

Interview: Miguel

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Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Anke Maas-Lowit: AML

Charlie Hackett – CH

Miguel

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.

CH: We're recording now ok? That was like a quick run through.

M: Yeah now it says it is recovering.

CH: Ok there we go. I'll let Anke introduce herself.

M: Hello Anke.

AML: Hey, hi hello.

CH: Anke do you want to say something about yourself?

AML: Yeah, well god. I'm just [laughing] not having a great day today. I'm the research assistant. The new research assistant.

M: That reminds me that I haven't introduced myself. I don't know exactly will be part of the interview or what.

CH: Yeah it would be good if you could introduce yourself Miguel that would be brilliant.

M: Sure so hello my name is Miguel I live in Belfast Northern Ireland although I am originally from Spain as my accent and my name probably suggests. I've been living in Northern Ireland for slightly over the time of the pandemic. I have one child born during the pandemic which I think is something that was useful to you. I work in IT, I was working remotely before the pandemic started and I got into the study because someone who studies, probably with one of you let me know about it.

LR: Ok, good thanks. Shall we just start?

CH: Yeah let's start. We have started.

LR: So Anke we were going to start and we have the Miguel's collage here and we were just asking him to explain why he produced this collage and what he means by it so Miguel can you explain?

M: Sure, first by the way apologies if there was too many words in it because it had to be wonderful but yes ancillary to the whole thing. So was inspired to create this one because for me really the pandemic hasn't changed much and the fact that I was very newly in a very new place where I didn't have a social life and I was already working from home meant that not that many things changed for me. However over time despite what I said about having no social circle here, over time I have really grown weary of the fact that I could meet anyone and most of my interactions even with my own friends back in Britain or in Spain were over Zoom or Google Meet or wherever cause such as this was. There was a bit of a feeling that list when dealing with other people it was just on smaller squares like this, small windows like this, saying myself many time because also when you're doing one of these calls you typically see yourself in the corner and I don't know about you but I tend to look at my own face a bit too much compared to what I looked to the others. I think I seen a lot of myself you know these things in many of these calls. In many of this infinite array of calls that you end up having for either work or social reasons. I also added a couple of virus pictures there to sort of represent the nagging fear of well the virus being present every day and that's why we're doing this in the first place and perhaps one of the people I'm talking to unfortunately contracted it.

LR: I haven't yet but...

AML: I have.

LR: Yeah I'm so over it yeah.

M: I'm glad that you are over it. [laughing]

LR: I just came to Italy actually. I flew about five days ago because I had things to do here and I had finished teaching and like you say because apart from teaching most other work can be done online so I tried to make the best of the situation although like you I feel a kind of, a bit alienated by all this online and yes seeing my face. My god I never though I needed make up as much as in the last year when I started looking at my face in the call on social media so I think I can totally sympathise with your feeling Miguel. Yes the lingering presence of this horrible virus which is always in the midst of things so yeah I think it's very expressive.

M: Yeah, regarding what you said about the make up, there are many jokes about how people go to work in their pyjamas now right? You don't know if any of those might be pyjama bottoms.

LR: No!

M: Or not and then for women for example then you have the issue of the make up which I don't have but you know perhaps I do present [laughs] do my hair a bit better these things. I say that but I haven't been to the hairdressers in the whole of the pandemic.

LR: Alright. So I didn't catch it, when did you come to the UK?

M: In 2004.

LR: Oh kay so that's a long time.

M: Yeah I lived one yeah in Plymouth, many years in London and only in October 2019 I moved to Northern Ireland.

LR: Ok. So apart from this feeling of not making any more friends how did you feel during the lockdowns? I know you said your life didn't change very much but did you have any particular thoughts or feelings that were specifically in that period of the lockdown?

M: During the first lockdown it felt more serious, it felt more real. First I was a bit weary about going outside at all, particularly in this first period when it wasn't clear yet whether wearing masks was advisable or not. Before vaccines and all that and I would still have to go to the supermarket and there were queues in the supermarket because they had a capacity limit and that sort of stuff. So I think it was in that period that I was a bit more concerned. Later as you know we started to know more and there was first the hope and the reality of it since I have started to feel a bit more relaxed even though I still mask and I just had my booster you know. I'm careful about all these things and I'm going to Scotland in fact for Christmas but I refuse to fly. I'm going to go on the ferry which feels to me safer. The reality I'm not going to know until I'm there but that does feel a bit better.

