

ORAL HISTORY INDEX AND SUMMARY

Interview with: Selatin Bogujevci / Jehona Bogujevci

Date: 16/11/14

Location: Manchester

Total duration: 01:06: 23

Albanian translated simultaneously by Selatin’s daughter Jehona who also contributes.

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	01.06.23	01.06.23	Selatin talks about his family’s experience of the war and recovery in Manchester
<p>Pen sketch</p> <p>Summary of interview content</p>	<p><i>Selatin, an electrician by trade, lived with his extended family in several connecting houses in the busy town of Podujeva, North East Kosovo. His wife, Shefkate, was a nurse employed at the local hospital. By 1999 they had five young children, the eldest being Nora aged 14, the youngest Genc, aged 6. On March 28th 1999, whilst the local men were hiding, a Serb unit forming an ethnic cleansing front line entered the town, herded his family and friends into a domestic garden, and shot them all. Selatin’s wife, Shefkate, his mother, and his daughter, Nora, were killed alongside five other members of his extended family, and his friend’s family. After the Liberation of Kosovo, the survivors - five young Bogujevci cousins - were found and supported by the British Army. Selatin and his brother were evacuated to Manchester with their five children. The cousins began the slow road to recovery and, with Selatin’s support, gave evidence in Belgrade against the Serb unit. Selatin has become highly involved in Manchester Aid to Kosovo and is one of its leaders. He is very proud of his four surviving children, who are all thriving in Manchester, and Saranda, his niece, who now works in Kosovo. He has re-married. It has been a slow and difficult journey for them all and Selatin is extremely grateful for the support his family has received in Manchester.</i></p> <p>(00.00) Selatin describes Kosovo before he left it for England. He says he had a happy, normal family life. He says he was married with five children. He used to work for a power company and his wife used to work in a hospital as a nurse in their town, Podujeva. Selatin describes how the four eldest children were all in school with his youngest child, Genc, at home.</p> <p>(1:19) Selatin describes how, before the war started, lots of people were sent away and had to leave their jobs including his brother, Safet, who used to work with him. He says that they closed the schools so the high school and university students had to study privately in houses. Younger students in primary school went to school but they separated them into schools for Kosovars (ethnic Albanians) and schools for Serbs. He describes that when they separated the school, they actually brought a lot of children from Serbia to study at the schools. Selatin also says that many of the people who worked at the</p>			

municipality were from Serbia.

Selatin describes massive changes occurring. He says that he had to travel by public transport for forty kilometres to work whereas before there used to be buses to take them right to their place of work. He says that sometimes he had to do night shifts and he could not travel back to Podujeva as there was no public transport at that time.

(3:20) Selatin says that there were several police check points from Prishtina to Podujeva and sometimes there were many problems and they would sometimes take the passengers off the buses. Selatin says that, when the war actually started, the Serbians and the KLA (Kosova Liberation Army) would fight and he would take his wife and children to his uncle's house in Prishtina for a week to keep the family away from it.

He says that it was not a normal life any more, that they would not have enough food and they felt they needed extra in case something happened so that they would have it there. Selatin describes how his wages were very low.

Selatin says that in 1990 the situation changed completely but it started to get worse 1997. He says that in 1990 is when he had to leave his job and his life changed completely. Selatin explains that in 1989 there were gas attacks in schools and that is when the schools were shut down.

He says that even though from 1981 there were loads of protests, everything really started from there. Selatin says that in 1990 the war started in Croatia, then Bosnia and then gradually they came to Kosovo. Selatin states that it is unclear who put the gases in the schools and although no-one died, people were made really ill. He says they had to close the schools down as they realised there was a danger but were unclear how the gases had got in the buildings.

(08:20) Selatin says that he did not have many Serbian neighbours. He says that in his area there was just one family. He says that there were a few Serbs at his work but it was ok as they had to work together. Selatin says that he had a good relationship with his Serbian neighbours but that started to change in 1990. He says that the neighbour used to work with his wife and father, a doctor, so the Serbian neighbour knew the family quite well.

(10:00) He says that people began to hire people because they were Serbian, in every institution, even if they were not qualified for the job.

(10:10) Selatin describes the events leading up to his leaving Kosovo. Selatin

says that on 24th March 1999 the bombing began so he was unable to go to out much anymore as there were soldiers everywhere and it was too dangerous.

On 28th March they had to leave the house.

(11:00) He explains that then there was a massacre where most of his family were murdered. Most of his family were killed. Selatin says that before the massacre he had to go elsewhere, separated from his family, whilst the rest of them stayed at home. He says that they were hoping to meet afterwards but this didn't happen as they were all killed or injured.

