

## ORAL HISTORY INDEX AND SUMMARY

Interview with: Paresh Patel

Date: 29/11/15

Location: Manchester

Total duration: 1 hour 7 minutes and 31 seconds

Interview by Pam Dawes and summary by Kelly Bücher:

The interview plays as one long recording

| 1. | Start time | Finish time | Approximate duration | Brief description   |
|----|------------|-------------|----------------------|---|
|    | 00.00      | 67.31       | 67.31                | Paresh talks about his work as a BBC investigative journalist and documentary maker. This led to him working closely with the Bogujevci family and a key member of the team working with them when they gave evidence against the men responsible for killing their family in the Podujevë massacre, in Kosovo, in 1999. He talks about the value of oral history and about how this experience of investigative journalism changed his life. |

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| <p>Pen sketch</p>                   | <p><i>Paresh Patel is an investigative journalist and presenter who, for many years, has worked for the BBC, both NW and National. He lives close to his family near Manchester. He loves football and music but his overriding passion is the pursuit of justice and truth. Paresh became heavily involved in the aftermath of the massacre by an armed Serbian unit of 16 women and children - in a domestic garden - in Podujevë in 1999. This involved him working in the UK, Serbia, Kosovo and Canada and a sixteen year personal commitment to the fight for justice for the Bogujevci family.</i></p>  |
| <p>Summary of interview content</p> | <p>(00:00)</p> <p>Paresh talks about changing his career from engineering to retrain as a journalist because he wanted to contribute more in other areas and he was always interested in journalism.</p> <p>He mentions an instance, when he was at a U2 concert in 1992, when, half way through the concert, Bono stopped to introduced a live link to Sarajevo. Three women addressed the crowd at Wembley stadium and spoke about hiding in a basement, rape and murder. Serb soldiers were marauding around the streets. Paresh was outraged and wondered why this wasn't being stopped.</p> <p>He talks about the 1995 Srebrenica massacre where 8,000 men and boys were murdered. He says that these killers were connected to the those of the massacre in Podujevë which he was to become heavily involved in. He explains how he came to be involved in the Bogujevci case.</p> <p>(03:10) He talks about covering a gig, Cohesion, in 2001, [MaK album release] in Manchester for North West Tonight and meeting Pam Dawes to plan the television programme and of how they hit it off talking about their mutual interest in the Balkans. A month later, Pam rang Paresh to tell him about how she'd come across five Kosovar children who'd survived a massacre in Podujevë and each one had been shot at least nearly four or five times and the eldest one, Saranda Bogujevci, had been shot sixteen times.</p> <p>He mentions going to a MaK fundraiser at a school disco in Altrincham in the summer of 2002 and meeting the Bogujevci children and their fathers. He met them several times over the next six months and would have tea at their family home. After six months, he received a call from Pam saying that Saranda, the eldest child, had said that they had agreed for him to make a documentary about their experience of surviving the massacre in their hometown of Podujevë where 19 women and children died. However, they also asked if there was any way he could bring the men who did this to their family to justice.</p> <p>(07:47) He says how it seemed an impossible task but he and Pam Dawes proceeded to try anyway to find the killers. He says that Pam received a phone call saying that the children had been asked to testify in Belgrade, against one of the killers, Saša Cvjetan a member of the unit called the Scorpions. The Serbs had been instructed by the U.N. to try all their war criminals and was considered to be one of them. He says that he and Pam tried to negotiate protection for the children so that they could testify in Belgrade safely, to no avail. Even though Pam managed to arrange some Secret Service agents, they were not allowed into Serbia by their government.</p> <p>Paresh describes how on the first day of the trial in March 2003, the reformist Prime Minister, Zoran Djindjic, was shot outside parliament. The men being tried - the war criminals - and many other Serbs, did not want the trials or reforms to go ahead and assassinated the head of the government who had agreed for this to go ahead with the U.N.</p> <p>Paresh talks about then going to and talking to the Chief Prosecutor, Milan Sarajlic to discuss the safety of the five children when giving testimony. He gave detailed descriptions of the children and when they would arrive to this man, assuming this intelligence would be used to help keep them safe. At this point, the children - even though the Prime Minister</p> |

had been murdered because of the trials - had not written off testifying.

