

Interview with Rrezarta Mulolli and Bedri Hyseni

(00:00)

RM: I am Rrezarta Mulolli. I am doing an interview with Mr. Bedri Hyseni, for the "Oral History of the Kosovan Albanians in Manchester" project, today on 27th of September 2015. Mr. Bedri can you introduce yourself ?

BH: Yes, I am Bedri Hyseni, born on 1960 in Ferizaj and now I live in Bibaj village in Ferizaj municipality. I am married and I have 4 kids, a girl and 3 boys.

RM: What was your education?

BH: My education is that I graduated as a lawyer in the Law Faculty in Pristine and I finished my studies during the Yugoslavian times.

RM: When did you go to England?

BH: We arrived in Manchester, England from Stankovec¹, Macedonia on 11th of May 1999 exactly.

RM: What transport did you use?

BH: We travelled by plane. If you are interested in the journey from Kosovo to Macedonia, that's completely another story.

¹ A border refugee camp in Macedonia. <http://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/refugee-camps-and-numbers-macedonia> By April 27th 1999 the Macedonian government said in a statement it had taken in a total of 183,800 refugees from Kosovo since air strikes began on March 24, adding 69,960 were being held in refugee camps and 27,990 had been airlifted out of the country.

RM: Can you explain that a little bit?

(01:40)BH: You see, NATO's bombardment against the aggressor Serb Yugoslav forces started on 24th of March² and the civil population was unprotected, not only here in Bibaj and in Ferizaj but everywhere in Kosovo, because the Kosovo Liberation Army³ forces were stationed in the mountains. It was like this; Serbian forces started to leave their bases after the bombings and entered into our own houses: the police, paramilitary etc. It became very clear that they applied systematic violence to Albanians everywhere. Even the property was violated because they got our houses and stayed there so we were obliged to leave Kosovo and started our journey to Macedonia. My family and I decided to leave Kosovo with my kids on about the 27th or 28th April, from what I can remember it was 27th.

I remember the 27th because of everything that happened in Sojeva village where I was staying with my family. Serbian paramilitary forces and police carried out an offensive in Sojeva. In Komogllava 90% of the village was burned down and there were also murders. There were also civilian victims where my uncle, his wife and two other relatives of mine were killed. The murders were systematic. There were killings even before this, and we buried all those victims by ourselves, I myself and a handful of other people. So we really had to leave that place for somewhere more secure in Sllatina in Vitia. Then we stayed there for about 12 days. After that, due to the risk, we came back to Ferizaj because in Ferizaj I had my wife's injured father and brother, both were wounded, shot by Serbs. On 27th April we set off, we used buses, some

² During the 78-day war, NATO crews flew 33,000 combat missions over the region, dropped more than 20,000 laser or satellite-guided weapons and concluded that 99.6% found their targets. Of the more than one thousand planes used in the operation, 725 were American. Four hundred and fifty precision Tomahawk and 90 air-launched Cruise missiles were used. All told, 79,000 tons of explosives were dropped, including 152 containers with 35,450 cluster bombs, thermo-visual and graphite bombs.

³ KLA

on the train, departing for Macedonia where we were placed in Stankovec Number 2, as I remember.

(03:37)

RM: When you went in England did the people welcome you?

BH: Look, in England not only did they welcome us but what was also surprising was just how they received us. I can't remember which organisations they were, but they were mostly under the umbrella of the state of England. And England proved that it really is the cradle of civilization and democracy and of human rights development globally. The welcome was magnificent, unexplainable. I don't know how to describe this any better. Not just our first steps off the plane at Manchester airport, but also then the processing of all of the refugees, as we were all allocated to different reception centres. It was a really good organisation, really excellent. And yes it's true, even at that time, I said that the English removed the rags of oppression and brought smiles to our kids. And they truly did bring smiles for the first time to our kids, because our kids had seen nothing but violence, burnings, killings etc. etc.

RM: How did you cope there with the life, with reference to food and the kids' education?

