

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH SARANDA BOGUJEVCI

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Duration: 84 minutes

Present:

1. Saranda Bogujevci (Speaker)
2. Aurela Kadriu (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

Saranda Bogujevci: I am Saranda Bogujevci.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us something about your early childhood memories? I mean, whatever you remember from your family, the circle you grew up in, games as a child, anything you remember?

Saranda Bogujevci: I grew up in a very wide family circle and I was always surrounded by other children but also by other relatives. My childhood memories are very good ones. I remember that we spent a lot of time outside with other children. I mean, we had, now I am speaking about the games we had like children of the '90s. I mean, there were some very specific games, but then I remember that we also invented a lot of new games. As a child, I loved music a lot, I loved dancing. I don't know, I have various memories. I also grew up with the children of my paternal uncle, so we were so many children and...I don't know, still, when I think about my childhood, I think about the time we spent outside.

Then I dreamt a lot, I recently talked to my friends about how I wanted to learn to play piano when I was a child, then I wanted to become a ballerina. I wanted to be a journalist, you know, how to say, dreams, various dreams. But, I had very diverse experiences as a child. When I was six or seven, we migrated to Sweden together with the family, since the situation in Kosovo had gotten worse, we are speaking about the early '90s when my father was expelled from his workplace. When I started going to school, they had already taken our school building, I mean, only Serbian children would go there and we weren't allowed to go to the actual building, so there were improvisations made.

Aurela Kadriu: In which city did you live?

Saranda Bogujevci: I lived in Podujevo, then we migrated to Sweden where I lived for one year and a half. I have very good memories there...We were settled in a very isolated place since they only kept those of us who had sought asylum. There were people from other countries as well, but most of the families settled there were from Kosovo. Again, as a child, I had good memories in the school and the setting where we used to live there. But a year and a half later, they sent us back to Kosovo and we lived in Podujevo for the rest of the time until after the war.

Aurela Kadriu: What did your father do when he was expelled from his workplace?

Saranda Bogujevci: He was an electrician in Obiliq.

Aurela Kadriu: When you returned to Kosovo from Sweden, can you tell us in what conditions did you find your place? How was it for you?

Saranda Bogujevci: I remember it was winter, if I am not mistaken, because I remember it was cold. And as a child, I experienced a kind of chaos, but at the same time, I didn't quite get what was happening. First, I didn't understand the reason why we had gone to Sweden...I didn't understand in the sense that the situation in Kosovo was getting worse and that bad things were happening. Then there was a big difference between the conditions in which we lived when in Sweden and those in Kosovo. You start noticing the differences, for example the conditions we had at school in Sweden were so different from the conditions we had in Kosovo, I mean in Podujevo.

So, I remember a kind of chaos, I don't know, the cold weather and...Especially as a child when there are a lot of things you don't know and which you only realize later. But again, you get used to the routine wherever you are.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us about your relationship with your family? Your parents, sisters, brothers within the family, do you have memories with them?

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes, of course. I have had, I have very good memories. I was telling you that I grew up with the children of my paternal uncle, which means I grew up in a very wide circle of family. And I always got a lot of care and love from the family. I was very little when my grandfather died, but I remember his care too. We had a kind of ritual, when we woke up in the morning, we waited for him because we knew that he had gone out to buy chocolates for us. So, that was an everyday ritual of my grandfather that always...So, I even though I was very little, I was five years old when my grandfather died, I still remember those moments.

Aurela Kadriu: In which year did you return from Sweden?

Saranda Bogujevci: We went in 1990, if I am not mistaken, and returned after one year and a half.

Aurela Kadriu: Did you continue going to school afterwards? Did you have the opportunity to continue going to school when you returned.

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes, of course. I started the first grade in Podujevo, then we moved to Sweden when I was in the second semester of the first grade. When I returned, it was already the third grade, something like that. There were the same students, same classmates, same teachers. So it is not that I had to start from the beginning without knowing anyone. In fact, it was more difficult for my brother

who was one year younger than me because he had...He started school for the first time in Sweden and then when we returned to Kosovo he had to start the first grade over again with a different system.

Aurela Kadriu: Were you in the school building or in houses?¹

Saranda Bogujevci: We were, I mean there was the public kindergarten, we went there from the first grade until the fourth. Then from the fifth grade to the eighth grade we went to a building where high school students were supposed to take their classes, but since we were younger, we used that building, while the high school students, as it is known all around Kosovo, held their classes in private houses.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you have memories? Do you remember school? What would you specify from the elementary school?

