

Interview with Saranda Bogujevci and Rrezarta Mulolli in Kosovo (16.36)

7th October 2014

(00.00)

R: I am Rrezarta Mulolli, today is 7th September 2014. I will be interviewing Saranda Bogujevci. Please can you introduce yourself?

SB: I am Saranda Bogujevci, I was born in Podujevë on 12th June 1985. I graduated from Manchester Metropolitan University with a BA Degree in Interactive Arts.

R: This interview will mostly be talking about your journey in the UK, exactly in Manchester. I will be asking you what was your life before going to UK?

SB: My life before going to the UK, as a child, it was very good. I was surrounded by a very large family, so there were a lot of kids around and I lived very close with my uncles and aunties and my grandparents, as well as, of course, my parents and two brothers. So I lived in a small town; we pretty much knew everyone. We... the school was very close by, so most of the people in my class were also my neighbours who then also became my friends. So it was a happy childhood.

(1:27) Things weren't so good in the country around that time. When I was 7 or 8, my father was told not to work. When I started school, my school was taken away. So we were not allowed to go to that school, apart from children who had Serbian background. We had to go to a different building which was supposed to be used for students from High School, so they had to go to someone's house to learn, to give us the building because we were younger. So in that sense, it wasn't very good. And then, of course, the war broke out

and, unfortunately, I had a very horrible experience where I was injured and also lost members of my family.¹

R: Why did you go in UK?

(2:20) SB: The reason why I went to the UK is because, as I mentioned before, I was injured during the war and to tell you the story of, kind of, how the journey was going to the UK: I was in hospital in Prishtina during the war with my cousins. We were all shot during the war. And then, by chance, after the NATO troops came inland in Kosovo, when my uncle and his cousin came to visit us at the hospital, they saw some men in uniform with the KFOR uniform. So they went to them. They told them about what had happened to us and our story and then they took us from the hospital, in Prishtina. It was the British Army that were based [there] so they had this hospital in Fushe Kosova. So they took us there and from thereon they looked after us and then we met doctors who worked in the army. One of them was **David Vassallo**².

(3:36) Basically, there is this form which is called telemedicine, where they take pictures and diagnoses and whatever they can out of patients who've been in injured during the war and they send that information to doctors around the world. And doctors from whichever place say, "Yes, I can treat this patient." And so there was a doctor in Manchester who said, "I can treat the girls," which means me and my cousin **Jehona**³, and also my cousins Genc and **Fatos** who survived the war.

(04.03) And so, after that, on September 10th [1999], we were sent to Manchester. And I remember Jehona and I were taken straight into hospital, which was then Wythenshawe Hospital - no actually, it was Withington... it's

¹ 'Podujevo 1999- Beyond Reasonable Doubt' (English and Serbian): Humanitarian Law Centre, Belgrade, Documents Series; <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/10/warcrimes.balkans>

² Col David Vassallo, RAMC, recording included in this archive

³ Fatos and Selatin/Jehona Bogujevci recordings included in this archive

Wythenshawe - it was Withington Hospital. And then my father and my uncle and my two cousins, Genc and Fatos, they were taken into nearby where there was this camp where the refugees from Kosova were already living there⁴. And then my cousin Liria came much later on as she was in Belgrade.

This is the journey. (laughs)

R: How old were you at the time?

SB: I was 14.

R: Where did you live in the UK?

SB: I lived - and it's a place I still live - it's in South Manchester: it's Trafford.

R: How did people treat you in the UK?

SB: We were very well looked after. When I first went to the UK I was mainly surrounded by nurses and doctors so I didn't really have much contact with the outside world. But then, later on, different organisations and different people found out that we were there. So there were children who used to send us gifts, you know, and write letters to me and my cousin Jehona. And then once we got better, we started to go out more - out of the hospital. And then we started school. It was very important, the way we were treated, because not only we had nurses and doctors who looked after us very, very well and also other people in the community, but when we started with school I remember children really making an effort.

^{4 4} Meadow Court - empty sheltered accommodation for the elderly - had been prepared in Hale Barns, Trafford. See Cllr David Acton leader Trafford MBC, and Rev Bruce Thompson recordings in this archive

(06.03) So when I started school⁵, I remember children from the school really looking after us. I never sat on my own when I went for lunch. I never sat on my own or didn't have anyone to talk to when I was in my classrooms. They really made an effort.

I remember the children really always making an effort to talk to us even though we struggled with the language and couldn't speak the language very well. So not only the teachers really made an effort and looked after us but also the students. They never left us on our own, during lunchtime, during classes: we always had friends around. So that was very important for us.

R: Can you explain us more about your experience in UK? Where you lived at that time and... ?

