

# Oral History Kosovo

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## INTERVIEW WITH CRISTINA MARÍ

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Duration: 115 minutes

Present:

1. Cristina Marí (Speaker)
2. Mia Crocetti Marzotto (Interviewer)
3. Donjetë Berisha (Camera)

*Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:*

*() – emotional communication*

*{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.*

*Other transcription conventions:*

*[ ] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension*

*Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.*

## Part One

**Cristina Marí:** My name is Cristina Marí. I was born in Ibiza so I'm from Spain and I'm 27, I'm about to become, to turn 28 in September.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** So you were born in Ibiza, how was that?

**Cristina Marí:** Well (laughs) being born [on] an Island, I realized as, as I spent more time outside my island, I always call, call it mine as if it was mine but it's, it's of everyone. No, I think it, it shapes you in way. It is a place that it's become very touristic and very crowded with the years. It was always since the '60s, '70s, but now it's becoming more and more every year. We're seeing very big growth in it, but at the same time I think that it shapes you to understand nature and the power of, how good it is when you have this closeness to nature in a way that it becomes something that you take for granted a lot. And when you travel and got the city more, [you] get into the city lifestyle of the rush-hour and cars everywhere and you live in between buildings. Or as I live here with a building right in front of me (laughs) you learn to appreciate a bit more the quality of life, of this kind of more chilled places like islands are.

Ibiza is a place that has become incredibly touristic. There's [are] so many also stereotypes about it, there's a conception of how you are maybe based on where you are from, if you are from there. But I was born in a, I mean I was born there and then I was raised in the countryside with dogs, chicken, ducks, all sorts of animals. Until I was pretty much 18 and then I travelled to Madrid to, to study there.

So I think it really shapes you. Anytime I go back home I have this feel that I have changed as well, also naturally we grow up and we assimilate the other values or lifestyles as I was saying. But being born there I think it, it also makes you, I don't know, appreciate things in a very intense way. When I go there and I look at the sky, I always see the stars and that's one thing that we might not realize how important it is until we're far from it.

However, it is also a small place and when I was living there, I mean it's a place where, a bit like Pristina, you get to know everybody more or less. Not like everybody but at least if you, if you are doing music for example or if you are doing journalism you get to know all the journalists or you get to know all the musicians, more or less you are in that circle. And I think that's something that only these kind of small places can give you, which is good in a sense, [on] one hand, [on] one hand but on the other hand it's claustrophobic sometimes (laughs), if I must say.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** So, so you went to, up to high school you were in School in Ibiza?

**Cristina Marí:** Ehem.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** Okay.

**Cristina Marí:** Yeah.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** And then you went to university in Madrid?

**Cristina Marí:** Yes. I, when I was in Ibiza, I always had this urge to travel but it wasn't always, I mean it was easy but if you don't have a very travelling family or I don't know, or these, I don't know, facilities in a way, travelling doesn't become so interesting until you actually do it for the first time maybe. I always wanted to travel but I didn't do it so much besides school trips and things like that. And then I decided to go to Madrid to start my studies in journalism and the reason why I decided to go there... I always find it a bit of a marking feature on me that I, I wanted to start from zero at a new place where I don't know anyone, where nobody knows me. Where I can, let's say, discover myself, discover my personality in a way that nobody can judge you from where you come from or what you've done before. And most of the friends [from] high school and most of youngsters in Ibiza, they always decide to go to Barcelona because it is closer, there's a bit more, there [are] some more options to travel, more connections during the day. There's also a lot of people already studying there so it becomes a little easier to connect immediately with, with the crowd there.

I decided to go to Madrid, I had been there for a judo championship, I used to do judo back in the days (laughs) and I really liked it, it had this kind of sense of neighborhood life, which I felt very comfortable with. I, I moved there in 2007 and I stayed there until, that's, I think 2011. For four years because my, my studies in journalism were a degree of five years before all the programs changed towards these more Bolognian programs of European Space Education. And I think I took the right decision (laughs).

Often I, I wanted to do other things while I was studying there. I wanted to study political science, I wanted to study law, I wanted to study history, I wanted to get into gen...[gender studies](laughs) because also... But at the same time through my degree I had options to study a bit all those different fields. I was always trying to do all sorts of complementary courses and trying to go to, to, to conferences and reporting training and...

But I think I was at a really good time there because it was a time when the whole *Indignados* (Outraged) movement took place. Which is a, is a movement that took place in 2011 in, in March if I'm not mistaken, in March or May... May, sorry. And it, it was a movement that totally reshaped the way that we organized as a society. I think it marked a lot the way people organize parallel resistance, if I can put it in those words (laughs).

And I were, and I took part in it, I got engaged as much as I could, at least for a month, for the beginning of it. Then it, it got decentralized to, in smaller protests, in smaller groups of work. At the time I was engaged with a group of people who were trying to, at journalism and how journalism can serve let's say, the public interest in an ethical way as well with a social responsibility. So for many days during that year in which you had to actually study for the final exam we were just trying to find a way and the time to go the square and, and see if we could join some of these discussion groups that were going on for more than a month. It was a really exciting time, I got to live thing like that, that

shape the way I see journalism, the way I also see my role as a citizen. I've tried to bring that wherever I've gone with myself.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** And were you already engaged in some sort of like active citizenship in Ibiza growing up, or was that something that you learned or you started in Madrid?

**Cristina Mari:** I will always remember the first big protest that I took part [in] and I'm very proud I took part in that one. It was in Ibiza, there were these, I was like sixteen or fifteen, fifteen, sixteen, it was like the two years before entering university. So my house, my high school was really close to an area where everything was kind of happening. There were these huge high roads, we used to call them the highway even though it wasn't exactly one highway but there was clearly interest behind the construction of these roads which were totally unnecessary for the, for the dimensions of our island... And will imply, the construction of these roads will imply that many houses will have to be destroyed, many neighbors that had been living there for a long time will have to be evicted from their houses.

There was this area very near my high school in which, it was considered the headquarters of the resistance against these roads. And all political parties had something to do in the construction of them. So I was not, it was truly a citizen resistance especially in the beginning. And I remember even my mother took part in the, in this protest sometimes. There were times in which the bulldozers would come to destroy these houses but neighbors and residents would come together and would make a chain of people to stop these bulldozers from destroying a particular house or from entering a particular field, a yard of the house or something.

And I was always trying to escape classes, me and some other colleagues, I remember one big protest that was basically organized by the, it was all students, it was all students from all the high schools. We all gathered in a very improvised way in front of the maximum, the highest organism of govern in the island. It's this council and we started there the protest, we occupied the, the council, we went out, we were driving all police crazy because we were absolutely unorganized. We were just occupying the street and marching and occupying and blocking all roundabouts in the center of the city (laughs). It took us hours, and perhaps it was the first time I escaped lessons to actually, not just, but I escaped lessons, but I took part in such an initiative that came really from this youth that didn't want to let this happen.

That was the first time I really saw the, the power of people. I, of course the roads took place and were built after in very dark circumstances, five in the morning, rainy days, bulldozers come and destroy everything. But it was really a lesson that I really also took in me very deeply because you saw people there defending their houses. Something as basic as your house, as you roof, the place where you've grown up, your memories are there, everything is there and destroying that also gave place to constructing. It was also a symbolic thing because destroying that core of resistance was like hitting the movement in a way, touching you as a citizen. Especially when the interests are not, not gonna benefit society in, in that regard.

So that was perhaps the first time that I really saw the strong power of people and I got engaged and... I remember that, of course my, my mother was often there and she never let me got too close. Because there were arrests from police and things like that. There were some people getting chained to the trees, it was all very, very dramatic in a way, if you look, looking at it now from the distance it's... For some people it was really painful to see that and to go through that.