(12:40) He says that he stayed in a village near Batlava, Kolic, for twenty days he did not know anything about his family and then he found out that some of his children were in hospital and had survived a massacre. His children wrote a letter and gave it to someone who was going to the village where Selatin was and that is how he got the news.

(13:10) Selatin describes how his family [Bogujevci] were killed in the neighbour's garden: his wife, mother, his daughter, his auntie and her daughter-in-law. He says that his brother's wife and their two sons were also killed in the garden. Selatin describes how his friend's family [Duriqi], their kids, his parents and his wife were also killed in the garden.

(14:00) He says that as soon as he found out that his children were in hospital his friend Enver and his brother Safet decided to go immediately to Prishtina even though it was very dangerous.

He says that the reason they separated in the first place is people tended to think that it was more dangerous for a family if men were found in the house so the men separated and went elsewhere to keep the rest of the family safe.

Selatin says that he knew the children were in hospital but did not what had happened and did not know about what had happened to the other members of the family. He says it was only when they got to the hospital in Prishtina they were told about what had happened in the massacre.

(14:30) Selatin describes the children being in hospital: Saranda (his niece), Jehona, Fatos and Genc (his children). He says his youngest daughter, Liria, was sent after two weeks to Belgrade. He describes how Enver found out at the hospital that he had lost all his family in the same massacre: his parents, his wife and four of his kids died. Enver's youngest son being two years old and his

eldest twelve years old.

(16:30) Selatin says that after two days Safet and Enver went back to the village which is when they told him about what had happened to his children and the rest of the family. He says that two days later, they had to leave the village, Kolic, as a lot of people were killed and he was lucky that he managed to escape.

(17:00) Selatin states that on 19th April 1999 he decided to go to Prishtina and on arrival, when the police found out that they were from Podujeva, they told them that they had to go back. The police did not want anyone staying there from Podujeva. He says that when they arrived in Podujeva, the police would not let them back to their houses and they could not stay there either.

Selatin says that they then went to another village which was nearby but most of the houses were burnt so there wasn't really anywhere to stay. He says that they went back to Podujeva and found a few houses where they were actually able to stay. He says that the policemen were staying in their houses, his auntie's house.

(18:50) Selatin describes an incident where he saw his Serbian neighbour and she asked where his wife was and he said to her, 'I am sure that you know better where my wife is than I do.' He told her that he only knew that his kids were in hospital, he did not know where the rest of his family were and she did not react to that.

Selatin says how it started to get darker and they asked the soldiers if they could stay with the Serbian neighbour and the soldiers said that it was up to her. He says when they asked her if they could stay, she said no and made excuses that she was ill and had to leave.

(21:20) Selatin says that the soldiers said to them that is not safe around here anyway and that they should go away with everyone else. He says that everybody in Podujeve knew exactly what had happened to the family as they were medics, his father having been the first Kosovar doctor in Podujeva and his own wife was a nurse. He says his family were well known and the neighbour would definitely have known what happened to his wife.

(22:50) Selatin explains how he then went to Prishtina, to be with his children, and his brother Safet stayed in a village in Podujeva in case there was any news of the family.

(23:40) Selatin describes how he got the bus from Podujeva to the hospital in

Prishtina. He explains how there were a lot of people trying to get on the bus and seven Kosovar people were allowed on the bus but everyone else was Serbian. He says that the rest of the Kosovars were told to wait for another bus.

Selatin goes on to describe that when he got to Prishtina, he watched the news at seven o' clock at night only to see that the bus everyone else was told to wait and get on, had been bombed and there were only four survivors, two children. He tells how these people were taken to the same ward where his children were. He says that it has been suggested that NATO accidentally bombed this bus but Selatin is not sure if this is true. He feels that the soldiers in Podujeva knew that something was going to happen.

(27:00) Selatin explains that on 2nd May 1999 Prishtina was full of soldiers and although he realised it was dangerous, they were killing people, he went to find his children in the hospital ward. Selatin says that at the hospital he found them and then a member of staff questioned him as to why he was there and how he knew the children. He says that he told them that they were his kids.

(28:00) He says that one of the doctors asked him what had happened to the children. Selatin describes spilt spaghetti next to Saranda where a plate had fallen and Jehona could not move to help her. He describes dirty, black covers in the hospital room where Saranda and Jehona were.