Saranda Bogujevci: I had a really good time during elementary school, in the sense of the relationships with friends and teachers there, but we didn't have good conditions. The building didn't fulfill the conditions of a place where classes are held. I mean, in winter we had to heat the building with stoves in every classroom. Families had to contribute to buy the wood.

But besides that, I have very good memories with friends, considering that it was a very difficult time to get educated. I am saying that because the circumstances weren't that good at that time. I always mention that I was the '90s generation who had a different experience. But again, there were differences from one city to another. For example, the teaching conditions they had in Pristina, when I talk to my current friends who were in elementary school at that time...When we exchange our memories, we notice that they are so different from one another. When you think about how far Podujevo is from Pristina, the differences are too big.

But again, when I think back, I am grateful for the opportunities that I had to get an education. Of course, I am grateful for all the great memories with friends, and then for the opportunity, no matter the very difficult conditions, I still managed to get an education.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us, I know you were little at that time, but did you notice the pressure from the situation. Did your teacher at school tell you? What did they say regarding the whole political situation that was in our country at that time?

Saranda Bogujevci: As far as I remember, it is not that we were very exposed in that regard. Our teachers were focused on our education and didn't load us politically. At the end of the day, we were children and I don't think we could manage to understand that situation much. It is not that we weren't aware of what was happening around us, but we weren't loaded. I remember that we didn't have, I mean, I am speaking personally about myself, I remember that I had a kind of fear during that

¹ By 1991, after Slobodan Milošević's legislation making Serbian the official language of Kosovo and the removal of all Albanians from public service, Albanians were excluded from schools as well. The reaction of Albanians was to create a parallel system of education hosted mostly by private homes.

time, later in the late '90s. I was more mature then, but it was also more obvious, while in the early '90s, it wasn't much. But however, these are experiences that are perceived differently by each one of us.

Aurela Kadriu: Did you manage to finish elementary school?

Saranda Bogujevci: No. When I was in the, excuse me, the war started when I was in the eighth grade, and we went to school on and off. And then the teaching was totally cut because it was no longer safe. When the war was over, we returned to the eighth grade again, to finish the eighth grade before going to high school, which I didn't make it to because then I went to England to get cured.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us about, however you remember it, the war time?

Saranda Bogujevci: It is hard for me to forget. I remember it very well. I remember when people talked about the NATO bombings and I remember when the decision was made on March 24, we were so happy when the NATO bombings started, "We will be free now!" And we never thought that things that happened after the NATO bombings would happen.

For us, it was a little different because we noticed and saw things later, I am speaking about the Llap region. I remember when the Reçak massacre took place, I mean, when the attack against the Jashari² family took place. A lot was said about these things at school, even though it was so near, at the same time it was so unbelievable that such things were happening.

And then when...there was the news that the NATO bombings would take place, I was a child at that time, as much as I could understand, for me it was, I thought that we would be free at the moment when the NATO bombings began. But in fact, a lot of murders against Albanian families took place at the time when the NATO bombings were ongoing. There were certain moments, for example I remember one occasion when...Our house is in the city center and there was a queue of big tanks coming from Serbia, I remember us looking at them through the window. It was very scary, we could imagine what could happen.

And then there were other occasions as well, for example, two bombs exploded in the city. It was interesting because at that time I always had one thought in my mind that such things cannot happen to my family, I thought it was something impossible, I was very certain about it. And I mean, no matter what I would experience, I would still believe that it would be impossible for something to happen to my family.

Then a reservist unit of the police, shortly called PIONA, who was the same unit who was part of the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia, entered right after the NATO bombings that took place on March 24, they entered four days later, on March 28. They entered the city and took us all, women and children.

² In March 1998 Serbian troops surrounded the compound of the Jashari family, whose men were among the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and killed all of them, including the women and the children. This event energized the Albanian resistance and marked the beginning of the war.

The men weren't with us at that moment because my paternal uncle's daughter, Nora, had asked to go out and there were words in the city that if the Serbian army entered the city, they would take the men and kill them. And then we asked them to leave because we thought, since we were only women and children, they will just take us out of the house just like they did with other families, and how to say, I don't know whether they thought about escaping, about going to the camps in Albania or Macedonia, or to the mountains where most of the people were. But none of us thought that...even though it is not that we didn't see it happening earlier, women and children being killed.