I think when societies come together and create a movement of resistance that doesn't succeed, that doesn't, that is nevertheless defeated, I feel as well, you get a little damaged as a citizen, as a person and you bring that with you in a way. Perhaps as people you bring that as well and... I don't know, seeing these, when I, when I went to Madrid and saw this protest taking place and these whole resistance movements as well going on in a very strong way I couldn't... I was curious the first, the first time I was in one of these gatherings that kind of proceeded these movements was in the Faculty of Science of Information, which is, was my faculty.

I remember I saw some posters there in stree... [on] the faculty walls and they were just gathering to, to discuss about Bologna programs of the European Space of Education. And I didn't know what this was at all, I had just started in the university and I was just curious what is this that people are sitting down to discuss about, and to actually protest against. And I remember it was a really small group of people the first time I went. It was maybe three, four older students from different faculties as well that had started gathering, from philosophy, from journalism as well, history. And I started learning slowly and it totally caught me as well in the way that things were happening because it was not, "Let's just go and have a protest." It was actually, "Let's sit down and read all this program and understand how it works so that we can create arguments against it."

That was really, that was not just about protesting, it was a smart resistance, it was really also creating a lot of networks, sitting down in the faculty for a few hours. I remember that we got permission to, to have an overnight. We overnighed at the, inside the faculty. It was called, something like, "getting... well, let's just call it overnight in English, it was, might be a little complicated to translate. But for several nights we stayed overnight in the faculty, it was also happening in other faculties like history or philosophy. But then [the] idea was that we will use this time 'cause during the day we had to study and the idea was not to lose class or to miss time from our studies and get bad at our degrees. But it was just to use some time together to think what actions can we take, how can these legally be fought, can we go on TV and have a bit of discussion about these, try to bring these issues more [on] a bigger scale. And then of course [there] were protests and marches but it was also about how we create networks and the spaces of discussion so that these issues can be discussed as much as needed and see where it can be fixed if it can be fixed or how can we contribute to it as a students or, or as activists in that regard.

So I was part of this for a while and that, that really also contributed to, to my way of seeing how [as] citizens we can get active and change things. And then slowly of course the movement went from, we as students were fighting let's say these, these programs, but other people were fighting about public health, other people were fighting about public educations in schools and all these movements eventually... I remember also it was very important, the movement fighting for a right to housing and all these came together eventually and the whole *Indignados* movements happened as a, let's say a, it was a natural result of all these parallel movements that were taking place at the same time in different fields. And everybody came together and it was a very public way of discussing public issues. There were people for more than a month, in a public square not just in Madrid but in all the cities of the country, in most of the cities in the country, thousands discussing how can we improve the health system, how can we fight for a better environment policies, how can we fight for better media, more

responsible media, media that serves the public interest, how can we change the constitution if necessary, in which way can we do it.

And so it took a lot of work and there was also another one about feminism and women's rights. But also there was the one where men were gathering to see how their role in society could play differently and improve as well everyone's equality. And so this whole movement, I witness it, I was part of it and it truly changed or shaped my approach to everything I do today. I think that that's what made me, I've been in a way trying to apply in my work whether I've been doing journalism or I've been working in an organization creating forums of discussion or more advocacy actions and things like this.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** So, you mentioned your mother, you were having these types of conversations also at home or how was it in your family? I mean, back then when you were in Ibiza, in Madrid?

**Cristina Marí:** I think when I was young and when all these protests were going on there was a... In general it really, it really pushed me forward to see my mother protesting. She's been always relatively engaged with social issues when it comes to go to a protest perhaps is something that is becoming a bit, maybe it's a natural thing of becoming less hopeful and seeing that sometimes a protest is not enough and perhaps they stop going. But all these things were happening, [on] one hand it's funny it's, my mother is always the one that is a bit more socially engaged perhaps, my parents understand this in a bit of different way. My father is the one that is a bit more pessimist, who thinks none of this is going to change anything. He is a truly, a man with values, very serious values but when it comes to protests or politics or things like this, there's not any hope for him that anyone is going to address the issues the way they should be addressed, if I can say.

But so often politics has become a topic that I don't discuss anymore, I try not to, there is, these fights all the time I suppose that I can just say in every family there are fights about politics, in mine as well. My sister always sees me as this idealist who thinks that [she] can change the world. She always says the Ombudsperson, she calls me. But I think it's, it's natural that every person in the family plays a different role a bit. I think we make a balance in a way with each other. I think though that it was really good always to see my mother in protests, for example when there would be police arresting people you know, it gave me like a, like an, it's okay to reveal and resist because sometimes you are going to have to and it doesn't mean that the state is gonna be good to you or anything like that. But it was a role model for, for me in that, in that sense to see, to see her being part of these protests and I've always... It hasn't stopped me to know that I, of course my dad many times told me, "Oh you have so many..." there is this expression in Spanish that, "you have many birds in the head," I'm not sure in English will be the...

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto :** What, what is it in Spanish?

**Cristina Marí:** "*Tienes pájaros en la cabeza,*" it means that you are full of ideas and idealism and then you build castles in the air that's the English comparison, I believe, so I, I know really. I think in a way that deep inside they, they support this idealism and, and this permanent fight for as long as it's for true principles. I think that, that's what they, what they would like to see happening, you know at least

that it's a constructive approach to things and not any rational way of behaving. I guess your parents always want you to be rational so I think that, that for sure.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto :** And can, can I ask what, what your parents do?

**Cristina Marí:** Yeah...

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto :** ...what they're working on?

**Cristina Marí:** Yes, yes. My father is a plumber. He's worked all his life, most of his life as a plumber. And my mother works in housekeeping and my sister she, she's older than me, she's five years older than me and she, she works in tourism with hotels, booking. She changes from time to time a little bit but everyone in a way is a little bit connected to the tourism industry but, it's, it's good. It's a good...

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto :** And they still live in Ibiza or?

**Cristina Marí:** Yup. They still live in Ibiza and they will always live there. And it will always be the place where I come back, always. We have a house there, our home is there. My mother, she arrived to Ibiza when she was 14 years old from Granada, from [the] south of Spain. And she had two aunts working back in the time in a hotel as, they were working as waitress of the hotel, as well cleaning. And my grandfather, her father as well had worked, had worked there. But it was always interesting to learn as well about her life struggle because I think as a woman, especially as a woman you, you have a lot of struggles in general.

When she finished the school, this was around '70s, I believe she was she was born in 1960 so around the end of Franco's dictatorship I would say. I think before that she, she came to Ibiza. And I find it maybe, I guess she didn't, she didn't want to continue studying. It was not about money, the, the family, I mean they were a humble family and they wanted to keep on, they were saying, "If you want to go to school it's an option, you don't have to work." But my mum decided to stop the school and I asked her once, "Why?" and she said, "I didn't like it." You know. I think, school what it was then and what is now it's, it's very different. And I guess it was a very strict place where you will get punished and you will get punished by holding books on your both hands, on your knees for a while. And it was a place that you will get, with a ruler you will get hit on the hands and things like this that I suppose were not so welcoming to, to a child to continue being in school.

And she decided to come to the island where her aunts were at that time to work. And I always hear fantastic stories and she has a lot of laughter when she talks about the time when she used to work at these hotel. And then she had me and my sister, well she stopped working and, and took care of us and much more. Not much more but (laughs) she stopped working so she was at home with us. So, I think that this has always changed of course the way I see my mother because she had, as a woman as well her own struggles and, and it's, it's inspiring to see how women in the world go through life in general.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto :** So you mention nature and animals. Do you mind sharing any particular memories about your childhood that you keep dearest?



**Cristina Marí:** Well perhaps I... I remember especially now that we are in summer, I remember with love a lot the summer days back there. We were never such a family that will go to the beach a lot even though we live near, really close to it. But summers were always related to, to doing things with hands all the time. So I had these really, creative sister as well that she, we would go together to the beach, get stones, paint them, we will do all sorts of arts and crafts and this is something that I still keep a little bit. Now here when I get a little bit bored I just go, I do some clay or I, I like to keep a bit, this way I was spending time that is not always on Netflix or watching series even though I, I do that of course as well.