LR: And were you worried about, do you have family in Spain?

M: Yes.

LR: How do you feel about them during the lockdown?

M: So initially, most of the time ok because for example initially my immediate family lives in southern Spain, that region was less affected. They got it in the first section of the pandemic. Over time it was more or less the same everywhere but restrictions were more strict in Spain. I think, I'm not entirely sure but I think even now you're supposed to wear a mask in the street. I will have to double check that and my dad couldn't go to my brother for example because my brother lives in the next town over and crossing town borders was restricted. Particularly again in the first few months of the pandemic so I could see how it was very problematic for them and they couldn't see each other but at least I knew they were more or less safe and according to news in Spain and elsewhere Spain appeared to be doing this particularly well. I felt that they were safer.

LR: So you thought people in Spain were safer than the UK?

M: In some ways yes, the vaccine arrived in the UK first, the whole AstraZeneca push and all that. I had my first vaccination before my dad for example. Then the time Spain caught up so my dad had his second before I had my second.

LR: Yeah, yeah. Same here in Italy. Same thing.

CH: How did you deal with your child. How old is your is it a boy or a girl?

M: It's a wee boy and because he was born during the pandemic. He was born just in June so he's five months now so we haven't had to deal with things like... And also I forgot to say my partner has taken a year off. So we haven't had to deal with things like day care or anything like that. The baby is always here, except for when you know we go for a walk or whatever. So having him hasn't really impacted us, which may not be your typical case. *[laughing]* I may not be very representative of the population.

CH: So were you worried when your partner was giving birth and things like that during the pandemic?

M: I felt safe because we had a hospital room all for ourselves, well, ok there was a worry but it had nothing to do with the pandemic. It is my partner had complications after giving birth so she had to stay for a bit longer. Ok so unfortunately had mental health issues after and she had to stay in psychiatric care where she wasn't ... It wasn't like being in a hospital bed sort of thing but rather walking around in a facility with other patients. So in that case I guess she had more contact with people and she was sort of more exposed but on the other hand it looked like they were doing a

good job at the facility and keeping things in check. So again to be honest the pandemic was a secondary worry at that point.

LR: Ok. Did you ever go back to Spain during the last two years?

M: I haven't been no.

LR: Did you say you wanted to go? Would you have liked to go?

M: Yeah like I normally go for new years and we missed last year and we are having to miss it this year too. We're going to Scotland where my partner is from. That's how I ended up here by the way. To her parents, that is good but I would like to go to Spain at some point but I'm not seeing myself on a plane any time soon.

LR: *Ohkay, why are you so particularly worried about planes?*

M: I feel that planes are, ok getting a smaller space with many other people whom you don't know, whether they are taking the pandemic seriously or not. It's not great. We have someone relatively close to us who caught Covid-19 flying back from Cyprus very recently. Fortunately this person is fine and all that but you know. As daunting as that might be it does have to remind you that you don't know who is sitting on that plane. I am driving and taking the ferry because I have more control over the situation. We didn't book the ferry on time to get our own cabin unfortunately so we don't know exactly how it is going to be mixed with the general population but worst case scenario we can go outside. We've taken the ferry before so we know that we can go outside if we feel that it's too crowded or whatever.

LR: *Ok. Anke would you like to ask a question?*

AML: *I mean I suppose it's interesting you know that you spoke about issues mainly aside from covid that seem to be you know just much bigger in your life like your baby's health you know you're partner's health. So I actually was just mulling that over and I find that quite interesting and I suppose also you know because of your work you seem to be quite isolated. So Covid doesn't maybe make such a difference.*

Lots of background noise that sounds like transportation announcements.

M: Oh that's another worry to add. About the same time my son was born we bought a house. So if that wasn't enough, now I have a mortgage. [*chuckles*]

Lots of background noise that sounds like transportation announcements.