And I mean, soldiers took us out of the house. We passed through our neighbor's gardens and they put us all together in the garden of one of the neighbors. It was my mother, two of my brothers, my grandmother, my paternal uncle's wife together with five of their children whom I grew up with and I. There was my father's paternal aunt with her daughter in law and there was the family of my father and my paternal uncle's friend, Enver Duriqi, I mean, his whole family, his parents, his wife and four of his children. And they put us behind the house and started shooting, I mean, from all those, only I and four of my paternal uncle's children Jehona, Fatos, Genc and Liria survived. We were all injured. After it happened, the soldiers left, then the regular unit came and sent us to the hospital in Pristina where we stayed until the end of the war. And only later, I mean, maybe a month later, did my father and my paternal uncle manage to find out where we were and what happened through a classmate of Jehona whom we had met in the hospital, who was there not because he was injured, but because of other health problems and then was stuck in the hospital. When his father came to take him from the hospital, he knew my father and then he managed to find him and let him know that we were in the hospital, and that was the time when they understood what had happened to the family.

Aurela Kadriu: Were you hospitalized?

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us about that time in the hospital? Were the doctors Albanians?

Saranda Bogujevci: Excuse me?

Aurela Kadriu: The doctors weren't Albanians, were they?

Saranda Bogujevci: No. Once, while I was in the intensive care, I met a nurse who was Albanian. I only remember that she told me, I don't know her name or her last name and I never saw her again, but I only remember she told me, "Don't say anything because they understand everything." And later I realized that they all spoke Albanian, they just didn't want to. The other thing is that they told the media, be it Serbian or international, that we were injured by NATO. Only later did I realize that this was the story.

Only later did I realize what the nurse that I met wanted to say, because in fact, if we spoke about what had happened to us exactly, we would be in danger. Then when somebody asked us, I felt so angry that I had to say that it happened because of NATO, but at the same time, I had to think about my own

and my paternal uncle's children safety. So, this is what we decided, we discussed with my paternal uncle's children and decided that whoever asks us something, we will just say that we heard a loud noise and we don't remember anything until the end of the war.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember how you moved from the hospital? Did your father make it to find you there?

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes, my father came to the hospital. They came together with his friend Enver. Enver was attempting to find his children. I mean, his whole family were killed, his wife, his parents, and his four children, and when he came there and the doctor said, "Your father is here." I thought that it must be some relative of ours who was living in Pristina and found out that we were there and wanted to come and visit, I never thought that my father would be there. Of course it was a difficult moment for us, but at the same time it was a difficult one for my father and my paternal uncle when they found out about what had happened.

Then my father had to return to the mountains and some weeks later, my paternal uncle came and stayed at his maternal uncle whose house was at Kodra e Trimave. They helped us a lot, they helped my paternal uncle to come and visit us in the hospital. Because he was endangered all the time on his way to the hospital from Kodra e Trimave. His maternal uncle's wife always accompanied him so that...I mean, so that if the police or the army stopped him on the way to come and visit us, maybe they wouldn't mistreat him so much if a woman was with him.

Aurela Kadriu: Saranda, I know it is difficult, but can you recall the moment when your father found out about what happened, I believe you remember it...

Saranda Bogujevci: I apologize, but right now I can't...

Aurela Kadriu: Okay, I understand. At the moment...Can you tell us how did it happen that you left for England?

Saranda Bogujevci: After the war ended, my paternal uncle came to visit us all. And we saw some KFOR soldiers, some British KFOR soldiers by accident. Together with my paternal uncle, there was his paternal uncle's daughter who spoke English and they decided to go and tell them about what had happened. The moment they told them, they took us and we were taken care of by the doctors of the British KFOR.

And then we met a doctor whom we are still in touch with. Then through a system which is called telemedicine, through which they take the data and the diagnosis for various patients and send them to various doctors around the world, I mean specialist for every kind of disease or injury. And then a doctor in England said that, "I could treat the girls," and so we were offered the chance to go to England to get cured, and then we remained there...Later we got the residence permit, later on we also got citizenship.

Aurela Kadriu: What kind of injuries did you, Fatos, Liria and the others have?

Saranda Bogujevci: Genc and Fatos were shot in the leg, in both legs. Liria was in the worst condition, she was shot in the throat, so for eight months in a row she was fed directly to the stomach. Luckily, after the surgery in England, she is a lot better now. Jehona was shot in both arms, in her hand and in her leg. And I was shot in my hand, in my leg and in my spine.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us about the journey, how did it happen, how did you get there? How was it made possible, do you remember?