But I guess the, the summer there is a little bit different. It's a lot of being in the outside [sic], not being inside the home. We used to really spend a little time playing outside, you know, catching each other, running after each other and with my cousins, they would come as well sometimes to spend the summers to Ibiza from Granada. I would go there as well and I'm... My, my childhood was quite into the rural [world] as well, I mean, I would help my grandmother to, to plant potatoes or things like this... And I loved it, I loved that and this is something that I miss now that I'm getting older. I miss being part, having that everyday closer and, and I somehow reject to, to embrace this city life but I still resist. I wish if I, if I can, one day I will in the future, I don't know, I'll just live in the countryside whether it's here or anywhere else. I will get back a bit to that because even if I, even if I don't live in Ibiza or something, I still... And even when I go back there is I'm, I'm there for two weeks, it's not like I'm all day in the countryside helping my parents with a, with a, with the plants, with the trees, watching things or... But I, I it's something that I would love to do one day, to get back to it and somehow makes you be closer to your roots in a way. I don't know, it's, it's something...

But something that I loved when I was a child is always being surrounded by animals. Still when I go home it's, we have eight or nine dogs, we have a horse now, we have a parrot who speaks and speaks all sorts of words and speaks so... He says all our names of the family, all the dogs names, all the neighbors names so it's pretty, we're never bored if we really want to, if we don't want to be bored. One thing I, I like, was the way we had the summer because it was a lot in this outside. My father would put out the speakers of the music and he will just play some music, whatever, random summer hits were going on, which is not really in line with this kind of rural calm, but it was really funny and then I will play with the dogs even if I was all by myself. I will have this...

But I used to spend a lot of time with my, with my friends at their houses or and mine, hours of just playing in the outside, we [would] not really turn on the TV at all for anything. And I mean having fun that way as well. Now also when I grew up I, I used to, I mean I used to do everything, I would, I would go to school and my mother and my father they, they didn't have any issues with me going to all sorts of classes. It's not like they wanted, they were not this kind of parents that leave you at school at nine and pick you up at nine after you spent your whole day in sort from one class to another. But I was always asking, "Can I get register into athletics?" There's this, you know, at five if I can go right after class or I will, do basketball or handball, or later I started doing judo and I started doing music classes as well. So I was always super active and I miss this hyperactivity that I had when I was a child somehow.



Now I, I took it the other way, I find it difficult to be completely dedicated to all the different things that you like to do, so I picked one maybe and I have been as dedicated as possible to it and, and eventually I, guess I'll, I'll relearn how to multitask in that, in that sense I'm doing a hundred things.

## Part Two

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** You mentioned judo, how did you get into judo in Ibiza?

**Cristina Mari:** I started doing judo when I was, I think, around eight. I'm not sure, but I think I was eight. And I was always very physically... empowered if I can put it (laughs)... I was not scared, also fighting or I will, I will get not in fights, fights but with boys and you know. Also there were a couple of boys in my class that did judo. So sometimes... children, we can get a bit hyper. And I will end up talking with them, and they told me they were doing judo, I remember. And I was like, "Hmm, this sounds like something I will like."

So I told my mother I wanted to try it out. I started and, and I did judo for ten years, until I was 18. And then I continued a little bit but, and... When I moved to Madrid I stopped doing any major... I mean everything I was doing in Ibiza stopped, I will only do it when I was going back home on holiday or something. But I try to stay engaged with everything but of course with time I stopped. But I did judo for ten years and it always made me feel very secure and confident.

I am a black belt of judo so... I also, when I was in Madrid I took some training of self-defense. Which were more meant to be applied into the street, not just because judo is a sport and you know... It's not the same when you are in a, in this environment where you know what you are doing, and your rival knows what you are doing and, and we fight. But also I felt like it was something that will make me very, feel confident and, and eventually prepare me for any unexpected situation in the street. I don't know if, I always think if it will something happen, I don't know if I will be able to react. Because the brain plays you in many different ways. But it made me feel very good, and it was also, it was also sport that taught me a lot about hmm... The self and the effort that you need to do if you really wanna achieve something.

I was lucky to have a really good coach, his name is Teo, Teo Blasquez. And he, he still continues to be, to be the coach there of our club in, in my town, in my hometown. So we learned a lot, more than just techniques. It was like a process of discovering yourself, your capacities, your fears, your... What are you capable of... Or sometimes for, it happened to me that I was in a weight, judo works with weights, so I was in, for a while I was in a weight that I wouldn't have a rival. So I will got to a competition and I didn't have anyone to fight with because of my weight. I was a lightweight so it will always be a little bit tricky to have somebody on the other side.

So this was really annoying because I will win championships without fighting at all. I will be alone, I would be the only one in the category. So it really taught me that not because you have a medal you

have a, (laughs) you are the best. The best means a lot of other things. So it was a bit, it became a competition with myself where do I want to reach, that's my win or my, or my losing mark. So, so yeah.

I will have loved to have more (laughs) competition. I loved it actually, and, and I love it now when there's more people doing the same thing I do. People who I can learn from, also people I can work with. I think that's way more healthier than, than being all [on] your own, monopolizing the whole category for yourself (laughs).

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** That's very interesting. So when you, when you moved from Ibiza to Madrid, as, did you feel, how did that feel in your interactions with other people? Being the one coming from an island, being the only one coming from an island, any particular recollections?

**Cristina Mari:** (smiles) Yeah, I remember, I... When I moved to Madrid I chose a student dorm, you could... There is a tradition of students dorm in Madrid. And there are some sort of communities, they are like big communities. And I chose this students dorm which was like, had a lot of history. It had this history that in the past it had been a place of resistance as well during the '60s, and culturally, cultural resistance especially. And it had this music and jazz club, so I felt like I was in this place that, I, I felt like it was an honor to be. But actually, it was really, extremely down to earth.

And then we had these, of course the first year there's sometimes that... As a newcomer there's some jokes and, from the veterans that have been living there for a long time. I hated that part (laughs) I didn't really, it wasn't that bad. It was alright, it kind of united us. That's a little bit more into, into looking at that as, "No, we don't like this part." But there were also some, I remember at the time, I think it was the same year... And there were two guys as well from Ibiza, they were from a part all the way to the North. I'm from all the way to the South. So I had no connection at all with them. And that was also interesting as well for me. Because you get used to saying that you come from... and you're gonna know everybody but actually [it] didn't happen that way when, when it happened, when I went to Madrid.

So that was one good thing, I guess. It made me realize that the place, the world is bigger than you think. And your island where you come from it's not so small. But then it was also, it was also nice because I didn't know anybody, at all. And that was really good. I felt really good because I felt like everything that happens from now on is all on me. I am the one to judge, people are gonna judge me as much as possible for my action now, not for where I come from or not for anything else. So that was really nice. And I met people that opened my mind a lot as well.

It went really fast. The first year we were, we were a group of... I mean we, we usually made friendships with people of your corridor. But then also you would get, end up there were a lot of groups of work as well. Like you could get engaged in the radio club, or you can get into sports as well, or you could get engaged into human rights group as well, doing some activities. So it was a bit like this small University clubs thing for each of the student dorm. We were 400 people living there. So it was a big... It was a fun community in a way. So when I was there I also took a lot of these initiatives

on... And I was lucky to see a lot of very unique concerts. Because as I said this place had a big history of cultural events taking place there.

So as students we will go in our pajamas to see a concert of the biggest flamenco singer in the country or things like this, or some jazz world start or something. And we would literally go in our pajamas and see this whole thing for free. So I was really privileged to be where I was. I remember even though it was and it sounds really cool, the couches were all burned from people smoking cigarettes and just destroying them (laughs). It was really not that fun. The rooms were especially small. Because the idea of the architects when they built that place was that people, students will spend most of their time in the common areas. So the rooms were extremely small. There was only place for a bed and a sink, a small wardrobe and a desk. And it was all like literally the small bed, the wardrobe {explains with her hands} in front, the sink and that's it.