(12:59) Paresh says that several weeks later, the Serbian government announced that they'd captured the men who had assassinated Zoran Djindjic. Incredibly, the ring leader was Milan Sarajlic. He had arranged for his own Prime Minister to be assassinated whilst himself being the Assistant Chief Prosecutor of the trial.

Paresh says that, once he was captured, the Bogujevci family decided that it would possibly be now safe, or maybe it's worth the risk, of going to Belgrade and testifying. Pam Dawes organised for the children to go to testify in Belgrade on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2003 with about forty bodyguards and round the clock protection. He says that they also took psychiatrist with them, Lynne Jones.

He says that on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> July, the Bogujevci children - thanks to the support of Manchester Aid to Kosovo - became the first children in U.N. history to give evidence at a War Crimes Trial. After they had testified they decided to go straight to Kosovo and leave Serbia, to go back to their childhood home in Podujevë, to be with their extended family.

(20:30) Paresh says that the next morning Nataša Kandić, the lawyers office in Belgrade told him that they had just detonated a bomb in the foyer of the court building. He says that illustrates just how dangerous the situation was and that they were right to leave when they did.

He talks about how he and Pam then had to fly home and how they nearly missed the flight due to being stuck in traffic on the way to the airport. Initially they were told by airport staff that it was too late but upon informing staff that he was the BBC correspondent, and Pam was from Manchester Aid to Kosovo helping the Bogujevci family, they stopped the plane from leaving and allowed them to board as a sign of respect for the enormity of the task they were undertaking on behalf of the children.

Paresh says that the first documentary he made was 30 minutes long and came second in the Royal Television Society Awards in the Domestic category. He believes had it been entered in the Foreign category that it might have won. Paresh says that this has been his greatest achievement in life.

He describes how Kevin Curtis, a former Scotland Yard Officer now at The Hague, gave him the heads up that one of the other killers, Saša Cvjetan 's partner, his close friend, a man called Dejan Demirović, a 28 year old, was hiding somewhere in Canada. He had joined his parents who had emigrated their several years earlier to Windsor, Ontario. His family had gone to a local Serb wedding and his sister got into a fight with another woman at which point she blurted out, "Don't mess with me, my brother is a killer from the Balkans." That news spread in the town of Windsor in Ontario, it was picked up by a local newspaper, the Hague spotted it, Kevin Curtis spotted it and he had told Pam and Paresh.

(27:10) He decided to try and make a second documentary in order to find Dejan Demirović in Canada. He offered the £100,000 worth of footage from the BBC, as the Bogujevci family had retained the rights, and offered it to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for use in their own documentary in return for the same value in resources in Canada. The Canadians agreed.

Paresh says that then Saša Cvjetan was found guilty of war crimes in Belgrade. At the same time, Nataša Kandić, from the Humanitarian Law Centre in Belgrade found one of the members of the Scorpions who had almost witnessed what had happened in the garden: Goran Stoparic. He was just outside the garden and saw six men go in through a narrow tunnel, heard the shootings, saw them leave and saw the 19 bodies. He had decided to give evidence against the unit.

(30:10) Paresh says that was the impetus to continue with the hunt for Dejan Demirović in

Canada.

He says that on September 4<sup>th</sup> 2003, he and Pam Dawes flew to Canada with Saranda. They arrived there to meet members of the CBC documentary team.

Paresh says that, in 1985, the first war criminal to be tried in Canada claimed he was 'just following orders' as his defence and was acquitted which led the unusual precedent (generally not legal anywhere else in the world) for other war criminals to be able to cite that, too. This had led to the unusual situation of approximately 2,000 war criminals in Canada. He describes Canada as also implementing a Privacy Law whereby the government did not have to let the public know who was applying for asylum. This was a law designed to protect victims and was being exploited by war criminals and their lawyers.

(33:34) He talks about how Saranda mobilised about 50-100 people in Canada who planned to demonstrate outside the building where Dejan Demirović was planning to apply for asylum in September 2003 in Canada. Because of this planned demonstration and the press coverage, the hearing did not go ahead at that time. "Demirović," Saranda said on tape, "We're coming for you."