CH: *Ah.*

LR: *Ok.*

M: I mean it's fine, it's a nice place that we're got ourselves but also perhaps it's slightly, more residential area than we were before so that adds a bit to the feeling of isolation and that now we're forced to take the car more than we were before. Also I am the only one who can drive so my partner wants to go anywhere, not really anywhere, there's some places nearby but for example we don't feel like getting on buses because we have seen so far doesn't give us much confidence about the safety of getting on a bus here so yeah. I think that adds a bit frustration.

AML: *Do you know what it is I wonder as well you know Covid is one thing but what about Brexit?*

M: [*big sigh*]

AML: How did you deal with the Brexit thing? Are you?

M: I'm sure you know which way I lean! [chuckles] sorry. You were saying sorry I interrupted you.

AML: Well I'm just wondering how you are, how you feel affected by Brexit.

M: In a way I am very fortunate because I have a European passport and very fortunate because I also have a British passport so things go towards I get to choose. My partner doesn't get to choose but I'm hoping that we will figure it out and my son has both passports too. Well both citizenships. We're still waiting for one of the passports to be delivered but that's secondary.

LR: I was going to ask did you get the British passport after Brexit or because of Brexit or did you have it before?

M: Because of Brexit but I started the process about a month before the vote. I was starting to see that things were a bit meh so I decided to apply for it and what do you know. That happened and I ended up actually naturalising three months after the vote or something like that I can't remember.

LR: Good timing!

M: Yeah! Also here in Northern Ireland we have another thing of the Irish sea boarder or the back stop or whatever you want to call it. Particularly here loyalist people, sections, are particularly angry about that. I'm hoping that won't go much further than that but you know you never know here what can happen. In some more real ways like one when you say to me the art supplies, they were sent by Anke I believe. So Anke you saw that you have to fill out a form to send it as though you were sending it over a border. You don't remember that?

AML: I was sending it, I just shoved some things in an envelope and send it to you.

M: Ok, but perhaps. Let me bring it, hang on a second.

M goes to collect the envelope of art supplies.

M: So here's the envelope and this here is a customs declaration. Which if you were sending it from Aberdeen to London you will then see but from Aberdeen to Belfast that's a whole different story. With Brexit and the backstop, what do we call it nowadays the Northern Ireland... So in fact one of the thing, when I was trying to figure out what I was going to you know make for you. I was trying to see if I could incorporate this into something. At the end I think I couldn't quite make it work and I ended up going for this other thing right but this was a reminder that now Northern Ireland is separate from the UK.

AML: Yes although, see the customs declaration so that was actually Charlie thought it was needed. Now at the post office there was a bit of a discussion about it and the woman in the post office certainly thought it wasn't needed to be fair but after a whole load of discussion we did it the way it was done.

M: Just the discussion is enough and we know there have been issues with meat or whatever exports. In fact we saw them in the supermarkets. For a while Sainsburys for example was not selling their own bacon they were selling Spanish bacon.

AML: Oh really?

M: Here yeah. Now they are back to having both Spanish and Sainsbury's bacon but you know this was at the start of... not the pandemic but the latest Brexit...

LR: When it actually happened yes.

M: Yeah I know the thing about the sausages. I hadn't bought sausages in a long time so I didn't notice. I do buy bacon.

LR: Yeah sorry Anke go ahead.

AML: Do you know what I'm wondering. Just when you were talking about Northern Ireland and the added issue with Northern Ireland and you know this backstop. Obviously being European, you know Ireland has got lots of problems anyway and particularly Northern Ireland. So are you more affected this being European, living in Ireland or is do you not feel affected?

M: I don't think that's something that has affected me at all yet. Also as well for all the news that we hear about Northern Ireland. You have to be in certain circles or certain situations to be directly affected by any of this. They're not the troubles anymore you know the post troubles and also at the end of the day I'm in a very privileged situation where I work from home. I do pretty well for myself and my feeling is that again, troubles and the post troubles. The situation is something that is more delegated to the working classes. It's the sort of thing that you use to distract the working classes so that they fight among themselves instead of trying to make a better life for everyone if that makes sense. It's that kind of political trick to me that's how as an outside who is very new here I perceive it. I might be wrong. So yeah as someone who didn't grow up here and arrived in the middle of the pandemic so didn't have a much of an occasion to make social life. I still feel like totally outside of that.