But then the common areas were really big and quite frequent. In between each corridor there was a space. And you will often not know people. But somehow slowly when you go to the bathroom and you find the same group of people sitting at their, sitting there every night, you end up as well joining and just spending your time cause yea... So I think that also has something a bit to do...

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** And you lived in the dorm for all your University time...

**Cristina Marí:** Two years...

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** Two years...

**Cristina Marí:** Two years I spent there then I moved to, then I moved to an apartment. They were about to close the students dorm. And because of the history, the cultural history that it had there was also a movement (laughs) in which I got engaged to stop the, the closing. Because a bank was taking over, overtaking the ownership and they wanted to renew it. But here was a very big fear that they will never open it again because of a, a reform of the whole building will take a lot of money and investment. And there was fear that a ban was not going to invest on this. So I also got engaged into that. And eventually I stepped back and I moved, I moved to, to an apartment with, with two friends, Javi and Raquel. And we lived there for, for a year. The next year another friend of mine moved in, a choreographer dancer. My other roommate was a musician studying telecommunications. So there was a lot of music going on in that apartment. I also play music a little bit so it was quite nice to, to live there.

I lived in the center of the city, so it felt a bit different. It felt a bit more grown-up maybe, more adult in a way (laughs) when you live with just two people... It was nice, it was really nice. And, and then eventually I did my last year in Romania with an exchange. I was in Bucharest with one of these Erasmus scholarships. And I, and I worked, I studied there the last year of the studies. So it was a bit of a closing of the whole University years, until I came here.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** So why Bucharest for your last year?

**Cristina Marí:** Hmm {drinks water} in Spain like other countries in Europe you have these Erasmus scholarships and they only give you a few options. I mean a few, there's quite a lot in Europe. I could only access those that were in English because I didn't speak French, I didn't speak German, so English was the only thing that I could work with. And there was some, some opportunity to go to northern Europe because you could get schooled in English as well. I think in... not sure if Norway, Sweden you could go, Denmark as well. And you could also go to, to the UK and then you could also... The furthest point you could go was Romania and Bulgaria.

One was the University of Bucharest and the other one was American University of Blagoevgrad, to which many people of Pristina have actually gone, which is now funny. Because I was about to, that was my second option. My first option was Romania, I really wanted... After four years in Madrid, again I wanted to go to a new place, somehow start from zero. And I took it as a year off, in which I will really try to get more into journalism. And as it was the last and it was also a bit of a bridge towards the, perhaps, working, potentially working as journalist or... I wasn't sure where it will bring me. I was sure I wanted to a very different place where I could really learn a lot.

All I knew from Romania at the time, all I knew, I knew some Romanian people. My, my dad's, one of my dad's friends, he's, he's a plumber as well, he works in construction with him. We know him from every year he comes to work from Romania in Spain. And he lived with his wife for many years in, in Ibiza as well. All I knew mostly from the people that I had around was that it had a lot of migration. Which was a topic that I was really interested in as well as a journalist, as a journalist. So I thought that it could be a place that I could really learn from and about.

And I went to Bucharest, I got the scholarship to go there for the nine months. So it was the last year, the whole last year. And then once I was there, there was this whole protest movement happening again (laughs). Which I really got as well, of course a bit into it. And I met a lot of really good people there through this protest. And it was a time in which they wanted to privatize the ambulance services. And everything got together {shows with her hands} that was just the cherry on the top of a lot of other policies that were not working well. And protest just started going on for every day as well at the, at the square of the University in Bucharest. They started in a different city but then in Bucharest as well they became bigger and bigger.

They were inspired as well by Occupy Wall Street protests in, in the U.S, *Indignados* protest in Spain. And I remember when I said that I was from Spain that I had been in *Indignados* protests. They were really interested to learn how it happened and I just explained it it's not like I did anything but it... They took this kind of approach as well, where they sat down to think what can we do to change things besides protesting. Which was really, really good as well to witness. And I got to meet a lot of people in the resistance as well, artists really forward-thinking people who perhaps there I met people who were more into the art. And, and I learned more about how art spaces are changing the way we also approach cooperative and, and that was really interesting to see as well there. And then I, well there is where I did the first trip on my own. I did a, I did a trip.

I was really keen to travel on my own backpacking. And I came to the Balkans because it was close, relatively close so I could really visit different countries with a low budget so that was good and that's how I came to Kosovo for the first time.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** What other countries have you visited on the tip?

**Cristina Mari:** I went from Belgrade to, from, from Bucharest went to Belgrade then I went to Zagreb first, then I went down to Bosnia, Montenegro, Albania. I crossed through the north of Albania and I met some people in the way which I joined for a couple of days. I remember joining an Australian, a couple of Australians and a Canadian. And because I was really interested in learning as well from other experienced travelers. My idea was that I will become a traveler for a long term but just one (laughs). So, I joined this Canadian who was really experienced into hitchhiking. I really wanted to learn hitchhiking, not just to learn but I felt more confident if I would go with someone who is more experienced and so on.

And, in Bajram Curri, which is [on] n the border of Albania we, we thought we might stay there. We didn't know much about the place, but the place was really small and there was nothing much there to see or to do or, or to sleep on. So we, we were just talking in the street and I remember seeing this but this man and a woman approached us and just asked they were just curios, "Where you from? What are you doing here?" "Traveling." "Okay, have a nice trip." Everything went...

A bit later we decided that we should leave the town and try to go to Peja, to the city of Peja and we hitchhiked. And this couple stopped with a car and picked us up and drove us to Peja and we told them, "Well, we're not sure we're gonna find somewhere to stay and then go tomorrow or after tomorrow to Pristina or something." And we stayed for a while in the city trying to find some accommodation, it was always without any guides or anything really no, no, no books or advice in advance. And we didn't find anything, it was a bit expensive this hotel and again somehow we see this, this man, his name, his name is Hasan and his friend and they told us, "Look, you can stay at our place and tomorrow you can take the train or, or you can take the bus to Pristina if you want."

So they invited us to spend the night there at their, at his house. And we didn't stay one night, we stayed two nights and three days and it was a very marking way of, of getting to know someone in Kosovo for the first time. They were incredibly hospitable. The first night they organized a barbecue with all the neighbors and he is from a village called Lubeniq, really close to the city, it's not far. It's a few kilometers outside Peja. And they, they had this village suffer some massacre as well during the, during the, during the war. And we didn't really ask because I, I was always like really concerned about this issue of, of war and how to approach it. I didn't want to be intrusive, at all. I'm a journalist but at that time I was a traveler and I didn't mean to intrude into your life and because I'm a foreigner you have to open up the most painful time of your life and, and tell me about it. So, I didn't really ask but it came very naturally to explain us. And they showed us some books that some foreign journalists had documented these massacres and everything. And they opened up a lot about their history and about their experiences and they were incredibly hospitable in and kind and...

That night we had this barbecue, the next day we had *pite* and all sorts of, we had also lunch and we went to this, to the city we had coffee at the, at the hotel Dukagjini, if I'm not mistaken. We made all

the, all the tour, they brought us by car, they drove us. They had, he had some young relatives who told us about what they were studying and trying to find a job. I remember this girl who was also part of the family, who lost her father during the war so she was only with her mother and her sisters. And she, she had her husband in, in Belgium and she was looking forward to leave and to go there as well to leave.

So, they really opened their house, their hearts and they told us about their, their lives and sooner, soon, later we, we felt like okay, we've been given enough and we left they, they drove us to, to the city. When I came here it was great because I remember the first day, I think it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May which is the World Press Freedom Day and... Sorry?

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** What year?