(35:30) But then, he says, a couple of extraordinary things happened, the Canadians changed the law which banned the Office of Defence, it meant that people couldn't say, "I was following orders." They repealed that law in June that year.

He says he knocked on the door of Demirović's flat with his camera crew but he did not answer.

Paresh says, secondly, the Canadian government postponed his asylum hearing for another six months.

(38:44) At this hearing, Paresh saw Dejan Demirović on the way in and questioned him on his involvement in the massacre, on film. He says that he did not reply but ran away with his mother.

He says how he and Pam had taken Saranda to the Mounties and Simon Wiesenthal Centre. After speaking for two hours, the Toronto Mounties said that they had opened up a case against Dejan Demirović because he could not longer use the Office of Defence and also they now felt they had a case against him. He was soon arrested but then released on bail.

Paresh says that in 2005 his legal advisor was appointed to a senior post in Canada and told Paresh that he didn't have to worry about Demirović.

(48:48) Paresh says that three or four months later, Dejan Demirović was arrested by the Canadians and extradited to Belgrade. A few people had been kicked out of the country but this was the first, formally arrested, war criminal in Canada's history, to be extradited.

In 2008, the children were asked to go back to Belgrade to testify against Dejan Demirović. Paresh says that it had become known that there was footage of the Srebrenica massacre, of murders committed by, and filmed by, the same unit as the perpetrators of the Podujevë massacre that Nataša Kandić obtained via the Scorpion, Stoparic, who had turned State's Evidence. That new video evidence could be used by the prosecution in court.

He says that in 2008, when they went to testify against Dejan Demirović, he was told that Demirović had turned State's Evidence about Podujevë and Srebrenica so even though he would be freed, they would potentially have many killers in court rather than just one.

(54:08) It was his Paresh's birthday, the day they were in court. He felt there was a message in this, "Your life hasn't been a waste. You've done something worthwhile."

He describes the court where the children testified and how the courtroom had a glass panel, a glass wall, at one side. It was built specially for the trial. He sat on one side of the glass panel and Podujevë killers were sat on the other side of it. He was literally two feet away from them. One by one, after giving testimony, the children went and sat with Paresh, several feet behind the killers. Paresh commends Fatos's clarity and recall.

He describes one of the killer's wives wanting to speak to the children to find out if her husband was really a child killer but they kept her away as they were not sure whether to trust her or not.

Ten men were convicted including Slobodan Medić, Scorpion Commander active at Srebrenica. Paresh says that Medić, the Commander of the Scorpions - who should be serving 20 years - was killed in a car crash in Belgrade with his wife and 17 year old son. He should have been in prison.

Paresh talks about the significance of this effective team work, both legally and for himself personally.

He says that he believes Serbia is still split down the middle politically: half is reformist and half is looking to the past.

He says that of his objectives when he made the documentary was to show the other side of asylum seekers.

He talks about the murder of journalist Jill Dando just after she fronted an appeal regarding Kosovo. He says that it's been argued by some people that she was killed in retaliation for the NATO air strike of a TV station in Belgrade that killed 16 Serbian journalists.

Paresh says that in terms of medical treatment, trauma treatment and economic support that Manchester could not have done more. He thinks you need people to empathise and understand when refugees arrive in a new place. He says that people in the community, such as Rev Bruce Thompson, are important as they help and assist without prejudice. The Muslim children were helped by Christians and also went to Roman Catholic School.

Paresh says that he does not feel that this story is over as there are still people waiting to be tried and also they do not know if those convicted are still in prison or have been released.

Paresh says that Serbia wants to be part of the E.U. He does not think it is ready yet as it is split down the middle, half reformist and half living in the past. He also says that it needs to be clarified if Kosovo is now an independent republic – the UN needs to be decisive.

Finally Paresh talks about people's own words - the expression of their own emotions and recollections – as being more valuable than second hand interpretation by reporters. He says that he thinks the project is fantastic. "Unadulterated, pure recollections - for the sake of history and documenting - are incredibly important."