

Fazli Blakçori interview with Naomi Hamill (20:46)

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(00.00)

I'm from Podujeva which is a town located in the Llapi Region, which consists of 74 villages. And I come from... family... my parents; I have two brothers, two sisters. My dad is a teacher and my brother is a teacher. We come from artists: artist family really. It's... all of my uncles and members of my family are somehow related to art, one way or another. That's including myself.

Until 1998... I was born 1990... in 1988, that was the year when the Serbians actually moved most of their weaponry ultimately in Kosovo and occupied every bit of the country. They were already present but their presence actually grew in 1988¹.

That's the year I was born 1990.

(1:18) 1988 until 1998 we grew... I grew up throughout the regime which was imposed by the - at that time - Slobodan Milošević². Growing up during that time, we were really isolated: very, we couldn't really move that much. The freedom of movement was restricted. Even visiting families from one side of

¹ See timeline in this archive

² <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/mar/13/guardianobituaries.warcrimes>

the town to the other side of the town... you... we had to be really careful whether to go during the day; we had to go during the night. Most of the locations, if you went during the day, you've... it's possible the police would stop you. There were tortures in different ways: torturing people in front of the families or it just was torture for the members really, stopping them and asking the questions.

We weren't, as kids, we weren't really that allowed to, sort of, play around that much, primarily because we have a big silo in town: that's where the army was stationed. Snipers. And most of the time, they weren't killing people all the time, but, it was shooting in the gardens just to scare people. It was fuelling, really, fear so people would give up and assimilate.

(2:40) Schools? We didn't really have school 'cause the schools were closed so for most of the people it was education in the cellars, private houses: away from the regime, away from the system.

My dad was involved in leading the Freedom Movement: peaceful movement. Growing up having my dad involved in that was really difficult because they guy who was leading, before him, was killed. So that's what my dad took over. And whenever he would leave the house we would never know if he would come back. Or if he was in the house, we never knew if the Serbians would show up any time - which happened most of the time... come and torture people. This, like, was more of less how we grew up - how I

grew up - until 1998 when the intensive war happened. That's when we had to move from our houses and go into the mountains.

(3:47) We knew the war had started elsewhere, but it hadn't actually come to our town yet. When the war came we had to leave because what happened is the army would go into the houses: kill people, massacre people. So the best option was to run into the mountains. We moved from our house into the town with a lot of... most of the families were... and then altogether during the night, we migrated into the mountains where we stayed for three months. We were chased on every step, really.

On few occasions we were lucky because we survived. Well when I say 'lucky' most of the people were killed, but because we left twenty minutes... half an hour... earlier, we survived.

(4:34) We didn't have any food: didn't have any clothes. We survived. We slept in the open air. We survived food wise: whenever we could find houses in the mountains, whatever supply of food they had, they'll give it to us. We'll share it with everyone: there were like, thousands of people. That was pretty much for three months, until the Liberation.

We were not allowed to use our own language; we were not allowed to use our own symbols. We couldn't, you couldn't use your flag. You couldn't travel: you had no freedom of travel. So, well basically, the regime wanted

people to start speaking Serbian, accept the Serbian flag and really assimilate into Serbia. Anything besides that, it was ruled out.

What happened is then we created our own systems of government and education which was a parallel system with the Serbian system. But it was run, sort of, privately really. Anyone who was caught in doing it was either tortured or killed.

So people were feeling that strongly about it being Kosovar Albanians that they couldn't really give up. There could be some, but not that we know in big numbers.

(5:55) We were doing our own taxation: so people would contribute to our taxation. We had representatives who would try and push forward our own interests. We had the parallel education which was people would give their houses for schools: so students would go into private houses and ... attending school, attending education. It was - teachers were not getting paid because there was no money - so it was... people were voluntarily doing it. People were giving their houses voluntarily and going to the schools to just keep the education, really, keep the language going. And that's how we survived.