**Cristina Marí:** This must have been 2012, 2012 May 3<sup>rd</sup> I arrived in Pristina and there was this "World Press Freedom Day" taking place. There was a concert in Mother Teresa boulevard, there was a really nice atmosphere. And I remember I hung out there, talked to some journalists some people as well from Serbia that had come to take part in the whole event, in the festival. And it was really a good atmosphere. And then when I came to work, months later I came to work, I enter my office, my new office which was Kosovo 2.0's office and I see the poster of this event, World Press Freedom Day. And I realized then, only then that actually Kosovo 2.0 had organized that, that event where I had been a few months earlier.

I had not met anybody, I had no contract with anybody but it was a bit, it was funny to see how is, how is life in a way so, yeah. When I came here the first day I was surprised to see that there was such a celebration of the vindication of the World Press Freedom day. I really liked it as a journalist of course because I guess it's something that maybe we've taken for granted even though it's not there all the time. And we don't claim it as ours as we should, as much as we should so, I really felt good to see that, to be part of it here.

And then the next days in Pristina I walk the streets, I, I talk to people. I, I remember going to the National Library to see the building inside because outside [it] was... I remember I wrote and I read later on about the building and how I felt about it from the outside "It felt really claustrophobic" that's what I, what... the, the words that I wrote in a journal I was writing. And then I entered and I met this man who started talking to me. I guess he just saw that I'm some foreigner walking around as a tourist and he was curious about [it] and he started talking to me and I'm... He, he spoke Italian because he had lived in Switzerland for a long time, a part where they speak Italian so I kind of understand it and I understood [it] then and we had a conversation.

Everywhere I went there was this real openness to, to just speak and, and meet you and help you. I remember a book presentation. He, he used to work in the national library but I think he was some sort of like handyman there or something, I am not sure I, I never got to know. But he just gave me a book that has been presented there. He just wanted to give me a gift, something to remember the, the experience of being there. And that was really nice, I mean there was these kind of things happening

all the time. So later on I left, I left Pristina. It was a really nice treat, I was supposed to stay for one day there, I stayed three. I liked the vibe for that time that I was here.

And then months later I finished the studies. I went to Amsterdam Utrecht to do a summer thing for a couple of weeks. My idea was to stay there and to find something that will be a job or... I didn't want to study masters directly because I wasn't sure what I want to do, if I'm gonna study again for two years I want to be very sure what I'm doing and I'm not. So I took some time. And when I was in Utrecht I realized that it's too clean (laughs), if I can put this in these words. It wasn't about cleanness, it was about the fact I didn't know what I will contribute with to this place. I wasn't sure how as a journalist I could be working there. I try to find some jobs but they were all requiring me to speak Dutch. Very soon I realized that it was just not my place, you know, people were, seemed very comfortable having, of course it's not all like that and I'm sure that there's a lot of issues that people take care about there, but it just felt a bit difficult to do or, or not so interesting for a new journalist.

So, I remember while I was there still in Utrecht I, I searched online jobs for journalists. I really, I had this very clear idea that I wanted to work abroad. Not because it was a crisis in Spain with employment because there was a lot of unemployment and there is still... But it was more about the fact that again I wanted to go to a very different place, learn as much as I can from it and, and keep on learning in new experiences.

And I remember seeing this internship opportunity for Kosovo 2.0 at this portal. And I had been here and I had the good feeling about it. I applied, I sent my CV, it was for a few hours out of, out of the [dead]line but they answered the next morning and they said they had accepted the application. This was the only CV I sent that whole period when I was supposed to be looking for a job. When I saw, I mean I had just started, but when I saw that I was so convinced that I'm gonna wait for these and see what happens. I bought the flight back home to Spain, decided that [the] Netherlands are not for me. And waited for that Skype interview I had with who later became my, my boss and my colleague. And, and, and three weeks later I was here Pristina working initially as an intern. Then a bit later as a staff writer and also helping out with project coordination and now as a program manager.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** So, during your time as a journalist or, sorry during your time in university and also in, in Romania and then in, in Netherlands were you publishing any of your writings?

**Cristina Mari:** I started being a "journalist" {makes finger quote marks} if I can put it like that, by being an intern at the local newspaper in Ibiza. Every summer I was an intern during my studies the first three years and that was like, that was the real school because I was an intern but I was doing the job of the other journalists. It was the most read newspaper, it was the newspaper that everybody buys. In Ibiza there is a long tradition of reading the local paper. And I worked there I covered all sorts of issues, cultural also sometimes some political issues, going to press conferences, going to interviews, doing features. So I made the school of, of that let's say the local journalism. And that was a real, for me always that was a real learning process because you get to understand all the struggles, all the problems that you can have. Also, you do all sorts of stories so it wasn't always this kind of protocol journalism or these guys said this, and this guys said these, there were also a lot of chances to do..



features and to look into issues more. But of course it's still a daily paper and you don't have that space like in a magazine or something like that.

Then, when I was in Romania I wrote a few pieces for a, for a web portal in Spanish focusing on European countries. And I didn't get to publish more than that until I came here and then I started working for Kosovo 2.0. But for me the experience at the local newspaper *Diario de Ibiza* was the most, hey, you know... When sometimes you're working like replacing journalists that are on holidays, that's what interferes really often doing summer in these kinds of newspapers. But it was a, it was a real learning experience and I got to learn as well from other professional journalists who were there from the editors. And it was, it was hard, I mean some, it's not like it was harsh but it was very direct. There is one day to do the news, there is one day to do the whole thing, the sixty, eighty pages that this newspaper has, so whatever you do it has to go to print. So, it was, it was intense and I really liked it, I really like these kind of local journalism.

And then when I, when I arrived here to Prishtina and I started working at Kosovo 2.0 which is a magazine and at the time I was working, I worked at the, for the first time I worked in the Sex edition of the magazine. So of course you had time to create a story, to research, to do interviews. And it was another really good learning experience because you have a totally different approach, you have to embrace all of the news about these issues, what go beyond them, find new perspectives. And this was as well another process that filled me in the, another approach of journalism. So that was really good and of course the Sex edition was a bit interesting experience as well.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** So, can you share a little bit more about the progress at Kosovo 2.0 in terms of like, your role?

**Cristina Mari:** Yeah, I'll tell you from the beginning.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** And maybe some dates too, so that we, yeah...

**Cristina Mari:** Yeah, so I started working, I perfectly remember the day I landed here, it was September the 12<sup>th</sup> of 2012 and I started working as an intern. I was, I had finished my studies and everything and I remember the first days I got the first assignments for the magazine. It was the day we were working on the Sex edition. And it was very interesting because I was always very interested in gender issues, in feminism, in anything related to body and mind. And so to have the chance to participate in a project that is looking at sexuality and how it influences our lives in, in, as a part of society. It was really, truly inspiring as well to be there, and interesting, and challenging because I had my own ideas and everybody had other ideas so we put them together.

I, I, I was doing, I did a story about transgender people, well it was actually, was a story about a doctor in Belgrade who is very famous across the world for his surgeries, to do sex reassignment from, from, sorry, from, from, from female to male. So it was particularly interesting traveling there. And I was also doing another story about intersexual individuals and how these, these persons are affected by their sexuality and what are the ideas about it especially here, in this context.

Then I did other stories for the magazine, which were really, as a journalist of course encouraging that I had the chance to work in such projects. Every week we had these editorial meetings. Which were a totally new concept of editorial meeting for me, because I came from a newspaper and when you come from a newspaper you have editorial meetings that last for ten minutes. And basically everybody gets the assignment for whatever press conference they have to go and run. And here they were, they they, they, there were editorial meetings for this one and future, and future magazines where everybody was involved, photographers, photo editors, of course the staff writers, the interns. And, and everybody had, well, let's say these brainstorming meetings would last for two hours or something, just giving ideas, trying to find new perspectives - how can we speak about migration, how can we speak about sexuality while we are embracing the issues coming out of migration, for example.

So, it was really, it has been always really challenging. Because you are at the same time responsible for creating new narratives, for triggering new narratives and new public discussions on issues that had really strong public stances and narratives as well, that are very established and you are challenging that with what you're doing. You have to do it, in a way that is not going to scare you but also going to explain you and, and involve you, into these discussion.

