

ORAL HISTORY INDEX AND SUMMARY

Interview with: Ilir Neziri

Date: 28/1/16

Location: Manchester

Total duration: 98.05

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	98.05	98.05	Ilir talks about life in Kosovo before and during the war and how he came to live in Manchester with his wife who was medically evacuated during the war.
Pen sketch	<p><i>Ilir's family comes from a small village in Kosovo. His father was an early supporter of the resistance to Serb oppression, well before the Kosova Liberation Army was formed. Known for his opposition and a wanted man, Ilir's father hid from the Serbian authorities when the family moved to the capital, Prishtina. Ilir's family were fugitives for months and somehow all survived the war in the capital, experiencing 12 weeks of bombardment by NATO. The family experienced the terror of arrests, bribing their way to safety. Ilir has vivid memories of the experience of conflict and threat during his childhood. Ilir went on to medical school in Prishtina. He married a Kosovar girl who had been evacuated to Manchester, where they now have a home together. Ilir is a dentist and, after completing a few final papers, hopes to start work in the UK.</i></p> <p>(00:00)</p> <p>Ilir introduces himself and says that he comes from Pristina which is the capital city of Kosovo. He was born in Podujeva, a town in the north of Kosovo. He talks about his memories of his childhood before the war. He describes living in a village with his parents and grandparents. They had a small house there. His father worked the land and they had a pet dog and cat. He recalls enjoying his childhood, especially playing in the countryside.</p> <p>(02:14) He talks about his father leaving his job in 1990's because of Serbian repression at that time. His job was working as an administrator at the police station in Podujeva. He talks about the oppression and lack of human rights his father was subjected to. He found other work as a joiner. In 1993 the family moved to Pristina.</p> <p>(03:40) He talks about his father being involved in the resistance in 1992 and he had a lot of problems with Serbs. They beat him a lot. He considered moving to Germany to protect himself and his family but his father did not want to leave them so they all went to live in Pristina in 1993. They rented a house and his father found work close by.</p> <p>His father was very politically aware of the situation in Croatia and Bosnia and knew a similar situation was going to occur in Kosovo and began to prepare for it.</p> <p>(07:00) Ilir talks about the Serbs who lived in their village. He describes them as</p>			

good neighbours. They helped them but when the politics of Milosevic began to take hold it became a difficult situation.

He talks about the Serb police taking his father from their house to beat him because of his views. They would ask for guns but they didn't have any and he explains how people were forced to buy guns in order to appease the police and save their own and their families' lives.

(07:54) He says that his grandfather was forced to join the army when Germany occupied the region in World War II. He says that a lot of Albanians in Kosovo were. His father was hounded and pressurised about Ilir's father's conscription in the German military and the fact he would have been issued with a weapon in World War 2.

(9:47) He talks further about his father living and working in the capital of Pristina. He learnt German and pretended to be going to Germany still but stayed in Kosovo and tried to hide. Ilir explains about the Diaspora. It was possible for him to go to Germany but he didn't want to leave Ilir and his family behind.

The family lives at his uncle's home in a village for 3 month before moving to the capital.

(13:53) They all went to live in Pristina with his father in 1993 and rented a house. Ilir describes being a little boy at this time and his older sister started school in Pristina. He was very jealous as she got to start school before him. He was seven-years-old when I started school in Pristina. He loved going to school.

Ilir describes his school. There were Albanian and Serbian children being educated in the same building but in separate areas. The Albanians learned on first and second floors and the Serbs had the third floor to themselves. They learnt in different languages. They had different teachers, too.

He says that they did not play together at playtime and were separated then too. He says that the Serbian children did not like them and they didn't like them either.

He says that sometimes the older children would play football against each other but the Serbians would often beat the Albanians at the end of the game. And sometimes the police would attend.

(17:40) Ilir talks about it not being safe for his father to go out, even to buy food for the family.

He talks about his parent's generation and how they were educated in separate buildings to Serbian children, in their particular village. The children did not mix.

(20:10) He comments on Milosevic really starting the separation, though. His family would watch the events in Yugoslavia on the television. Ilir says that in 1989 speeches were made, Fushe Kosove, and things changed even more. But it started happening in Slovenia and Croatia and then in Kosovo.

(22:30) He talks about the school again. He says that the Serbians wanted the top floor in order to feel superior to the Albanian children. The Serbians and Albanians had separate Head Teachers.