LR: I was going to ask apart from the practical side of things of you not being affected by Brexit, but as a European do you have any feelings about it or any thoughts about it? I mean you know you are a European you didn't grow up here or there because I'm in Italy now but you didn't grow up there. So I mean, what did you feel when all this thing came out of the blue. For me it was out of the blue and then even more gobsmacking was the result. I was wondering if you had any feelings as a European. I know you've also got a British passport but you are European really, culturally I suppose.

M: Yeah to say more I have visas as a European, as a Spaniard. First thing I think it's a load of tosh right and I'm horrified that it happened in the first place but also [*sigh*] this part of this whole interview is part of this whole zeitgeist or whatever you want to call it. We are getting now with these extreme right movements and another following of loonies who are managing to get these ideas into mainstream. In Spain we have a similar case with Catalonia which you may have seen in the news. I am completely against Catalonia separating. If [*sigh*]... If a proper vote came along and definitely showed that most of Catalonia wants to cease it well [*sigh*] I will have to accept it and that's fine but it is very much a Brexit situation where today 49% will be in favour and tomorrow 51% will be in favour and you cannot just go have a vote at a given moment and if 50.2% say yes have it because this isn't democracy. Now you're fascist state right, has been said since and again in Catalanian independence, sorry I am now going in a completely different thing but just so you see they are very much the same. Catalonia dependence is something that is fuelled by politicians for political gains and these politicians don't really want to do it because they benefit from this friction existing and it's built from completely spurious historical bullshit that never happened and the manipulation of historical facts. So for me it's exactly the same thing and tomorrow if there was such a vote, I'm sure it going to be a 50% minus plus 1% sort of thing and to me that doesn't make any sense. So same with Brexit, lets go back to Brexit sorry. So yeah I hope that helps showing that my perspective also forms the Brexit situation.

CH: What was your mood when you were living in England during Brexit? What was the mood around where you were living towards Europeans?

M: Well I lived in London. So it's like a different country. You know one is Scotland, one is Northern Ireland and one is London. [chuckles] So I don't know still anyone who is in favour of Brexit. Oh no sorry. I know one person. I don't count him. [chuckles]

CH: The way you described the Catalonia situations is very much like where you are now in Northern Ireland to be honest with you.

M: Yeah, yeah exactly. Again if there is a vote here, what they call it, the something poll. Yeah the vote has a name but I can't remember what it is, doesn't remember. If it happens here we will still be in this situation from what I understand. So how good is that and also even if it happened, Northern Ireland is already quite different from the republic, culturally. So it's not going to be as easy hey! Now you're the republic of Ireland. [chuckles] In this case I'm a bit more ambivalent because it is not a succession it is we get out of one thing to get into a different thing right. It's different from Brexit which is complete removal from and Catalonia which is complete removal from and if I may say so Scotland which is complete removal from. It is very different and in some way I have to admit I have some republican sympathies but I don't necessarily think that joining the republic would be a good idea. I have no idea how to solve this.

CH: Lucia?

M: Lucia I think you muted yourself.

LR: Ok can you hear me now?

M: Yes.

LR: I was going to ask, did Brexit, the very happening of Brexit. Did that change the way you feel about being a British citizens and also about your relationship with your host country?

M: Well, yeah my becoming British even if I started the process before, happened later but I think that is just signing a paper so it's not that big of a deal. Like I have been in the UK for long enough that I felt part of the UK regardless of what a paper said or didn't say.

LR: And that hasn't changed because of Brexit?

M: It has helped me I don't know, get a better picture of how different, particularly England and parts of Northern Ireland is from London and how certain views that I disagree with are so common in the UK and yet they are so far from me because the majority of places are not where I lived. Then again does that really affects my day to day life. It helps me understand the UK a bit better but I guess it doesn't affect me directly.

LR: Ok thanks.

CH: I'm interested in why you wrote friendly neighbourhood beside the covid. Why did you write that?

M: I wanted to represented like you don't know who is going to be carrying the virus right. So it could be [laughs] in a ways it's like your neighbour or any friend you find on the street. You don't know who is going to have it. The exact phrasing by the way is taken from Spiderman. I not really a comics person but you know from living on the internet in the way I do you end up learning a lot about the Spiderman and the Star Trek and many other things. Anyway it was to show you don't

know who is going to have it. Any of the people who you are talking to or who you may or may not meet in the street may have it.

