

ORAL HISTORY INDEX AND SUMMARY

Interview with: Bledar Bujupi

Date: 16/2/15

Location: Manchester

Total duration: 23.59

Interview by Naomi Hamill and summary by Kelly-Anne Bücher.

The interview plays as one long recording.

1.	Start time	Finish time	Approximate duration	Brief description
	00.00	23.59	23.59	Bled describes his experiences in Kosovo as a child before the war; the build up to and beginning of the conflict; exodus and evacuation to Manchester. He describes his life in the UK.
<p>Pen sketch</p> <p>Summary of interview content</p>	<p><i>Bledar (Bled) is a freelance film editor working in Manchester. He was born in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo and he moved to the UK when he was thirteen years old. Bled remembers a happy childhood until the war began when his family had to live under siege conditions and were forced to leave their home. The family were loaded onto a train and taken to the Macedonian border as part of an ethnic cleansing campaign. They then had to walk from one country to another. Bled's family were evacuated to Manchester and lived in a refugee centre for a year when they arrived in the UK. Bled and his twin brother Bes both studied multi-media at Manchester College and work in media now. Bled enjoys living in Manchester; he finds it an accessible city and says it has everything you need. He would choose to live here again if he had to make the choice and he finds it to be a creative, stimulating city.</i></p> <p>00.00 Bled describes his life in Kosovo before and during the beginning of the two year conflict. He says that he was born in a medium sized city, Prishtina, with other family members living in a small village. He describes a normal, simple childhood which involved him going to school, swimming in summer and snowy in winter.</p> <p>Bled says that he was nine or ten years old when he first heard gunshots in the night, where people were getting attacked and arrested. He states that his family had been protecting him from the news thus far but these events could not be ignored or hidden from him. Bled says that, at this point, the incidents which has been occurring every four months or so started to occur more frequently until they had become weekly.</p> <p>Bled says that they heard on the news, at this point, of schools and universities being shut down because of teaching classes in the Albanian language. He describes discrimination taking hold. Bled describes learning about how Jewish people were treated in Nazi Germany and the realisation that something similar was happening in Kosovo. He says that initially there were small things occurring, that did not really affect day to day life, and then slowly they started to become larger things, such as businesses being closed down.</p> <p>He says that, obviously, then the war came. Bled states that, at first, people</p>			

were being harassed and arrested and then they were being killed. In response people started to rise up and defend themselves against what clearly wasn't right. He describes this as being the first episode of the war.

04.03 Bled talks about how he considers himself lucky as he survived the war. He also comments that children experience war differently to adults, adults being more aware of the danger in everything that is happening.

05.35 Bled says that he lived in a village which was attacked and had to escape and live in the mountains, where he stayed for a couple of days. He says that his family then went to a flat in another town where they stayed for five to six months. Bled describes how he experienced a lot of the war in this town, under siege, surrounded by Serbian soldiers. No-one could leave and no-one could get in.

He describes the children being allowed to leave the flat but not to walk around in case a sniper shot them or they just disappeared. Bled describes masked soldiers appearing at the side of the road from nowhere, shooting in the air and shouting threatening descriptions of things they could do to them. Bled says this was a tactic to frighten people and his way of coping with this, as a child, was to treat it like a dream rather than reality.

07.10 Bled describes a few instances where the Serbian soldiers would go into buildings and go, flat by flat, and hold family members to ransom. He says they took people, in front of the rest of the family, demanding money. He describes it as a way for the soldiers to scare everyone and steal jewellery and other things. Bled describes being twelve years old when he was taken, in front of his family, who were told to pay money to free him. He says his mother had some jewellery which she gave to the Serbian soldiers and then he was let go. Bled says, again, that when you are a child, you don't fully experience things and block things out in order to cope with the situation.

08.38 Bled describes seeing houses on fire in the distance. He says that in a sieged city, the food is the first thing to run out. He states that the adults were not allowed out so the children would try and get food from relatives' farms nearby. He tells of an instance where he once went with his grandmother to do this, as the family considered there less chance of a soldier shooting at an old woman and children than two adults. Bled says that it was still risky but probably less dangerous than any of the adults going together. He says that they had to do this to survive. In winter they also had to go out and get wood in order to stay warm as there was no electricity in the war zone.

11.00 Bled describes instances where Serbian soldiers would burn the houses near the flat he was staying in. He thinks the people may have escaped but he didn't really know what had happened to them. Bled describes how they would sneak in as the house was burning in order to steal wood. He says it was a way to survive and you had to adapt in order to do so. He says he considers himself quite lucky as they didn't lose any family members. He thinks once the hard times are over, you have to move on.