Ilir talks about the parallel system that came into place for older students, as Albanians could no longer be educated in the same University institutions as

Serbian students. It was a vulnerable parallel system and beatings were regular.

(24:19) He says that he was in school until 1998. And when the war started he was ten-years-old.

He says that during that time he remembers the protests in Pristina and everywhere else in Kosovo. He says that sometimes the biggest protests that happened were in Pristina. In 1997 he witnessed a protest against the repression of Serbia that started in Kosovo. Because at that point, in some places in Kosovo, the war started. In Drenica the family of Adem Jashari had just been killed.

He says that the police beat the protestors.

(25:00) He talks about a youth party protest in 1997 where students were beaten and tear gas was used to stop them protesting. He remembers trying to help them with other

(26:50) He says that the peaceful student protestors all wore white as a sign of wanting peace and not wanting a war. Albin Kurti was a young leader. Tear gas was used. Ilir helped the students. It was a peace movement. Massacres were already taking place in Drenica and Peja.

(30:10) He talks about the how the parallel system of University students being educated in houses was funded, partly externally. Albanians working in other countries would give part of their wages to help those in Kosovo. He describes their own Albanian government.

Things changed again in 1998. He was no longer allowed to go to school along with other Albanian students. The Head Teacher instructed them but it came from Milosevic and was happening all over Kosovo.

Ilir says that this is when the resistance developed and the Kosova Liberation Army formed. He says that a lot of young men joined including those of school age and some were killed.

(32:52) He says that at this time of those living in Pristina, 50% were went to Macedonia.

Ilir says that he and his family were still in Pristina by the end of the war. He describes a heavy police and military presence in the city in 1995, 1996 and 1997 before the N.A.T.O. bombing ended the war.

(35:58) He talks about life in Pristina during the war. He says that other family members came to live with them, as it seemed safer than staying in their villages.

Ilir talks about the family beginning to stockpile food in early 1999 and sleeping fully clothes in case of emergency, as they didn't know what might happen from one moment to the next.

(37:40) He says that in 1999 Albanians who were living in buildings were sent to Macedonia and those who lived in houses were sent to the hills. He and his family had to go and live in the hills and they were very scared. He says it was around March at this time, in the Spring. He says that thankfully they were lucky that the weather was quite mild and it could have been worse.

(41:33) Ilir says that soon after they went to stay with some people who shared their homes with them. They also slept in mosque on a carpet. He says he was

about ten-years-old at this point. He was carrying as much as he could of items such as food and clothing. He comments that there was no room for any personal items such as toys.

(43:30) Soon after his father found a friend who took them to his house where they stayed for a month. They were very helpful and helped them a lot with everything they needed. He says that there were about sixty or seventy people living in the farmhouse.

(44:30) He says that a month later the Serbs came and they had to move. There was a Serbian helicopter and they had to move immediately to find a safe place. He says that they had killed a lot of Albanians in a village nearby and they were heading to where they were so they had to move. They were using the helicopters to locate people. They all left in vehicle including tractors and people were also walking. The women and children were largely in the vehicles with elderly people and the men would walk.

(48:12) Ilir describes this group of people being very large. Thousands of people fleeing. They went to a village near Pristina and his family slept there in a house and the owner gave them some food and a place to sleep. In the morning they left towards Pristina.

(50:30) Ilir says that the people who left this area last and were at the back of the caravan of people were killed by Serbian forces, about one hundred and fifty people. He says that his family were lucky not to be part of this group and to have already left.

(51:25) Ilir describes a checkpoint near to Pristina where people were again separated. Young men were killed and some people were allowed to pass through unhurt. If people were identified as being from Podujeva on their identification they were made to walk to Podujeva. Others were made to walk to Pristina.

(53:20) His parent's I.D. indicated Podujeva so they were told to walk there but they decided not to and after starting in that direction, and then hid elsewhere. It was a forty-kilometre walk to Podujeva and they had just walked fifteen to twenty kilometres already.

(56:00) They found a house of a relative and they stayed there for about three months. Many other Albanians did the same thing as his family. He says that luckily the house was empty but there was lots of food there as his relatives had gone to Macedonia. He says that they had to hide and could not leave the house, as it was not safe to do so. They also had to live with no electricity or heating or anything that would make it clear that they were there to any Serbian forces.

(57:37) Ilir says that during that period Pristina was being bombed by N.A.T.O. and describes that as being scary and that they could not sleep because there was a lot of noise, as well. N.A.T.O. were trying to get rid of the Serbian forces from occupying the capital and were bombing communication buildings amongst others. He describes constant bombing.