CH: *You've laid out your photograph as well very much like a comic strip, now that you say that.*

M: Oh yeah I guess. I mean there isn't any timeline intent or anything like that. Like I took one and then I went to the kitchen and then I went to every room I put there randomly and then I reproduced them in the same order. Mainly because it was easy and as for the titles on each one of them it was more of a spur of the moment thing to sort of reinforce that is sort of missing myself in different (???? ???) always, always me.

CH: *You've got a very serious face though when you're at work or....*

M: To be honest that is the only one of those that is sort of original. I was in a conversation with three friends on Google Hangouts and I think by then I had already had the idea of doing it like this and I took the chance and took the picture. I used that as a base as a foundation and then after the call I went around the house to take the other two pictures and put everything together. I think it's good that, I don't know why I have a serious face, but I guess I was looking for the right keyboard shortcut or something ok where is it ummm this.

CH: *Lucia?*

LR: *Yeah, sorry. Yeah that's interesting I don't know. I don't have any questions now. Anyone else wants to add?*

M: If it helps, the first picture also captures one of my base guitars.

LR: *Yeah that's one thing. I just thought of something. You seem to pull some faces on some of the pictures so is that reflecting your mood?*

M: It was, I was trying to show different faces, to show a bit of variety but I wasn't particularly trying to represent anything.

CH: *Yeah but you feel you're a different person in different places or?*

M: No it was more like this whole thing can catch me, I can find myself on one of these calls anywhere. To be honest for me the most common setting is the first one at work cause in my home office where I have my computer. If you can see right now I'm in exactly the same place. I'm less often in the other two locals but it adds a bit of variety.

CH: *Lucia you're sounds off.*

LR: *Yeah I know, I just turn it off when there is noise around because I don't want to disturb the conversation because I'm not exactly in a very quiet place and I'll have to go in five minutes so...*

CH: *Ok don't worry that's fine.*

LR: *Yeah you carry on. I'm sorry I'm just trying to do everything at the same time. It's real multi-tasking and to be honest with you I feel great having this technology that at the beginning of the longing I was resenting it but now it's like yes! It does have a big purpose. I'm sure you know about it Miguel.*

M: Yeah! I have used most of the softwares because I work in IT during the Pandemic so.

LR: So your life didn't change much because you would be working on your own anyway really. I mean you wouldn't go out to the office and meet colleagues and stuff like that. You'd meet them online anyway?

M: Yeah, moving to Ireland, having a child and buying a house were much bigger changes for me than the pandemic.

CH: Looking at the pictures as well there's no sign of the child in the pictures.

M: Yeah in my home office I don't have anything. I guess you know the kitchen one doesn't show. In the kitchen I have some stuff to clean baby bottles but they're not in the picture. Yeah and the one I did just in front of the window so there isn't a lot to...

CH: Do you think the pictures that you've shown is very much a sign of living a life under lockdown or would your life be different. You said your life wasn't that different before lockdown but it must be I would think.

M: Yeah I see myself having to get into calls more, into these types of calls more so that's why I felt that this was representative. So even though I didn't have much of a social life here before. Something I would do for example was going to tech related meet ups right. I went to a few before the pandemic started and even now those meet ups I have to do online. So that's an example of an actual social interaction that I would have had you know in the real world. Then I have to go online. Bye Lucia!

LR: Bye, thank you so much.

AML: Bye Lucia.

CH: Bye.

LR: Bye, take care. Thanks Miguel and Anke will send you an amazon voucher.

AML: Yeah I'll do that tomorrow.

M: No rush, thank you bye.

CH: Anke have you got any more questions?

M: Speaking of Amazon. [chuckles] One comment and it is and I'm not sure how relevant this is but now with the pandemic people are ordering stuff online much more right? Particularly Amazon has seen a surge of orders. Things well before the pandemic, I have been an Amazon, what do you call it, anti-amazon? I mean don't worry I will gladly accept this voucher but just wanted to mention that not a single Amazon parcel has arrived here with my name on it. With my partners name yes, but not with my name. [chuckles]

CH: Yeah, no we understand that like I think because of the study we needed to find something that would give vouchers to people. Maybe a marks and spencer voucher would have been better or a...