Bled describes how he came to live in Manchester. He describes ethnic cleansing in the sieged town in which he was staying where the current government, the Serbian forces, gave them twenty four hours to evacuate the whole city, the whole country. He compares their treatment to that of Jewish people in World War II where you take a country and say that you just want to 'empty it'. He considers it a little bit weird that in the twentieth century, in the age of the internet and computers that there are still people with the mentality of emptying a whole country. He laments that it doesn't make sense because we should have moved on from that kind of age, but he guesses that it's different for

some people.

Bled describes being taken on trains out of the country. He was taken with his family to Macedonia on a train full of people where they got off ten miles from the border and walked the rest of the way. He describes that some people, mainly men, were just taken at random or because they were of interest to the Serbian forces and these men have since never been found. Bled says that they were probably arrested or killed as there are still close to two thousand people missing from the war. Bled says he doesn't know why they were taken as they were from the group who were escaping and leaving the country. He went to a refugee camp in Macedonia. He says that globally countries were to take a certain number of people and Bled's family were picked at random by the British government to be sent to the UK. That is how he came to live in Manchester, England.

Bled describes the journey to the UK refugee camp. He describes his family receiving a letter, after being in the Macedonian refugee camp for a few weeks, informing them that they would be flying to the UK a few days later. It was a large refugee camp and people were also taken in by families in nearby homes. Bled describes feeling lucky to be alive at the refugee camp, his family being one of those then taken in by a nearby family, and only several days later then being told they were to be rescued and to travel to the UK. Bled had never been on a plane before. He says that he and about three hundred people were taken to Ulverston, Cumbria, England: a small, quiet town. He says it must have been a shock to the people there to suddenly have 300 refugees amongst them. He feels that they were received very well. He says it is with thanks to the British government that he is able to be here now, taking part in this project.

15.28 Bled says that, in Ulverston, an old school had been prepared and turned into a refugee centre where they lived for five to six months. Each family had a room and there was a canteen, sports facilities and they were taught English. Bled says his father was one of the first people to say that they wanted their children to go to a real school and socialise with peers. He says that when he was sent to a school it was straight into year nine, with people his own age, but he failed (he could not speak English). He said that he was given a special support teacher/translator, Wendy, and sometimes would miss certain lessons in order to go to specialist English lessons, which they all picked it up quite quickly. He proudly says that he failed year nine, but could read and write English in year ten and by year eleven he was able to get an A\* in English Literature.

17.20 Bled says that the other children were friendly and understanding. There were no issues and he was at a good school and made friends, even though they were about twenty new students who could not speak English. He said that they tended to stick together at first because they spoke the same language and could not understand English but were then separated to be in different, appropriate years as that was the best way to learn English.

18. 33 Bled describes being moved from Ulverston to their own family house in Barrow-in-Furness, after several months. Here he finished school, went to college and looked for a university, settling on one in Manchester.

Bled describes his feelings about Manchester. He says when he was at college he wanted to work with cameras and film and this is why he chose to study multimedia at Manchester College. He says that, during these three years, he and his twin brother discovered what they wanted to do and what they enjoyed. Bled says he concentrated on film making and, although he did not know much about Manchester, other than Manchester United being based here, after the first few days he realised that Manchester had everything you could possibly find in London except you can easily walk around it.

He says that, if he had to choose again, he would choose Manchester, as it has everything you need. He says that it is a creative city and that a lot of famous people started off here. Bled says he likes the vibe of Manchester, it has a good vibe.

21.00 Bled describes his concept of home. He says that he goes to visit his relatives in Kosovo in summer. He sees Kosovo, where he grew up, as the 'old home' and it has a special place in his heart. Manchester is his current home and is where his life is now: where friends and family live and where his work is. He considers 'home' a bit of both Kosovo and the UK but leans towards home being Manchester now.

Bled describes what he is doing now. He says that he is working as a film and commercial editor in Manchester, which is what he has wanted to do for a while. He is developing an office in the city centre, a good base for expansion for the future. He describes the city centre as having everything you could want: galleries, stadiums and concerts. He says the Northern Quarter and Media City are all perfect for the creative career he hopes to have ahead of him. Bled says that he thinks about going back to Kosovo. He would like to make a linked documentary or film about both Manchester and Kosovo, linking two contexts.