask you is, if you had to... Sorry Charlie do you want to come in?

CH: No you go with your questions and I'll come in after.

LR: A question for us that is important actually is if you had to say where your home is, what would you say?

L: I would say currently my home is in greater Staffordshire because that's where my wife is and you know I don't feel... I would say currently that's where my home but I'm very French. I don't think this will ever change and I still feel very strongly European but yeah no home is still in England at the moment.

CH: Do you speak French to your kids?

L: Yeah so we are... My wife will speak English, I will speak French.

CH: OK. I'm interested in just a couple of things, sorry Louis. You see the freedom of movement drawing you got there with the feathers? Is that meant to be flight or is that meant to be?

L: I mean it's flying away, it's escaping from us.

CH: Escaping ok, interesting. Another question I was going to ask you is because you're involved in the movement of train parts is that right?

L: Yep.

CH: How has Brexit affected that?

L: Well as I was saying early on, to me it's affecting it big time so you know where before we have parts going up and down the channel you know because we have suppliers in Italy, in France in Germany and so on. While this was all happening without any issues or problems, now we have to go through customs, if you don't have the right papers you may be turned back or you may be fined. So what was very simple has now become very complex and it goes behind that. In France we have a contractual status called (French word) which means, so VIE is basically you can get somebody who's got like a masters degree to come and work in the French company in the UK or anywhere. We can't have these types of contract anymore because of the visa status they need to apply for. It needs to be sponsored. You know, I came here twenty eight years ago on an internship for three months. This could not happen now, anymore, because there's no visa status for somebody to come and do an internship for three months or stuff like that. So I think, and this is affecting us in the business as well so I think if you know, I work for a French company but it's multi-national so we have people from all sorts of national backgrounds and all that. Before Brexit somebody working for... in Spain could have said you know I want to come into the UK for two years. You know get a job almost a formality. Now you've got to make sure they've got a visa, you need to sponsor it, it's costing money, they may be rejected. The same the other way round you know, we could have as English people go to work in Paris or whatever. Now they need to be sponsored they need to have a visa... it's ...

CH: Sorry another question, yeah. Do you know people that have returned to Europe because of what's happening?

L: Yeah I mean you always hear stories about people that have moved back but yeah I would say...

CH: Any of your friends moved back to France or?

L: No, so some Romanian young guys, who have come here that I knew through Rugby have gone back to Romania because you know, and some Polish people as well, again who I knew through Rugby have gone back to Poland because... I think some people feel... Some people probably felt more vulnerable than others and decided not to chance it and have returned.

CH: Was that during Covid or after Covid or?

L: Some were before Covid and yeah I think Covid has also put a strain on people. Yeah so actually there are two people who work for me, French people that have gone back to France and I think Brexit was already a challenge for them and I think Covid made the decision. They started, you know as soon as lockdown hit they asked me permission to work from home in France so the first few months it felt like they were, and you know everybody was working from home so you couldn't tell whether they were in France or the UK with the wifi and all that. Those two persons have since moved back to (Allstorm or Halstrom) in France. Refused to come back. So yeah Covid was definitely a catalyst on top of Brexit I would say.

CH: Have you been able to re-employ British people in the company or whatever?

L: Yeah I think... Yeah I think we you know... so it's a bit difficult to answer for that question like for like because in the middle of all that we've acquired a company called (Bombardier?) so we have. So yeah I would say we are not in the trade where we are struggling in finding UK profile. Not in my line of work anyway.

CH: Ok. Do you have to be bilingual, multilingual sorry?

L: I mean English is the official language of the company but yeah if you speak French or that it's always a bonus if you work for a French company.

LR: Ok.

CH: Another quick question before we go sorry. Did your son like your drawing, your son doing animation?

L: I'm not sure if I've shown it to my son but my daughter yeah. I showed it to my daughter.

CH: And what did she think?

L: Yeah no I think she was... I mean she did put a smile but yeah I think she said that was good effort.

CH: Good effort ok. I think it's excellent. It's really good. I think it got a real sense of mood about it. It's got real passion which is really interesting. It's great.

LR: Well I think we can wrap it up here. Thanks it was a really nice interesting interview.

L: I've got to say both the drawing and this session I would say was almost therapeutic. It was actually nice. It's weird because you actually, especially when we spoke about my mother and all that. You know touched some strings that I didn't think it would so at least it was good for that. The drawing I've never done that since I was good you know to like try and express on paper something I feel and all that so Charlie if you think it's good that's very good for me and yeah I think the interview session is interesting because it kind of like get it off your chest kind of thing.

LR: That was one of the things we wanted to do with the study and we are quite excited to start the next phase which is going to be really difficult because we're going to have to analyse all these interviews and with the drawings but I'm sure it will also be fascinating. By the way I wanted to tell you that we are setting up a blog and we will be sending a link to all the participants. The blog went online just a couple of days ago and we are you know...

End of recording.

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