

**Interview with Valbona Peci Kadriu and Pam Dawes with Selatin Bogujevci
(14:01)**

2nd December 2015

(00:00)

PD: So Valbona Kadriu, this is Pam Dawes and Selatin Bogujevci interviewing for the Oral History project on 2nd December 2015. So Valbona, can you just say your name and where you live?

VK: Yes, my name is Valbona Kadriu, I live in Manchester.

PD: And would you tell us a little bit about life in Kosovo before the war?

VK: Ah... before the war? I was so young. I was 16 years old, before the war, I was meeting my husband, Besim. And then, they going ok on that time. For a short time very bad things happen and they change everything. It was the war in Kosovo and my husband was shot in face. One of my brothers was injured. One of them was dead. (pauses) And five of them was kidnapped and find them dead... after four years I think. (pauses)

And then very bad things happen.

And when they finished the war, they apply for my husband to come and medicate in England and they take us in here¹. They look after us very well with everything. And we have children in here, four beautiful daughters. The biggest one now is 16; second one is 13; and 10 and two and a half now - the youngest one.

¹ see MaK timeline in this archive: In a global humanitarian response to the conflict, the British government evacuates dispossessed Kosovars to Manchester, Leeds and Scotland. 4,346 of the most vulnerable men, women and children are selected from refugee camps. 2,400 arrive in the North West. *"People had few belongings, what they brought with them instead was bewilderment and dignity, grief and dispossession."* ('My Name Came up' Refugee Council, 2000)

PD: When you were in the village when the massacre took place and people were kidnapped, could you tell us where you went Valbona? Did you escape to the hills or what did you... there were a few of you who survived, what did you do?

(2:50) VK: Yeah, we escaped outside the house in the mountain but the other half of family, they escaped as well. But after one day we heard what happened to my husband and my brothers.

PD: What was the date of the massacre?

VK: 29th April 1999.

PD: And you were in the hills with Besim or not?

VK: No, with my mother and my other family.

PD: Why were you separated?

(3:34)VK: The mens have to run away from them because they... everywhere they find a man, they kill them, and they tried to run and go far from the women. Sometimes it's more easy for the women: they don't take. Sometimes they take. We didn't know then. But with the children it's hard to go very far. That's why, because we separate with them.

PD: And your family was killed, do you think just because you were very close to the border... Mitrovica - a divided city - your family home was on the North side of the river? So you were very, very close to the Serb border?

VK: Yeah, and we can't do anything because if we try to go somewhere, it's very far. We can't go anywhere... just to go through Serbia. Serbia was in there...

PD: So you were moving in the hills every day?

VK: Yes, every day. Every day because the house it was burnt. The 29th April, all the houses in the village, they were burnt.

PD: Were you aware of NATO bombing? Where you were was there any NATO presence or did you hear bombing?

(5:15)VK: Yeah, I hear bombing. I was in my village because we're going in the daytime and the night time we come and stay in burnt house. Same house as we was. Just the women and children because the mens they have to sleep in the mountain. And then we heard. But I couldn't believe that. (laughs) Even when I saw the force for first time they came, because sometimes we listened the news. But when I saw the French came in Mitrovica, and when I saw them, I was afraid: I thought still the Serbian military is there. But then I learnt, bit by bit.

PD: That it was actually the French and NATO liberating.

VK: Yeah, yeah.

PD: What was your reaction when you went back to your home, your home area? Had it changed dramatically?

VK: Yeah

PD: Could you tell us how it was?

VK: It was beautiful house and garden and everything: all the village was like that. But the 29th April all the house was burnt, like you can see in films. We didn't know how it happened as it's the first time for me to be in the war and then I couldn't believe what I saw. But we were afraid every night that they gonna come and kill us.

PD: You got pregnant just before Besim was injured in the face. So you were just a few months pregnant. (pauses) Valbona, it was very hard and yet there was some kind of hope because the army, the NATO armies, actually identified the need and you were medically evacuated by the British Army, I think, and met David Vassallo, and other surgeons perhaps. How did you feel when you felt you would be leaving Kosovo and coming to England? I think Besim said that perhaps you didn't think you were coming?

VK: Yeah, we didn't know I was coming 'til I go to Prishtina but they said. "You can come and if you want." And, I was afraid what I have to do because I never was out of country alone because I was so young. And then what I am going to do if I come here if they don't understand me in the house, or with other people?

PD: In a camp or something like that?

VK: Yeah, so I was so afraid. But then in the end I said, "Im going to go, he is my husband and I'm going to go for him!"

But then I come here and everything was so good.

I didn't know where I am going and what I am going to do or anything like that. I was afraid about everything was going to happen to me but I said, "I'm going to go with my husband."

PD: How old were you?

VK: Sixteen. And then when I came here, they waiting for me in the airport of Manchester, some people, and taking me straight to the flat in Manchester. And they waiting so nice for us, with everything I needed, and in here there was very good people.

PD: Were you alone in that flat because your husband was in hospital?

(9:00) VK: Yes. I was alone. My husband stayed for a long time in the hospitals, they have many operations. The first one was fifteen hours operation. And most of the time I was alone.

PD: Were you in contact with the rest of the Kosovar community - did you know the **Bogujevcis**², for example?

VK: We came with the Bogujevcis from Pristina but I didn't see them because they separate us in Manchester airport. They bring them to Altrincham and us in Manchester and I didn't know where to find them.

PD: And their children were all injured so they had also gone straight to hospital.

VK: Yeah.

PD: But now you're friends.

VK: Yeah.

² Selatin/Jehona, Saranda and Fatos Bogujevci recordings included in this archive

PD: And Valbona, could you tell me, do you go back to Kosovo and if you do, what are your thoughts about Kosovo now?

VK: I like to go there because I have family down there. But now I have children in here. The children in school, and my husband still in medication here for everything and I am going to stay here I think. The children for me is more important and my husband as well. But I'm going to visit my family.

PD: And are the girls enjoying life in Manchester?

VK: Yeah, yeah, they're born here (laughs). For them is they home in Manchester. Everything nice in here. Bit hard for us, we have family down there... but ok.

PD: And when you go back do you feel the recovery is going well in your home country?

VK: In Mitrovica still is very dangerous place, very separate city: the North and the rest. Our home was in North and now we have a different home in... but it's still hard, for us it's very hard.

PD: And Valbona, thank you very much for doing this interview.

VK: You're welcome

Could you tell me why you think it's important to have your family's story recorded?

(11:52) VK: It's important because everything happened. Even when I came in Manchester in 1999, we have interview by the press. I told everything what

happened in those days. I told you in short things but if I told in the long, we going to stay more than three or four days in here.

PD: You always wanted to speak out.

VK: I like to speak out but I don't have with somebody to speak.

PD: I know, I was in Kosovo in 2000 and I was partly with KFOR and I saw a newspaper article then about you and your family and a copy of the Time Magazine photograph [the front cover]. So that was used in either 1999 or 2000 and the caption was, "The Face of War," I think³. But, now it's wonderful because that half destroyed face of Besim is reconstructed and he's looking mighty fine.

I know you both realise how many operations and how much medical care that's taken over the years.

Do you feel that's close to ending now or is it necessary to have a lot more medical treatment?

VK: For me, I said, "Stop, don't do any operation anymore because he does too many operations. I don't care what he look, he have very good heart." But he likes to go through his operations and to look better.

And I would like to thank all the medication and people from the hospitals and everything because they was so nice with all of us.

³ <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,40339,00.html>