In the beginning I was an intern working in the Sex edition. Then this internship was supposed to end after, actually it was supposed to end after a month, but then I had the resources to stay longer and I really wanted to stay and finish my stories. And after three months I had, I had to leave I mean, I was supposed to leave. But two things happened. The first one, well not in order but not in order of priority. But one of them was that. We published the Sex edition, this came accompanied by a lot reactions from different parts of society. When we launched the magazine there [were] several groups of people who were protesting the launch of this publication, because they argued that it was the generating the use, and the magazine had... part of its content was looking at homosexuality and masturbation and issues like these. It was looking as well at things like sexual education in public schools or how the international community presence has also been in line with an increase prostitution, illegal prostitution and human trafficking in a way as well. It was looking at a lot of different issues. But perhaps this one that was looking at homosexuality was more picked up by, by media and also by, by the groups that were opposite in this publication.

And the day we launched it, I was there and we launched it at Boro Ramiz which is the Red Hall not sure. And it, it's a very central venue and we had prepared a big party. And we were also organizing during the day some screenings, we had the Vagina Monologues being screened and some interviews that we had done with artists, sociologists about their perspectives on sexual, sexuality and more.

When we were finishing the preparations for the, for the launch of the, of the discussion that we were going to have , where we had invited an artist, an artist, sorry ,an activist from Serbia and also from Kosovo. They were reading one letter to each other that they had written, which had a lot to do as well with let's say cross-border cooperation and, and much more as well than any thoughts on sexuality alone. It was very, embracing a lot of different issues.

Just a few, an hour or so before that a group of people, of thugs came into the place destroying everything and screaming some radicals things and "Allahu Akbar" and, and some things like these.

And then they left and everything was destroyed. And that was quite shocking that was quite a reality shock not only for me but also for my colleagues from here as well, people here, activists who didn't, who were not aware of this level of homophobia or that the level of homophobia could be manifested in such an aggressive way in a very particular moment.

And this happened but we went on with our, with our event, the discussion took place among broken mannequins and dolls and things like this. And by the evening around two hundred, three hundred people had gathered in front of the venue to protest against the party that we were having in the evening, which we had a DJ invited, we had a whole venue. We expected maybe around a thousand people coming, it was going to be really big. And it was a mix of radicalized Islamists and also some hooligans from football teams and football groups that had been exchanging a lot of comments on social media. They had been also writing in comment sections of news portals, which were not at the same time being careful about the moderation of those comments and so everything a real, real mess of comments of hate speech and, and everything resulted in this event happening that way.

We had to cancel the party because we could not secure the place. Even though people wanted to come, even we would have loved to have it. Security was not guaranteed and the police was there and everything but it was really uncertain whether the security will be there for everybody. And based on that, the decision was taken to cancel it. The day after of course everything, everything on media because actually we had some cameras there. We had some press there already that were doing some interviews for the, for the event and, and so everything was on, on camera and it went in a huge discussion on the media as well. But it was really at the same time, it was good that it created a lot of discussion and even though it wasn't always the right way of discussing about issues like this, it was perhaps being discussed at a much more visible way. There was visibility of, there was visibility of both the LGBT community but also there was visibility of the level of homophobia and where it can go and actions that need to be taken became more urged.

So, after this happened then, of course, I felt like this thing that we're doing, it might look like just a, a 178 pages of paper but it's having an impact. So I really want to keep on working on this. And at the same time I had met who is not still my partner and we, I also wanted that to continue. So for several reasons and everything came together and, and, and I was offered a job to continue working as well at Kosovo 2.0 as a staff writer and also projects more involved in the, in the in the strategic development of the organization. And so I continued working up until now.

And then I have been working on both, I have been working as a journalist for the organization and I've been working as a program manager. When I've been working as a journalist, I especially covered arts issues, arts related issues, I have, I love doing long interviews (laughs) and, and I also like all social issues as well. So I had the opportunity to do some, some features and to work as a journalist. And at the same time I discovered that I could also translate work that you do as a journalist from the organizational side as a project coordinator, and today a program manager by being as well behind all the types of actions. And we were trying to organize discussions that are more and more gathering and including more and more people that are having some sort of, creating dialogue about issues with perspectives that are lacking in the public debates in general and the media or...

So, I tried to translate, to move this function of the journalist to as well the active citizen side and I keep doing both. Now I do, I don't do so much journalism right now, because I'm fully dedicated to, to [the] program of the organization and thinking of actions activities, advocacy that we can do to, to move things forward parallelly with the editorial production that we do.

### Part Three

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** Issues that you've worked on, that you feel particularly close to? Or that have...

**Cristina Marí:** As a...

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** That have marked your experience here?

**Cristina Marí:** As a journalist or in general?

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** Well working, working these years at Kosovo 2.0. In general, as a journalist and as a project, program manager.

**Cristina Marí:** (laughs) Hmm of course the Sex edition was really defining work that I really loved doing. Not only because it was the first time that I had come here and worked for the first time with an editorial team like this one. But also because of the issues that I was dealing with. I've been always very interested in sexuality, feminism and all sorts of issues related to gender and politics. But also migration has been an issue that has interested me for a long time.

And when I was working on the Migration magazine, I, I wrote a story about a Spanish man who was marrying a Kosovar woman. And this, of course, I was relating to this story a lot because I am in a particular situation in which I have a partner who cannot visit my country because of visas. And visas are not given, not even as a tourist, or not even as a scientist visiting [the] World Fair of Scientists there. There's no visas at all. So it was an issue that I was very close to. And though the Migration magazine as well I, I put that story there. Which was pretty unique, not mine, it was a different (laughs) two people.

But also migration is an issue that I found, I find very close to, to myself. Perhaps because, because I moved as well and I am a migrant in a way, I am a migrant, not in a way but full way. But also because I think it's really changing our societies a lot and of course it's a very current issue. So working into that magazine was really, particularly as well challenging. As a journalist I have not only written some of the stories in, in the, in... Not only have I written the stories as... Sometimes I, we, we worked as an editorial team so many stories come across in brainstorming meetings so it's really challenging sometimes, not because of what you are doing but because of what you have to take upon, the challenge of creating the whole magazine with a team of people with different perspectives as well.

So it's a lot of discussions and each of those brainstormings is a learning process in itself. But then I started working more... perhaps covering art. Somehow I started covering more and more arts, cultural issues. Maybe because I really love doing interviews and somehow it became, well it was needed as well for the type of content we were having at the time. But also maybe it was easier sometimes because there was really interesting artists visiting and it was really interesting to interview them.

But I have never had a real knowledge of the arts. I do have a real interesting people (laughs) so I guess that has... Having the chance to interview a lot of different, interesting people was really, I loved it. I really felt in my medium, you know when you get to interview. I interview interesting musicians like Ian F. Svenonius, who is a Rock and Roll guy. And also artists like Alfredo Jaar, people who have done history in their own life. So I suppose I'm always more interested about what the human behind the, the achievement than the achievement itself. Even though are both incredibly interesting. But I had, so I had the opportunity to do some really interesting, to have interesting conversations with interesting people.

So... And then when I entered more the field of the project coordination and management, I... It happened naturally because I was really keen to doing more and more things. How can we do more and more, reach more and more people but also more creatively. And some things I'm really happy about are, perhaps it's that we have managed to grow into different levels and this... For example, now we're doing these small talks [to] which we are trying to bring people who are interested in an issue, but also trying to bring local politicians as well, who are working in that field so that we bring people together, but not in a conference room in some hotel, where nobody's gonna go to that thing. But in some open space or really central space where everybody can come and feel engaged.