Saranda Bogujevci: I mean, this happened through certain organizations that were here and dealt with these procedures. But I remember that for some time, maybe one month or so, we were always prepared because they told us we had to be prepared because we would leave for England the moment the decision was made. The day we left, I remember there was a tent, if I am not mistaken, near the airport, where we waited until all the procedures were finished.

Then we took off with a military plane, which we had to change in Italy because of some problems it had. And then we flew directly from Italy to England. My paternal uncle's daughter and I went directly to the hospital from the airport with an ambulance. While the other part of our family stayed in a camp where there were refugees from Kosovo, who were sent to England earlier. I mean, we stayed in the camp for one year or so. And then we got the chance to, each family got the opportunity to settle in their own house and they were given residence permits.

Aurela Kadriu: Did your father and your paternal uncle come with you?

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes, of course.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us about that one year and a half there? Whatever you remember from that year, when did you go to the camp?

Saranda Bogujevci: Ah...

Donjetë Berisha: Which year was it when you went to the camp?

Saranda Bogujevci: It was September, '99. I mean, some months after the end of the war. There were some families from Kosovo, since there were camps in other parts as well, they were settled in Manchester, I mean in various parts of Manchester there were other camps where there were other refugees. I spent most of the time in the hospital. I started school in the beginning, I mean, in January, 2000, I mean, I went to high school. And even there, most of the time I had to go, maybe half of the day at school and the rest in physiotherapy, or I had, I mean, other appointments for my hand, because my hand was very damaged.

It was an interesting experience, what I liked mostly in England was how organized...How organized they are as communities. For example there were a lot...I mean, pensioners who had more free time. They would organize daily trips where two elders had time and they would come and ask whether somebody wanted to go and visit a place...I mean, citizens were around the camp where we were living all the time, they tried to help us in their own way. Even if just to invite us for coffee or to take us to an interesting place. They were very well organized. How to say, even as far as religious communities go, they were organized like that. Everybody tried to help in their own way...with whatever you needed.

It was, how to say, very difficult because we were in a new place, we didn't speak the language and all the things we went through in Kosovo. Then the other part of the family was in Kosovo and...it wasn't easy. We had relatives, we had our maternal aunt in London, even though she came every week, she took care of us, she spent time with us. But again, when you are in an unknown environment, it was difficult. But in general, it was a good experience, in the sense that they took very good care of us.

Aurela Kadriu: When you went to school, can you tell us what was the school environment, how did the socialization process take place?

Saranda Bogujevci: Of course that the education system was completely different. But besides that, the conditions at school there, compared to the conditions at school here, were very different. The school...

Donjetë Berisha: Did you start going to school after getting the citizenship?

Saranda Bogujevci: No, before that.

Donjetë Berisha: Before. So that means, during the time you were in the camp?

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes. I mean, even refugees went to school...

Donjetë Berisha: So all the children refugees went to school?

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes, yes. It is mandatory.

Donjetë Berisha: Was the school within the camp or did they take you somewhere?

Saranda Bogujevci: We were in the same school like the others. Something else that was interesting was that the school was a Catholic one. We kept in touch with the school director after he retired and he told us that when they received the request to accept...Because first the refugees that went to England from Kosovo in May 1999 were accepted to school...And when they were asked, I mean, the director and the school board to accept students who weren't Catholics but were Muslims...then the director asked them, "If we are a Catholic school and if we don't accept those who need us the most,

then what are we doing?" So this is how the school board decided to accept the refugees. So, there were [Albanian] students in that school even before us.

Donjetë Berisha: Was the language a problem?

Saranda Bogujevci: It was difficult but we had teachers who only helped us with the language. They weren't Albanians, they were English but they were with us all the time and explained the lessons to us, everything that was lectured, so it worked well. But we didn't have...I mean, first they were more focused on the language, to teach us the language.

Part Two

Saranda Bogujevci: I liked art, so it wasn't a big deal for me to understand the tasks in the class of art, so they asked me and I went...It wasn't mandatory for all of us to attend the same classes as the actual students, because they were aware of our situation.

Aurela Kadriu: Were there classrooms only with Albanians or were they...

Saranda Bogujevci: No, we were mixed. We were mixed and there was not a high number of Albanians. I mean, the only time we were all together was with the teacher who taught us the language, but there were also a lot of students from other countries attending that class as well. For example, I had a friend who came from Hong Kong and was part of this class. What I liked at school in England is that I never felt as if they were looking at us with pettiness. In the sense, they didn't look at us only as victims but they tried to treat us with care, of course, but they wanted to make us feel equal to other students, and of course, that's a very good thing.