(28:50) He states that after ten minutes, he went to find his sons on the second floor. Selatin says that Genc was in the corridor and his hair was very long, with just one sock on, and Selatin didn't recognise him. Genc shouted 'Fatos, daddy is here' and that is when he realised that it was Genc and his legs went weak. He says that he stayed for five minutes before he left.

Selatin describes it being dangerous on the way back to where he used to stay with his uncle in Prishtina. He says that the hospital was on the other side of Prishtina but there were some parts, such as in the centre, which were worse due to the high number of soldiers. Selatin mentions that the children would ask him not to visit, crying, due to the danger he was putting himself in.

(32:11) Selatin describes wanting to visit his children every single day but he was not always allowed in to the hospital. He says that, on these occasions, as his sons could walk and go outside the hospital he was able to see them but his daughters could not walk so he was unable to see them as they were confined to their beds inside the hospital.

(33:00) Selatin describes an incident where he was stopped by the police on the way back to his uncle's house, this is when they were going to shoot him. He says it was because he was holding two pieces [loaves] of bread. He says that

he was taken inside somewhere and asked if he was taking the bread to the KLA. Selatin told the police it was for himself, it was only two loaves, and it was for himself. He was asked to show ID to the police and when the police saw that he was from Podujeva, the police said that he had been looking for him. Selatin describes being made to empty his pockets in which he had one hundred German Marks. He was then told to put the money back in his pocket as if he had not actually been forced to empty his pockets. The police inferred that Selatin was just saying that he was being made to do it.

Selatin says that he had an ID with him from his workplace which saved him as the police asked where he worked and why he wasn't in work and he told him that he couldn't because of the war. Selatin told the police that his family was in Podujeva but he could not go there so he had decided to stay in Prishtina. He explained that his children were in the hospital in Prishtina. He says he could not really tell them what had happened to them so he told them that NATO bombing had injured them as he was fighting for his life at this point.

He said that the doctors gave two letters to his brother, Safet, saying that the children might die or they might survive. He describes screwing up the letters and he swore at him. Selatin said that he then said, 'Get away from here because if I see you one more time, I will kill you.'

(37:03) Selatin says that on 12th June 1999 [the Liberation of Kosovo], he visited his children in hospital and that was the first time that Saranda and Jehona could go into the hospital garden with Fatos and Genc. He describes NATO forces walking past them and they had a translator with them and they stopped to ask what had happened to the children, asking if they could be of assistance. Selatin said, 'Yes, you can help us,' to the NATO forces. He says they were invited by NATO to go to their own military hospital which they went to immediately.

(39:00) Selatin describes the children having tests and check-ups and then asking what he should do for the best afterwards. He says that NATO troops suggested taking the children to their home or another safe place and taking the children to their military hospital instead of the main Prishtina hospital. It was still dangerous. He says that NATO troops offered to help with transport and anything else they could provide to assist in this.

(40:30) Selatin says that after that they were introduced to a psychologist, Lynne Jones, who he met through a journalist. He says she would visit the children weekly.

(41:20) After the war, as well as the NATO support, some family members from London came to Prishtina so they were surrounded by more family than before. Selatin says that after three weeks NATO Medics moved elsewhere to a base in a prison, and contact was lost with them for two weeks. He says he was able to find where they were and he made contact with them and that is when he met

[RAMC] surgeon David Vassallo.

(42:40) From that moment David looked after Jehona and Saranda and he actually went back to Prishtina hospital and he was trying to help move the children to somewhere outside of Kosovo but they could not really do anything. He says they went to the OSCE who were dealing with the refugees in Kosovo. Selatin found out that David Vassallo was doing his best to help them and he had written a news article in the UK which had featured in newspapers, obviously trying to get people to help the children, reaching out to doctors all over the world.

(43:30) Selatin says that after a month they were brought to Manchester. They were accompanied by another man Besim Kadriu, who had been shot in the face, and a woman with her son, whose husband had been shot but was already in Leeds. He says that he was told that only he or his brother could come with the children, four being his own children and Saranda being Safet's daughter.

(44:20) He says that he told them that he did not want to leave his children and his other daughter, Liria, was in Belgrade, where she had been sent during the war as she was badly injured and was in a hospital there, and he did not want to leave her either. Selatin describes trying to get his daughter sent from Belgrade to Manchester but being told that he had to go and get her himself. He says that she alone in the hospital with only a patient aged 14 from Peja with her, whom she did not know.