M: It's ok, I mean if you have the option sure M&S is great too, just if you have the option but don't to making it too complicated.

CH: Yeah I don't think we do I'm afraid.

AML: Use it for the baby.

M: Sorry I'm not getting that.

AML: Use the voucher for your little baby.

M: Oh little baby, yeah I'll get something for the baby yeah. I like, don't worry.

AML: And it will definitely let you off the hook so you don't have to use anything from Amazon.

M: I do buy from many other places but I always make an extra effort to buy from a place that is not Amazon and sometimes that has cost me more money but hmm at least it is money that the tax man is getting.

AML: Yeah. Do you know Miguel I did wonder actually I know you're saying that you don't you feel quite lucky because you've got a British passport and you know you're life hasn't change so much plus you've got a baby and babies kind of take over you know for quite a long time but do you think that you know were it not for the fact that had you not moved house and not had a baby. Do you think you know things that kind of take over, do you think you might have stronger feelings or do you think it would still be the same.

M: Hmm... I'm not sure how much things would have changed to be honest because again for example I am privileged that my partner is staying at home and looking after the baby so I don't have to deal with day care as I said earlier. So again if I had to deal with day care then that would have an impression but because I don't I haven't really changed much.

AML: You're like Jacob Reece-Mogg.

M: Sorry what was that?

AML: You're like Jacob Reece-Mogg who's never had to change a nappy.

M: *[laughing]* Well at least I do change nappies. I do. *[laughing]* Yeah no I am in a privileged situation but not as privileged as him. Yeah I mean I want to think, this is easy for me to say because the many father out there want to think they are doing a lot and they are not doing that much right. As many of them I want to think I am actually doing my part. I am changing nappies when I can, I am the one who cooks and cleans and I do all the things around the house and I try to minimise the number of tasks that my partner is doing. So I want to think on that department that I'm doing ok but you can never know.

CH: Will you speak Spanish to your son?

M: Yep.

CH: ok.

M: And when I can to my partner too. Mostly in English though.

CH: Is teaching your son Spanish important to you or?

M: Yeah I will want him to be bilingual.

CH: Ok, why is that?

M: Why, well first I think that speaking another language opens opportunities and I want him to be able to go to Spain if he chooses to and not have to worry about learning the language because also Spain is not like you know Sweden. If you go to Spain and you're going to speak Spanish, you're going to have a hard time. *[chuckles]*

CH: Yeah no I can imagine. Sorry Anke what were you going to say?

AML: Well I just wonder is when you've already bought a house which would indicate that you're quite settled where you are but would you see yourself living in Spain long term or in Ireland long term?

M: For now so when we go here and things settle we decided that we liked the place enough to be here long term and we got into this whole you know house buying thing and it actually happened but as a longer term, and now we're talking like ten, twenty years from now, would I like to go back to Spain? Yeah I entertain the fantasy every now and then, it would be good but now that I have the child and all that you never know what is going to be possible and again actually that's another reason for him to be able to speak Spanish because if we actually do it, you know ten years from now he'll be more prepared for the change if he can speak Spanish.

CH: Do you go to Southern Ireland, do you feel more European or?

M: So I have since I've been living here I've been to the republic only to go to Dublin airport, nothing else. I have flown to France for work a few times just before the pandemic but yeah I haven't had enough experience of the republic to...

CH: Ok. Whereabouts in Northern Ireland are you then?

M: Sorry what was that?

CH: Whereabouts in Northern Ireland are you?

M: I am in Belfast.

CH: Ok ok. Cool city.

M: Yep. Yeah I didn't know what to expect but as I said after some time here we decided it was good enough to buy a house.

AML: Yeah it is a nice place.

M: In London there are so many things you can do. I like going to concerts right and one of the things that you're going to lose when you live in London is that every single artist goes there. Before the pandemic I was able to go to a concert of my favourite artist while I was here so yeah every now and then people come here.

CH: Cool. Anke have you got any more questions?

AML: No I can't think of anything.

CH: Ok, hey Miguel thank you so much.

M: No problem, happy to help.

End of transcript