

Interview with Kaltrina Gjata and Rrezarta Mulolli (08:39)

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(00.00)

Yeah, so I came to England when I was five, during the war. I, yeah, got into education, got into education as soon as I went into England, Primary School, High School, College and I have now finished University. I must say, I did finished University a year later... a year earlier than everybody else (laughs). Not that I'm saying I'm a bighead or anything, just throwing it out there. It was quite a challenge. Yeah, it was... kind of regretting it now as it was a fantastic time of my life, University. I live in Manchester with my family but I moved to Oxford, for University, for that reason.

Keep in mind that I was quite young when I came here but I just remember, I never really remember unhappy time. It was quite, you know, quite a happy childhood with all my family in Fushë Kosovë.

During the war, all my family fled Kosovo in 1999. And we were placed in Manchester from Macedonia.

Well, we travelled through Kosovo and we stayed at the camp for a while and from there we were picked up and taken to Macedonia by some family members. And from Macedonia, our uncle, from London, he filed some

papers and petitioned for us to come to England and from then on we were placed in Manchester¹. And that's where we lived: fifteen years now.

I thought that, honestly, maybe because I was a child - if someone older than me maybe, for example, my parents, they remember everything much more differently when I speak to them - but as a young person I just remember it being fantastic. I loved all my teachers, I got on extremely well with all the pupils. I just thought they were very welcoming and yeah, very loving as people in general. So I like the UK for that reason.

I... my family, I come from quite a strict family which is quite a normal family in Kosovo, to be fair, so they were all about education in my family. And I was really involved with school projects, you know all the time I was part of the school council or something to do with - one could say - quite geeky, in a geeky way. But it was just a great experience. I still keep in contact with a lot of my teachers from High School and even from Primary School actually. So it's been a great, really great experience. I consider myself quite a lucky person. I don't really have any bad things to say, to be honest².

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)

² See Kaltrina's involvement Institute of Education (IOE) Beacon Schools Holocaust Education programme <http://tinyurl.com/jjtjddt>

(03:00) Oh, my parents? My mum, she became a hairdresser, when she came to England. She started going to college for a hairdressing course. And my dad is a taxi driver and yeah that's what they've been working as ever since: my dad's a taxi driver, my mum's a hairdresser. Although my mum became redundant recently with all the kind of, you know, jobs going down.

You know, as I said, I consider myself to be a very lucky person in all sorts of, in all aspects of my life.

(03:30) I studied English Literature, at Oxford, for three years. I love English Literature, I've got... I'm very passionate about writing and, you know, I love poetry. I love books. I love all those kind of things. Although, to be honest, once you get to University and you study English Literature, they kind of push those things down your throat until they don't become a hobby anymore, they become a kind of an obligation. But I still enjoy it and I'm glad I chose that subject because it's a mixture of everything, all my favourite things, like History, Politics, you know, all those kind of things.

(04:19) Ever since I was fourteen years, I've always - every single year of my life - I've volunteered somehow, for years. My biggest passion is, you know, the homeless subject. I find it really close to my heart, I don't know, because

when I went to Oxford, there was, I found, quite a lot of homeless people and there was such a contrast, as well, which I found really shocking because you see quite homeless people and it's such a rich part, it's a rich country but it's also a very rich city, Oxford. And seeing loads of homeless people, and myself as a student, I felt that I couldn't help that much, you know, I couldn't give a lot of money away so I started volunteering at the homeless shelter and I've been there, I was there for three years. So all my University life, I went there, you know, a few times a week and I helped and I did some, you know some projects with them, you know, to aid, to raise money and such things like that. And also, on the side, just working in charity shops when I could, you know, Oxfam and British Heart Foundation: all those little things.

Primarily my family friends so my parent's friends and my parent's family, you know, they come over. 'Cause to be honest in High School, in my High School, there was a few but there was hardly any Kosovans or Albanians in my year and, going to College, there was none and at University there was absolutely none that I ever knew. So, friendship-wise, I haven't had much contact until I've come to Kosovo but otherwise, yeah, you know, my family and friends, my family and family friends - that's about it.

You know, I came back for the experience but also, you know, because obviously it's a part of my life, I am a, I am a Kosovan, and I did, I wanted to experience how it is living here. I grew, you know, sometimes the culture, it's a bit difficult transferring from English culture to Kosovan. In some ways, I

prefer... I love the Kosovan culture: I love how close the families are, how close knit they are; how, you know, everyone goes, comes over all the time, it's absolutely fantastic. And obviously there are some, kind of, dynamics, some. There's the male and female dynamics that are a bit different, that are a bit hard getting used to in Kosovo.

But most of all I really wanted to - a personal project of mine - I wanted to build a homeless shelter here. And I'm trying to speak to a few people. It's very difficult but, yeah, that's another thing that's really striking because in England, you can almost become detached in some way because the homeless population, they're quite, they're middle aged so from 25 to 40, kind of thing. And in here, it's the opposite. There's a lot of women and children - especially children and old people - and it's really hard to see. It's really quite striking and I always really wanted to work with that.

However, now I am working at a University, I'm giving lectures and, you know, that's my job here. It's lovely, as I say... it's quite, a little bit difficult because it's just the start and I haven't... I start working pretty soon at the University giving lectures and it'll be good. But, you know, I'm just really hoping I can put this project on the way and I'm trying really hard but it's quite difficult to get contacts, for my homeless shelter project. We'll see how it goes.

I dunno - maybe this is just my opinion - but it's really hard to get through the culture of the homelessness as well because just talking to some people, I

don't think they think it's as big a problem, 'cause - especially people in Kosovo - I think, because of who they are as well - they're Romanians [Roma] and they are quite cast aside - and I think getting through that problem first and then the homeless shelter. We'll see how that goes.