(46:00) Selatin says that there was a Kosovar man, Hajid Shorsha, who lived in Belgrade and they contacted him through him a relative who knew his nephew. He says that they asked him to go and look after the children in the hospital in Belgrade and he visited Liria every day and looked after her. Selatin describes not being in touch with his daughter during the war and only once the war was over, with the help of the Red Cross, was he able to speak to her over the phone. He says that after the war Hajid came to visit him and he told him that sometimes he could not visit her because he would be told that if he wanted to look after her so much, he should take her home with him. This was impossible as she had been badly injured in the throat, when shot in the garden, and she needed to be fed through her stomach. He says that Hajid sometimes would not go and see her because of that and that is why Selatin came to England in the end as he felt he could not really do anything in Kosovo for Liria.

(49:00) Selatin describes when they first arrived in Manchester and where they lived. He says that they were picked up at Manchester airport and taken to refugee centre of Meadow Court where five or six families were living. Selatin thinks Bruce Thompson, from the Methodist Church, had actually recommended the building was used for the refugees.

Safet stayed with Fatos and Genc that night (at Meadow Court) and Selatin

went straight to hospital with Jehona and Saranda. Selatin says that although they arrived in Manchester in September, most of the other families had arrived between March and June: they were the last family to arrive.

(51:20) He describes being looked after very well with their own taxis to take them to Withington hospital and the children to school, food and translators. He describes being taken to do fun activities - such as going to Chester Zoo - each weekend and they went to the Methodist Church to play games. He says that some people from the Muslim community came to visit and helped them as well. The hospital care was excellent.

(52:50) Selatin says that after two months, Liria also came to Manchester with Aferdita [Safet and Aferdita married later]. He says that the Red Cross first took Liria from Belgrade to Podujeva and after that she came to Manchester. He says that they immediately took her to Pendlebury Children's Hospital, a different one to where Saranda and Jehona were where they removed the tube from her stomach. Selatin states that she was 9 years old and she weighed only ten kilos and was really thin. She had an operation on her throat and after two or three months she was getting better.

(54:50) Selatin says that they lived in Meadow Court for a year. He says that it was decided that each family could have their own house. He says that when he first came to England that they were told that would have to return to Kosovo once the children were better. Whilst the children were still under treatment the family was told they needed to apply for asylum but this request was refused.

(56:00) Selatin describes first meeting Pam from charity Manchester Aid to Kosovo at Meadow Court. He says that Pam used to be involved with MAG, who helped clear the land mines in Kosovo. He describes how lots of people, including Pam, wrote letters and articles in support of the family being able to stay in England. Selatin says that he will always miss his home town of Podujeva but as Manchester supported his family so much, he doesn't feel anywhere else could possibly have done the same. He says that there are different refugees all over the world and for different reasons, theirs [the Bogujevcis] being a need for medical treatment. He feels that they would not have had the same support in Kosovo as they did from the Manchester community of Altrincham and Timperley where they lived, close to Manchester city.

(58:30) Selatin describes his life now and stresses how happy he is to see his children healthy again and finished with their studies. He says it was very difficult for him at first but after a year he also got remarried which obviously was good for him and the whole family. Selatin laughingly describes going to see his psychologist and how he would always talk about his kids and would be told that he was there to talk about himself not his children. Selatin describes how his life changed completely. He says he used to have a job and a family and it had to change completely but he is very happy again now.

(01.01:07) Selatin talks more about Pam and the charity Manchester Aid to Kosovo and how they helped them as a family. He says that through MaK he has been able to do a lot for Kosovo as well. He describes how, in the beginning, in the UK they dealt with the kids by taking them out to do fun things. He says that through that the idea came about to create a park in Podujeva, where children could do the same over there as they were able to in Manchester parks, and the family met people in the UK and Kosovo, with Pam, to try to achieve this.

Selatin describes how Pam went to Belgrade with the children to support them through the trial which was obviously important to them. He describes a connection between Podujeva and Manchester and how they have a great relationship which is all through MaK. He says that it is great because many people from Manchester go there and people are given the opportunity to come from Podujeva to visit Manchester.

(01.03:43) Selatin says that he tries to go back to Kosovo whenever he can and it feels good to go back. He says that it is really good as well as he feels proud to live in Manchester, and to say that he is from Manchester. Selatin says that things there have changed a lot, even the people. He says that people now deal with their own problems, their own family. He says that he feels good when he is there but things are not perfect - there are struggling families there and he feels bad as he cannot do much to help them. Selatin hopes that the younger generation will also speak about their thoughts about Kosovo when they return.

(01.05:38) Selatin describes thanking Bruce, the priest at the Methodist Church, who replied 'Don't thank me, thank God for sending you to us so that we could help you.'

Lastly, Selatin thanks England for helping his family – for everything.