Aurela Kadriu: What were relations with your classmates like?

Saranda Bogujevci: Very good. They were very careful. I remember in the beginning it was pretty difficult to communicate with each other because I didn't speak the language very well, but I remember that during lunch time, because there we ate inside the school, we weren't allowed to go out. And during lunch time, for example, the system works differently, you have your own classroom...I want to explain it that way so those from Kosovo understand it, it is like the class monitor and the class. It was that way that you had a class monitor and your class, then the other classes that you chose, arts, mathematics, science or geography, were divided into groups. You weren't always with the same people in the same classes. You were in the same year, but you weren't in the same class with the same people.

And for example, during lunch time, when I went to take food and sit somewhere, the students from the class of my class monitor never left me alone, they always took me and I sat with that group, they never left me not knowing where to sit, you know, because I didn't know anyone. So they were very

careful in that sense. And they were very good, I never felt lonely and like that I don't have anyone to hang out with even though I didn't speak the language.

Aurela Kadriu: Did they manage to understand what happened, your experience?

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes. I spoke. When we had high school graduation exams, I made a sculpture in art class that showed the story of my family. When they understood what happened, a teacher who was teaching religious studies invited me to his class to talk to his students and explain to them what I had gone through so that they would understand the value of it better. Starting from there, I was often invited to various schools where I went to talk about what happened.

Aurela Kadriu: What did you do after high school?

Saranda Bogujevci: After high school, I continued my education in England. They call them the *A levels* [English], college, it is more or less if you take the elementary school system here, then high school and then the university. I studied media, art, graphic design there and...Yes, I guess that's it.

Aurela Kadriu: How was that period?

Saranda Bogujevci: It was a very good one. I learned very good things and met very good and interesting people. It was...I mean, there were people from all around the world at the college where I was studying. Most of them were born and raised in England, but their families came from various countries, but there were also people who had come to England late, so it was an interesting experience. I got to learn a lot more about other cultures. I mean, there were people from India, Pakistan, from various African countries, Portugal, Palestine, Iran, Iraq. It was a mixture of students, so it was a very good experience.

Aurela Kadriu: I am digressing, excuse me. When was the first time you returned to Kosovo after the war?

Saranda Bogujevci: Two years after I had left for England.

Aurela Kadriu: That is 2001?

Saranda Bogujevci: 2001 or...No, it's 2001. Sorry.

Aurela Kadriu: How did you find Kosovo, how was it...?

Saranda Bogujevci: It was more or less the same post-war energy. It was just of course, better, things were more in order. There wasn't the immediate post-war chaos. For me it was a very good feeling that I managed to come back. Because no matter the good conditions and the fact that I had made friends in England, I missed Kosovo very much, I missed my family. Then I wanted to know who had ended up where, I mean, my friends from school. A part of the family, wider family, whom I hadn't seen after the

war. And even though it was very difficult, I didn't have the rest of the family...But at the same time the feeling of returning home. And in a way, I always had that feeling, each time I came to Kosovo.

For example even if I am in Pristina or somewhere else, because I have returned, now I live in Kosovo, but when I go to Podujevo, I always have that feeling that I am really at home.

Aurela Kadriu: What did you do after the college?

Saranda Bogujevci: I continued studying Interactive Arts in Manchester.

Aurela Kadriu: At which university?

Saranda Bogujevci: At the Metropolitan University of Manchester.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us what happened with your life at that time, in the professional and academic respect, after your studies?

Saranda Bogujevci: From...In the beginning, in fact when we went to England we met with people from an organization who was helping refugees in England but who also sent humanitarian aid in the camps in Albania. Later we engaged the organization and we had various projects which always contributed to our work in Kosovo. We started with the peace Manchester park in Podujevo. I mean, the project started at that time, when we started negotiating with the Municipality of Podujevo in 2001. And we have had various projects since then.

My work always dealt with art and culture, but dealing with the increase of awareness of citizens in England of refugees and asylum seekers. Because it is always viewed, even in the media as a negative phenomenon and only a few people understand the reason why people go from one place to another. For example, like our case of going to England. And I always make the comparison to Sweden...If we were given permission to live in Sweden, maybe my family would be alive today. And I always explain it to them in this way so that people can understand it completely. The other thing that I always speak about is that now as a British citizen, I have the right to choose where I want to live and what I want my life to be like.