But what it meant is we didn't have any power because we wouldn't be able to make any decision. We wouldn't have any... didn't have any army;

we didn't have the police. It all was under the Serbian rules but we kept the education going; we kept the will of people being independent going.

(7:00) When we went back home, it was nothing like we left, but it was one of the greatest feelings because it was home. I still remember the grass was about, like, above a meter. The house stank when we went in because everything was turned apart.

My dad knew that there were mines so he was, like, walking in the garden making sure that, if there was a mine, he'll be the first one, because he didn't want the kids to go walking around.

I lost my grandmother. She was killed during the war because at some point there were a few tractors, with some food supplies, but at some point the tractors were stopped. She was killed because all the old people who were on the tractors couldn't really walk. Everyone else had to run because there was an intensive army chasing the people.

(7:56) Then, yeah, it ... after the war, we had the freedom. We could walk, go anywhere. We had the freedom of using our language: our own symbols. We had our own TV. Things started improving; roads starting improving. We had schools: we could go back to schools, books.

(8:25) And for me? Then I started getting involved in different projects and with youth centre. And then, in 2003, I got involved with MaK³. It was an accident I met **Pam**⁴. I started getting with youth activities and then at one point the council phoned me for a project, or something, and then I went and I was... I actually met Pam and then they started telling us they're building this Peace Park⁵. And I hadn't really heard much about it but when they told us how they building the Peace Park, and how they had been involved with the **Bogujecvi** ⁶family, we gathered a group of artists and decided to help: to open an exhibition as a welcome for MaK and the work they were doing. And that's how it led... we started talking and explaining our dreams, really, our wishes: how we want to see other places; how we want to meet new people; how we wanted to get more experience. It was like an exchange experience: bringing in people - and us travelling - so we can have that, sort of, mutual experience⁷.

And then, one thing led to another and, ten years later, I'm still involved in MaK. For a good five years, I was doing all sorts of things: helping the charity: co-coordinating, translating. And then, for about five years, I did represent the charity and all their works in Kosova. And in the last three years - it is the last three years - I've been in England, I have been Secretary of the charity, and I still support the works of the charity.

³ <http://makonline.org>

⁴ Pam Dawes recording available in this archive

⁵ <http://makonline.org/home/peace-park/>

⁶ See also recordings by Selatin/Jehona, Fatos and Saranda Bogujecvi available in this archive.

⁷ <http://makonline.org/home/art/>

Well as I said before, when we started talking to MaK, we kind of expressed our interest in travelling and coming to and seeing in England: visiting galleries and museums and meeting new people and visiting schools. So since 2004, I've been quite regularly travelling with the charity, for various projects: representing; speaking at different venues; fundraising; helping the charity with fundraising.

(10:45) In 2011, I wanted to continue with further studies and I chose to pick Peace and Development. I explained to the charity what I wanted to do, but I had no money to do it: there was no scholarship available. Then the charity decided to do fundraising. So, through that fundraising I continued doing my Masters in Peace and Development at Leeds Metropolitan University, which I finished a year ago - well I graduated this July⁸ - so that's really, pretty much how and why I'm here.

Coming from that background is really difficult being... not being biased.... and not being objective and seeing the real situation. Since I've been here, I've been studying; I had access to wider literature. It has helped me to understand things so I'm not just black and white. My views have changed: I try to be a bit more objective rather than subjective when I see the whole situation - how it is going back home.

⁸ Fazli graduated with distinction.

It has improved, has helped me enrich my personality, and - one of the key things - has helped me see things differently, in a different way, and really has helped me change my views about, sort of, things in general, especially post conflict reconstruction and peace building.

(12:18) Well moving here, it was sort of... it happened naturally, in a way. It wasn't very... it wasn't one of the easiest - best decisions well, easiest decisions - I made. Only because I still feel really strong about my country: I still... that's where my contribution is and that's how I'll always believe. My dad didn't leave the country in the toughest time and I'm here. It's... when I think about it I think I still feel like I belong there. However, I do see greater opportunities being in the UK and I see a greater future being here. The transition moving wasn't easy, but now Manchester feels like home, with a lot of friends around, and it just feels as home as Kosovo is⁹.