(7:00) SB: It was quite tough in the sense that, ok... my experience in the UK at the beginning wasn't very easy. Even though I had a lot of support and help and a lot of people made an effort to make life easier, because I couldn't speak the language, I was in and out of hospital a lot. So even though I had all of that support, it was quite difficult to lose one part of your family during the war and then to move to a new country, new language, a very unfamiliar place: so all of these things made it quite difficult at the beginning. But as time went on, I got used to it; I got to know people a lot more; I made friends; I got to know the area where I live - got to know my neighbours. So slowly life became a bit more normal and I got used to living there.

But it did take time.

R: Did you like your life there?

⁵ Head teacher Lou Harris and David Acton, Trafford MBC leader, recordings included in this archive

SB: I have to be honest, at the beginning it wasn't that I didn't like it, it was just I couldn't accept it. It was quite difficult. So, yeah, it wasn't so much whether I liked it or not, it was more to do with just things being difficult. But as time went on, I got used to the place; I got used to people around me; I learnt the language; I went to school: that helped a lot as I made friends. I became more independent: got to know the town and the city where I lived.

I think, as time went on, I became much more familiar with the place and that made it easier. And I managed to accept that I had a new life in England.

R: Why did you come back in Kosova?

(9:27)SB: Everything that I've done in England, regarding my career, job-wise, it always linked with my experience during the war. It always linked with conflict, even with, you know, even in the beginning - when I was in school - I used to go and talk to the students when they were discussing why people moved to England, for example refugees or asylum seekers, you know. So I used to go in and do a lot of talking with the students explaining why I had to move to England. So all of these things always, kind of, took me back to Kosova. So the older I got, you know, I got involved in more... different projects and it was just part of me that I could never keep to one side. So I decided, now that I'm an adult, to come and see what I can do here and what I, you know, if I can contribute and kind of pass on my experience from England. But also, at the same time, to learn a little bit more about how everything is functioning here because you only know what people are telling you or what are you reading when you come and visit here, you know, every time I come and see family in Kosova or see friends or for whatever reason I come. So it's different when they tell you how it is. And it's different when you are here and you see how it is.

So for me, for example, one thing that was quite surprising is that I actually don't feel that it's that bad. You know, I always had this image in my head that it was... it was very bad to live here. But kind of, when you live here and you spend more time with the remaining of your family, and with friends, and you get to work with people, you see that they just need opportunity and they are willing to work. Some aren't but there's a number of them that do. So it's good to see that side and it's good to see how things are, how things are working here.

R: (12.10) How was Kosova when you came back?

SB: I've spent a lot of time, I mean, since the war, I've come a lot to Kosova so I've seen how it's developed. It's a very long subject to talk about.

There are a lot of good things that have happened here but also there are some things that need to be changed and I think what's important is for people to be able to have the opportunity to know what it is like to run their own country. Because there are issues and there's always talks of how, you know, we were waiting for someone to sort things out. But we also have to remember that this is a country that has had conflict for such a long time that people are used to trying to remain [retain] their language, you know, to keep their identity.

So they were always fighting against something that was trying to take that away.

So I think it's going to take time for people to get used to the idea that now they can work towards making their own decisions and changing things the way they want to change over here. So that's just one of the things but, of course, there are a lot of other issues as well.

R: You mentioned in the UK you got involved in so many projects, can you tell us what kind of projects did you get involved?

SB: I did a lot of talks in schools. I've been involved with the charity Manchester Aid to Kosovo⁶ since the beginning when I moved to England so when we moved there they helped us out and later on we got involved. And there's been a lot of different projects in my home town in Podujevë. One of them, the biggest project, is the Peace Park [Manchester Peace Park⁷] and when I see that park it really makes me happy because also it's important to see the young people from the town being involved and changing things. And I think that's very important. So yeah, as I mentioned before, it's been mainly about everything that involves conflict.

R: How is your life now?

SB: (silence) It's not bad: there's always struggles. When you have experienced something so terrible in your life as losing family in the war, you tend to see things quite differently. But what makes it easy is that - even though you have such a horrible experience - to see then so many people kind of be part of your life and changing it and making it better and always giving you hope and pushing you to move forward and helping you and supporting you to achieve what you want in life, it's... I think it's amazing to see that as well. To see that... how much we can do working together and how much we can change our lives despite what our experience could be and despite of certain people who have managed to ruin it. But then you have this number of other people who really lift you - and you move forward.⁸

⁶ <http://www.makonline.org>

⁷ <http://makonline.org/home/peace-park/>

<https://www.edenproject.com/sites/default/files/documents/eden-project-peace-park-kosovo.pdf>

⁸ See recordings of Paresh Patel, investigate journalist; Rev Bruce Thompson; Pam Dawes, a MaK leader; and Lou Harris, Saranda's head teacher, included in this archive.

<https://www.facebook.com/Bogujevci.VisualHistory/?fref=nf>

R: Thanks for sharing your experience with us.

SB: Thank you.