We're eliminating this whole structure of panel versus audience where there's five people talking to an audience. And then by the end, after an hour of talking they get to ask, ask questions. Not even questions... what, why, why... you don't come here to ask question to the experts, you come here to talk. You have ideas [of] how to solve this issue, this is a forum, we are welcome. Not only to solve problems, but as well to share thoughts or something that is gonna hopefully bring us forward to... And we have done different topics, from public spaces and the reuse of public spaces to migration as well and all the topics. A long list right now (laughs) because we started doing this like a couple of years ago and, and it's been working well.

And then we also, we also have done a few campaigns. Last one has been one that we're proud of. It was called, "I want to know," in Albanian, "*Po du me ditë.*" So one of these advocacy projects that I liked to work on was the campaign we launched last year, it was called, "I want to know," in Albanian, "*Po du me ditë.*" And it encouraged through video but also through other offline actions to encourage citizens to use social media and particularly the hashtag, "I want to know," to ask questions and demand information [[from] public institutions, representatives of public institutions, politicians in general. And it didn't get perhaps the answers from them {points with her finger} that we, we were hoping. We didn't expect to get lots of them.

But I think it really had a bit of an impact into raising awareness about the need, as citizens [we] feel more engaged into demanding information and into exercising the right to information. And perhaps in a way, also to, to share this thought that as citizens we also have a responsibility, if we wanna take it, not that it's a must. Because of course, everybody is dealing with lots of different issues in their lives. But it can come with something good, if we all come together to put pressure on, on institutions that are not listening to us always.

So that was a creative project. It was an advocacy campaign, which it also contributed to our understanding of what do people what to know about. And in a time that there was a lot of discussion about the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. These kind of narratives that are very prevalent on the media and always very present in public discussion actually were not so present in the questions that the citizens had or the demands that citizens had. They had interest in learning what's gonna happen to public services, how are they gonna get developed, how is the health system gonna get developed, how is the, the trash pick-up system gonna get developed, how are minority rights protected in schools, how are women's rights protected but particularly violence within the family, how, how is that gonna be fought.

So it was also enlightening for us to see this response and we try to use that in our editorial work as well. And to implement this knowledge that we got, and the questions from the citizens into the work that we do every day. So I like the fact that I am a journalist, and I worked right now into thinking of activities and actions that can help us move forward with new conversations. And perhaps because I have been a journalist before I understand, or I want to think that I understand how as a media organization we can create different spots of conversation, or trigger new issues to be discussed in different ways. More creative perhaps, more engaging, still with the same values of journalism.

So, that's a big change perhaps for the very initial classic journalism and media approach, with which I started. But I think it has complemented each other in the end. And I hope it will continue to, to be that way (smiles).

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** So how does it feel to be an activist in an environment that's not your, your, where you're from?

**Cristina Mari:** Well yeah. I'm not sure if I identify as an activist. I, I do, but in a way I feel like as a journalist you are somehow partly an activist because you are doing a public service, and I understand it as such. At the same time, I, I, here I am a foreigner. I am an expat for the majority of people who see my name written somewhere and don't know who I am. And I always find, find that issue very challenging and I think a lot about it. Because even though I have lived here, now it's been five years, I have learned the language enough to have conversations. I was recently on TV, I felt really proud I managed to have a whole interview in Albanian. And I have learned, all my friends are from here, most of them. My partner is from here, I've gone through a lot of experiences with him as part of the life that we do here, and his family. And I am here, I live here. And I don't see myself as an expat or as a foreigner.

I always find the word expat charged and loaded with status and privileges in a way. Because somehow when you are an expat you are someone who came from abroad and who didn't really integrate for some reason. I find that it also, especially here in Kosovo, where there is such a big international community very attached to creation institutions, it is also very connected to the work of those institutions. I often get asked here, "Do you work in EULEX?" or, "Do you work in KFOR?" It's either one or the other. They never think that I might work in a civil society organization or... I mean some, still civil society's maybe the third or the fourth option that people think for a foreigner. But they often think that you're working for some institution such as EULEX or, or KFOR, or the EU, or something, some, some, one of the big ones.

And that also comes with ideology, because these institutions have policies or have implemented work here that has some consequences or, and did or not fulfill the expectations of society here. So we're coming back to how I feel here, being a foreigner and whether I, as an activist or journalist feel, how I feel here. I always feel that I must be careful because I'm not seen as a person from here, so, by the majority who don't know me. The people who know me treat me as one more... someone who understands what they're talking about, not only in term of language but also culturally and how things work here.

And, but if I were back home, I think I will be way more active, I think I will be way more, having some sort of independent initiative, not only through my organization but also as myself trying... I don't know, I... There is a space here in my neighborhood which I always think it will be a great space to have neighbors gatherings every once in a while and talk about the issues that we are worried about. But I always think if a foreigner knocks on their door telling them, "Let's talk about the problems that we have..." It eventually is gonna come for some, or for many, or at least that's my thinking, as a patronizing approach. So I don't want to create that approach, and I don't want to push that to be a confrontational... So I have psychoanalyzed all the possible perspectives to how that will be taken. And I always think, if people know me, they, they will understand what I'm trying to do and they will not see as a, or I hope they will not see it as something, as a patronizing approach. Or as a foreigner trying to tell them how things work, Because she is a foreigner, in her country things are different, things work and she can... "No, actually, in my country things don't work that well either (laughs).

But I just, so I feel always very, that I have to be very careful and, and understand very well, and approach very well each person, of course. And try to connect in a way that's horizontal as well, and I'm not trying... I'm not trying to teach anyone anything, I'm trying to learn myself what's the best, the best way to do things. But if I do it alone, I'm not gonna do any difference, I'm not gonna make any difference. But we help each other, maybe you help me, I help you and we move forward.

Still, even when I was asked to do this interview, I thought twice about the issue of, "Oh, but I am a foreigner. What are they gonna ask me about? Will it be about..." I don't know, I wasn't sure. Of course, I accepted with, gladly. So I can also explain these kind of perspectives in a very extended way. But I think, and I understand this feeling, because it, it is there. This feeling that foreigners come to teach us to live. It's there, because, and it's perfectly justified because it's happened. It's, it's there, it's in the institutions, it's in... It's been institutionalized as well, this approach, this patronizing approach.



Sometimes for good reasons, mostly I think in very wrong ways but what I mean is that I understand this fear, or this rejection, or this skepticism towards the foreigner coming up with initiatives. But for that reason I am also trying to carefully be part of everything I, I do.

From the very beginning I knew I had to learn the language if I wanted to work here, if I wanted to live here. I started very slowly but from almost the first day after I knew that I was gonna be here for more than three months. And then it just, slowly as well, with friends and everybody I learned about the issues they face. And I, myself faced issues by living here and being part of life, of normal life.

So, still being a foreigner, it, I don't like to say of myself that I'm a foreigner, somehow the word doesn't feel right (laughs). I am a foreigner, I am from another country but I live here, I am a resident of Pristina. I take part in life, I go to events and if I could, I'd vote (laughs). But that's not allowed yet for residents so hopefully one day, maybe (smiles). And I feel like the more I am able as well with the language to be engaged and to show that I... It's not only the language that makes you engaged but it facilitates the way to take part in, for example, this interview on TV, or, or I was moderating a debate recently as well. So this kind of exposure as well, it helps to, to feel yourself as part of the place you are, to also feel more responsible and also to... It gives you a tool as well, to start being more active, and use that in a different way. And hopefully I'll get further with it, with time.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** So how do you reconcile this, this idea of the foreigner coming in and imposing their way of doing things, but also the warm welcome that you mentioned, that you received when you first got here? How do you think that those two go hand in hand? Or, or has your experience of being welcome in Kosovo made you, maybe, understand better this perception and the reasons why a foreigner could be seen as, as imposing?

**Cristina Mari:** Can I think about it? (laughs)

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** Yeah.