(01:00:35) He describes the house they were staying in as being in the centre of Pristina near an old mosque. He says that Serbian forces knew they were there and would often come to the house and they had to hide in a partially finished new build behind it.

(1:01:40) Eventually they did not hide successfully and the police came in with Kalashnikovs and this father and uncles were forced to leave. His father offered

to give the police all his savings, approximately one thousand German marks, which was accepted and they all came back to the house. The family were given new I.D. and their money taken. Whilst this was going on they had to feed the five policemen as they drank and celebrated before they left. He describes them as being about thirty to forty years old.

(01:06:42) Ilir says that his family went out to try and find a train or a bus to get on to Macedonia but at first were not successful as everybody as well trying to leave as well.

(01:09:05) Ilir says that they moved back to the house where they had been living earlier in Pristina and many other neighbours had moved back there as it was safer than elsewhere at that point. He remembers that day that the war ended that the Serbian troops were all celebrating as they had been fearful that N.A.T.O. bombing would kill them. He remembers them noisily celebrating all through the night.

(1:12:00) Ilir describes the British N.A.T.O. troops coming into Pristina and giving people water and chocolate and how happy they were. He remembers trying to help them carry their heavy bags as he was so grateful and wanted to be of use to them.

He says he will never forget that day.

(1:13:30) Ilir says that he and his family are all very lucky that they survived the war.

His father went to Podujeva to see what's happening there with their other family members. He started back at school soon after but many of his friends and classmates were missing and most had gone to live in other countries.

(01:14:30) He says his father found work with the United Nations repairing windows and doors as a joiner.

Ilir says that the schools were not bombed, other areas were. People began to clean up the city.

He says that he can't remember a lot of that time.

Ilir tries to describe how the family spent their time whilst hiding in Pristina during the war but he says that mainly they did nothing and were just trying to be quiet as they were frightened. His sister did, however, start writing down her experiences of the war and praying a lot for the family.

(01:18:10) Ilir talks about the recovery of Kosova after the war. He recalls a celebration of the KLA in a football stadium in Pristina.

(1:20:00) Ilir talks about independence of Kosova on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2008. He was twenty-years-old at the time. He talks about the new national flag. He describes celebrating all day with concerts in Pristina and a lot of people being there. His family was by the "NEWBORN" monument to the new country.

(1:22:10) Ilir says that around one hundred and ten countries have accepted Kosovo as an independent state but the United Nations requires more for it to accept it, too. He says that some countries do not accept it such as Spain as they have their own problems with independent groups such as the Basque separatists. Other countries, he believes, do not accept Kosovo as independent due to pressure from Serbia and Russia and that their pressure has been

successful in some cases.

Ilir regrets that Milosevic died before his trial in the Hague could be completed and he could not be judged appropriately for his actions. He died in prison before his trial ended and justice was served. He says that he, and many other people, watched the news closely to see how his trial went and the verdict from the court but he evaded justice.

(1:26:50) Ilir talks about the emergence of Vetvendosje, a youth party, in Kosovo that is trying to represent the wishes of the Kosovar people, which in some instances is different to what the United Nations want. He talks about Serbian people living in Kosovo. He believes that Kosovars should be able to make decisions for themselves as to how their country should function. He talks about not wanting the same thing to happen in Kosovo as has occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He talks about current politics in Kosovo.

(1:31:29) He talks about Prishtina mayor Shpend Ahmeti as being the hope for the future of Kosova. He talks about needing to end the current corruption in Kosovo and Ilir is optimistic he is the man who can reform the country and stresses Shpend Ahmeti's morality.

Ilir talks about President Rugova dying in 2006 before independence in 2008 but that it is what he wanted, even if it is a shame that he didn't get to see it for himself.

(1:33:30) Ilir talks about now living in Manchester after meeting his now wife, from Podujeva, whilst they were both there on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2009. She was attending a remembrance event about the war and the loss of many members of her family in a massacre in Podujeva. They plan to live in Manchester for some time to come. His wife already works as a graphic designer, who loves Manchester, and he hopes to work in dentistry when he completes his last few exams.

He says that it is difficult being separated from his family but he tries to visit often and keeps in touch over the internet. Ilir says that his grandmother passed away last year.

Ilir says that Oral histories are important in order to have people's stories recorded safely for people to learn.