(05:00)BH: Look, there the food was of good quality, I don't know how to describe it. It was better than we had had even when we had a stable life before the war. The food was all sorted by the government organisations, which brought the food non-stop. First we were in a centre where the food was eaten communally. After that they placed us in our rooms with separate kitchens. The food was really good. Any kind of food you wanted, you could have. Medical care was specific

to each individual: it was provided for kids and also for the adults. It was really well organised. The kids' education? This is chapter on its own we will never achieve here. Maybe we'll do it, the reason I say 'never' is because we are so far away at this moment. The kids' education was arranged so that firstly the kids learned English for about two months or more in the centre where we were living. Lots of teachers were engaged. After that, when the school year started all the kids were placed and I know that my kids were going to three different schools. My daughter went to Saint Alfonso School and she was one of the best. My two sons went to Victoria Park School.

RM: They were in Lostock?

BH: The other son Rigoni was at a nursery in Lostock School or Victoria Park School. Granit and Vullnet were in Lostock School where they some of the best students, especially Granit. And it was all organised. Our kids transport was free. The state provided it. The teaching was excellent. We weren't used to seeing that kind of teaching ... so very organised. Right now maybe we are on the right track. I am employed in education myself, but I can see we are far from this system.

RM: Were the kids welcomed by the other children?

(07:28) BH: Look! The kids were really welcomed well there. I am speaking about my kids, because they created a circle and their own friends thanks to knowing the English language, not that they initially knew it well, but then they perfected it and they had friendships with all the English kids. Even today we have connections with an English family. And my kids have connections with their friends, some of them.

RM: How much time did you stay there?

BH: I stayed for 13 months.

RM: Did you have the possibility to work?

BH: There was the possibility to work but my wife and I didn't work, because we had some income from the state. In reality I had hopes of getting a house. They placed people from the centre in houses. My manager, who was really excellent, she was aiming to find us a house and for us to be placed there but fate determined that in the end I would decide to come back, though I don't really understand how it was that I came back. I had hoped to come back, to contribute, to have something better. But unfortunately not only myself but also my kids have suffered more through us coming back than if we would have stayed there.

RM: How much has Kosovo changed during the period when you were there, comparing how you left it and then how you found it?

BH: The way we left and the way we found Kosovo? I'll tell you about the day I came back here. When I came back I found Kosova partly burned, disorganised, with everything in anarchy. And I am talking sincerely here - if I had the chance to go back I wouldn't stay here another 10 hours. I would go back there because of my kids' wellbeing. But I was forced to re-build a life here. I didn't have a house. The house was burned. The money⁴ I got from England was 8,000 Marks or was it 7,000 Marks? Because 1,000 was used by my wife who had come back once⁵ That didn't last even for a month. And after that the life of challenges and of sacrifice began. After two years I found a job. This

⁴ a grant was issued to returnees - probably FRS

⁵ possibly a Home Office organised "Explore and Prepare" visit

means that I lived two years without a job. After two years I found a job in teaching and I am still there.

RM: How is your life now?

(10:18) BH: My life didn't change too much compared to before the war in an economic sense but the work that my kids are doing motivates my life now. They don't have the conditions they need but they are slowly moving forward but we can't compare this with England. I know that if my kids were still in England they would be more advanced than they are here.

(10:57) During my stay in Stankovec, I contacted The Hague, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia⁶. And sometime after I came back I had interviews again with the Prosecution. It was in September 2006 that I gave evidence, 11th September in The Hague court. I gave my evidence in front of the Serbian military leadership and, as is the way things are, when I got back I had lost my job. Someone took my place at work. I didn't work for a year and then I started again, working as a teacher. In 2009 I was again at The Hague tribunal to endorse the evidence I had given against Gjorgjeviq⁷, who was Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs for Serbia. He had escaped. They re-captured him and then they developed a new legal procedure for him. I was once more a witness.

It's important that in 2007, in the beginning of 2007, I had some threatening messages in the Serbian language that I thought weren't in

⁶ ICTY <http://www.icty.org/>

⁷ Gjorgjeviq, formerly an Army General, Deputy Interior Minister of Serbia and Head of Public Security was sentenced to 27 years imprisonment on 23 February 2011 by the ICTY for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed against Kosovo Albanian civilians in 1999. On 27 January 2014, his sentence was reduced from 27 years to 18.

the native tongue⁸ and from that day onwards we all, myself and my kids, have been worried about this issue, because freedom of movement does not exist as needed. Freedom of movement has been limited for my family since 2007. I notified the court, the Hague Tribunal, and they didn't do anything. They gave some suggestions.

I don't know what might happen.

Thank you.

It was a pleasure.

⁸ Serbian