(13:20) For a year now, I've been working for a company, which I probably won't name. I have... it's completely different field to what I studied, it is something that I, at some point, I do enjoy it. You know, some of the times, I don't. It's... this sort of job at the moment is giving me the opportunity to be in England and giving me the opportunity to build up a new experience in many different ways in how I'm presenting myself, how I would go about things, and how it's preparing me to be very pro-active. It's just been a year of very stressful and great experience!

⁹ Fazli was given Home Office permission to work in the UK.

(14:18) But how I see things improving in Kosovo or going forward? I think the challenges there are absolutely massive. Especially now, I think we - the country - had a great opportunity in the last 14 years. Unfortunately, we have... we have lost these opportunities. Wrong people came to the power: led the country into corruption - organised crime. And it's difficult to see how things will improve just because the country has been led by wrong people in the last few years. The mess they have made, it's going... it is very difficult to recover from.

(15:07) The current situation that we with Islamism - which is one of the biggest threats at the moment in the country, with an outside influence - the country will be... the security of the country will be at risk for a very long time. The issues that we have in the north of Kosovo, with Mitrovica - which is a part which is mainly populated by Serbians - that's another threat for the country.

There's lots of improvements, roads and freedom of movement. We have justice and all of that. But the system is very fragile. The future - if not intervened soon - it could be quite a risk for the security of the country.

My future is I have great opportunities in England and hopefully US - which I plan to move with work and get some amazing opportunities. I see myself carrying on and building up my experience. Ideally I'd like, at some point, to see how I could contribute back to my country. It is necessary for me to carry

on with what I'm doing, to build up my experience really. And then the future is brighter when I have all of that experience and I can look into - if possible - contribute back to the country.

Masters at Leeds

(16:36) Well I had the best time of my life at Leeds Met. The reason I went there was to learn then met people from all over the world and made some amazing friends from all different places: got some amazing experience, amazing stories from everyone. And - most importantly - I met my wife. It was strange because I was spending a lot of time in the library reading books and yeah, there she was, walking down (laughs) and started talking to me, we went for a coffee. And we are married now!

I was doing Peace and Development, a Master's Degree.

... things in Kosovo... but if you want to build your experience, if you want opportunities, you know you can never really get out, so whatever you plan, you just have to use the opportunities you have in the country because you are restricted, you can't travel. Now - it's not just the travel - but I have the residency in Manchester; it means that I can work; I have job opportunities. I don't really worry much that I can't really travel or I can't really move from one place to another. It just makes life a lot easier knowing that the doors are open.

My first degree in Kosovo was Fine Arts, specialising in sculpture. It was a more practical degree so there was a lot practical work compared to the Master's Degree that I did, where it was more academic and a lot of research, a lot of writing and essays and that's - while I have enjoyed the practical, doing the practical degree in Kosovo - doing the MA, that's what opened the doors, really, for the future for me because that's where I learned quite a lot.

That has really helped me in the work place.

It was amazing, we could go out and have a coffee with the teachers and it was a bit more of a friendly environment and teachers were open to discussions: were always there to help us. And compared to where it's really quite strict and really quite scripted, this was more freedom for us - at least for me - where I could have a discussion with a teacher, we could go and have a drink and we could discuss really, not just the work at University, but other topics as well.

It's a strange one because Manchester is like home, 'home'. And then I love Leeds as well. And every time I go back to Leeds, it's just a great feeling: I could just go there and spend a day and it still feels amazing. Whereas, Manchester is like 'home'.

I think people are a lot friendlier in Manchester than compared to other, probably, parts of England, just because... only because I've been travelling quite a bit and people are more friendly in Manchester. Even if you go to a pub, you can have a discussion with people.

It will be between Manchester, Leeds, Norway, Kosovo and US... so I don't know. The options... all of these places are still an option.