**Cristina Mari:** I think culturally Kosovar society, and I can speak more about the Albanian society here, it's naturally hospitable and the hospitality is very present, is very intricate in the culture and it goes back to centuries ago. But that has remained and that's still very, very visible in, in people. But I think it also can eventually disappear if this trust and this kindness is abused, in a way. So I feel like when... We have this expression in Spanish, it's like, again expression in Spanish, it's when you give your hand and they take your arm, your full arm. I feel like perhaps this is something that can represent the idea that I have, that when you are offered kindness that doesn't mean that you can abuse it. And you can take someone's trust in you and abuse all their potential and tell them what to do with their lives, or dictate how they should behave, or how they should behave with you or...

I think all relationships must be horizontal and through that everybody can feel welcomed into that relationship, the foreigner and "the local" {makes finger quote marks}. But I think that to, to reconcile being foreigner and then this kindness and not being... I suppose that it's what I'm saying, it's don't abuse this kindness and this kindness is happening because this person is autonomous, and knows

well what they want. Or at least they have an integrity and they understand that that kindness is part of that decency and that integrity that they have. So don't abuse it, don't, don't, don't behave in a way that they're gonna think that you are undermining their intelligence or... showing them how things are done. Because I don't know if what I'm doing, or what I've done in my life is the best way of doing things.

And of course you have different experiences when you come from abroad but then you're coming to a place that doesn't work the same way you work. Or maybe it does, but get to know it. First I think that you have to come with this tabula rasa and start from zero. Where you don't the other, they don't know you either, and we can both learn from each other what is it, what we're missing, or how can I contribute to what you are doing, and how can you contribute to what I'm doing. And I'm talking about human relations, I'm not talking about stage relations or things like that.

But I guess that also, the political situation of Kosovo and how [the] international community has contributed to state building of Kosovo, and Kosovar society is also influencing the way you are seen as a person who comes from abroad. I'm always, I'm from Spain, it's a country that doesn't recognize Kosovo. And I always get asked, "How, when are you going to recognize us?" But always with very great kindness, you know. It never comes as bad or, it never comes across as... Because people treat you as a person. And so, I try to do the same. I, I don't know if I'm explaining it well but (laughs)

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** You are, most definitely. Are you still in touch with the people who first welcomed you in Peja?

**Cristina Marí:** I am not, I'm not... I mean I have, I have them all in Facebook and everything. Somehow I felt like, I have this approach sometimes to some encounters in life, where I feel like they are not meant to repeat, or they are not meant to last, or they are not meant to get extended. They are good, they are short but they were beautiful. And I, not intentionally but somehow I never went back to, to this village. I felt like I was given so much, that going back will also be, keep on taking, in a way (laughs). And I don't know, it just, I, I would love to go back to it. But I've been, I've been also contacted and we've been in touch, we've written to each other, "How are you doing? How is life going?" Some left already, the town and everything. But I've been, I've been somehow in touch.

I would love to go back, perhaps now that I can speak the language and I can communicate with everybody. It would be a much more enjoyable experience, also for them to see that I was not just passing by, but I actually decided to, to learn as well more. It was also the language issue in the past, because I didn't speak at all Albanian in the first year. So it was a bit difficult to communicate anyhow but... It also goes back to the thought that some things are not meant to repeat, maybe. It's a bit, of course I will, it will be great to, to go back and visit. And it's not like I'm not gonna do it, but somehow I had this thoughts like, you know, when you have a painting that is perfect and you keep doing three touches on it, and in the end you're gonna destroy it or something (laughs).

Somehow I had a really beautiful experience and I wanted to conserve it exactly as it happened. But sure I will eventually, now that I have the ability to speak and communicate it will be great to, to go back to it and learn more about it.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** Have you parent ever, and your sister, have they ever come to visit you here?

**Cristina Mari:** No, my parents have not visited. My family never visited. They are not very travelling, I mean my sister is more travelling but now she has a daughter so... My parents, my father didn't leave the island for year and myself, I know my mother wants to visit eventually. Hopefully she will, (laughs) hopefully she will, but no they haven't visited. Not for any special reason, but it's more about the logistics. Going to Spain usually takes three planes because there's no direct flights between Kosovo and Spain. And also I'm from an island and also we need an extra flight often. So it, it was always a bit complicated to make it happen. But hopefully we will eventually meet in a middle point or at least here.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** How often do you go back to Ibiza?

**Cristina Mari:** I go back usually two, until now it's been two times a year. I usually travel in July and also in December for Christmas time. But this time I went in April, try to spend... I always go back home for holidays so I never get to travel around the region. I haven't been travelling much since... I mean I travelled a bit in the region but never with my free time and enjoying and trying to see new things. So this year I'm gonna go to south Albania and hopefully take the road and see a few more hidden places besides the main ones.

Because I always go back home, I go in July, I go in December. That basically takes all my holiday time of the year and I cannot not go (laughs). I need to go home, have a feel of home and reset the brain a little bit and have a touch base with home a bit. Yeah.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** And how do you explain your life here to people back home or even your friends who live elsewhere?

**Cristina Mari:** (laughs) Hmm, I think it's really hard to explain it, because they haven't seen anything and Pristina is a small place. It's not like a big city European capital that is like a huge city that, I don't know, somehow has a lot of offer, lot of places to go, a lot of places to visit. You know, I have sometimes the impression, I became used... Now I have water 24 hours, but before we didn't, we had water cuts during the night, after ten. I got really used to it, it was not an issue. But if I will mention it sometime, just because it happened, like, I don't know, maybe talking on the phone with my family {looks at her hand watch}, "I have to, I have to go because I wanna take a shower, because at ten I'm not gonna have water." So I would do it totally unintentionally (laughs) but eventually my mom became, my mother I think she has an idea that nothing works here (laughs).

But I don't know, of course, I guess they have an idea that it's a difficult place to live. Maybe because when you talk to your friends you tend to explain more the struggles that you are having, or the

difficulties that exist. And maybe you don't talk so much about the good time that you have, or so... So yeah, maybe they have a harsh idea of Kosovo but at the same time they, I told them a lot about this hospitality aspect of society, and how I don't know... How open people are and how welcoming are these, the traditions as well and... Because often they are curious about, "How are the traditions?" or "Do you have Christmas? "No, but there is Bajram and this is what happens then..."

And like when you explain all these differences, they are curious. But eventually it's also about your life and depending how your life is, then they also have their own idea of what you are doing there. I guess they often have an, or maybe friends that are journalists as well, they see you as, "Wow, you're in Kosovo. You are being a journa..." I think they have a better... a bigger idea of what I do, than I have (laughs) you know, like, "Wow, she's in Kosovo, she must be doing something really incredible or something." You know, just because you are far in a country that had conflictive [sic] past, you must be doing some sort of war reporting or something, it also plays a lot with these stereotypes, which try to deconstruct as much as I can.

And of course they are all very mad about the fact that Spain doesn't give visas to Kosovars to travel. And I have talked a lot about this issue to them, so they are very aware about it. And they don't understand it, it comes as such a shock. They often don't know anything about this fact. Nobody knows that Spain doesn't give visas to Kosovars and nobody understands what that means, what is a visa. Because we became European Union privileged citizens that travel without, without visas, just with a passport. And the sole idea of going to an embassy with your whole life documentation to ask for permission to travel, it's out of their minds. So it's something that I talk a lot about and yeah. Perhaps that contributes to that image that Kosovo doesn't work (laughs). But it has its issues but, of course as every society. Hopefully we will overcome these struggles.

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** Well, thank you so much. I think I've asked all of the questions that I wanted to ask...

**Cristina Marí:** Okay...

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** I don't know if you want to ask anything else or just revise any of your thoughts, feel free to...

**Cristina Marí:** No, I also think I went through everything. (laughs)

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** Yeah, thank you so much!

**Cristina Marí:** Sorry if I got very extended on some of these issues...

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** No, no lovely to hear your life story, it's interesting.

**Cristina Marí:** Yeah, actually you made me talk about everything... (laughs)

**Mia Crocetti Marzotto:** That probably means that I did a good job...

**Cristina Marí:** Yeah, yeah, I hope you understood everything and yeah, cool...