I mean, the moment when I went to Sweden with my family and the moment when I went to England after the war, I had no chance to choose. It was a matter of survival. So, a big part of my work in England is...I mean, I have worked on the topics, on the refugees and asylum seekers topic, raising the awareness of citizens there. And then for a long time as a family we have worked on the production of the exhibition that we had in Pristina, Tirana and Belgrade. Then after that time, I decided to return to Kosovo.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us, sorry to interrupt, can you tell us about the exhibition, how was it organized? And then tell us about the experiences in Pristina, Tirana and Belgrade, how was it expected and how did you personally feel about it?

Saranda Bogujevci: When we started thinking about the exhibition...We spoke a lot about it as a family, I mean, as a case, it was followed by the international media and there was always a perspective of the journalist who wrote the story. So we decided to show the story as we experienced and felt it. We met through our work with the organization Manchester Aid to Kosovo we met the exhibition curator James Walmsley who understood the situation, who had also worked with other artists from Kosovo and was very sensitive, not only towards the family or the story, but to the sense of how we saw it and how we wanted to show our experience.

It took a long time because usually such projects take time to develop. We started discussing with the National Gallery whose director at that time was Faredin Spahiu. Then we worked a lot on the funding direction, I mean in that respect of production. We decided on it being divided into four parts, the idea was for everybody who visits the exhibition, to go through a journey that our family went through, in the sense of the memories we had.

And when you enter the exhibition, the first part is the living room. And there is the entire living room furniture set, just like we had it at home in Podujevo. The idea was from all the things we had at home and one...One of the traditions we had within the family was that on every holiday, one of our family members recorded us children in order to keep them as memories, and we had recordings until the New Year's Eve of 1999. But unfortunately, the soldiers found the photographs and all the cassettes and threw them and most of them were damaged.

One that has survived was recorded in 1990, on New Year's Eve. And the idea was when the visitors see the video, they see what the life of our family looked like, they see the video in the same environment. I mean, so that they can understand exactly how it was for us. Then the second room is the family tree showing which members of the family survived and which ones didn't.

There are sayings in every part of the exhibitions where thoughts or things that were said or experienced by the family members are shared. Then there is the third room, the hospital room where we tell the experiences we had while in the Pristina hospital, during the war. We are talking from March '99 to June '99 when the war was over. And the last part is the courtroom where the journey we had when we went to England for recovery is shown, and then there is our fight for justice which shows us taking part in two courts in Belgrade in 2003 and 2008, where there are five persons sentenced.

Then there is our journey to Canada where we asked the government to extradite one of the defendants who had sought asylum there. And the trials that were held in the Hague court. And the last part is when we went to England, there was a photographer who had taken photographs of all the families who were in the camp as refugees. Those photographs are part of the war museum in Manchester and part of a play called Children and the War, where stories of children from various countries and wars are told. And then, ten years later, he took photographs with some of the children again, those of us who were children at that time, but then he took photographs of us as grown-ups. And then there is an expression saying that we will never forget the past, but we have to move forward.

Aurela Kadriu: How was the exhibition received in general?

Saranda Bogujevci: There were various experiences in every country. What we found interesting about the living room [in the exhibition], it was that, you know, either in Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, but also the visitors from other European countries... all of them had the same feeling when they entered the living room. You know, the living room was a sort of, how to explain this... through the living room everyone understood that in that period of time everyone's ways of living were similar to one another's. You know, we were not so different from one another, you know how propaganda took over, especially in Serbia towards Albanians in Kosovo.

And when they entered the living room all the time you would hear people say, "We also had this, we also had this book, we also had the same television." Or, "We had the same blanket, my grandmother owned this..." I mean, there was the same feeling in every country, and the same comments, it was interesting to see how each of them understood that we had the same things as other families in Kosovo did.

What I have noticed in Kosovo when we had the exhibition in Pristina is that, I understood how little space is given, I mean and it still continues, how little space is given to families and individuals to speak about what happened to them during the war. I mean, you notice the bad effect it has, because nobody knows that they have that space to speak, or that somebody cares about it. I mean, the approach, "It happened, it is in the past," I think it is very wrong. We have to confront the past and everybody needs to be given the space they need to have in order to confront what they went through.

In Albania it was interesting in the sense...I had an experience with a lady where they were trying to make a comparison between their experience with communism but...They saw the war in Kosovo as...I don't want to generalize now...For example, what impressed me in the meeting with a citizen from Tirana was that she couldn't understand why we sought war when we were free. She thought about it in the sense that during the time of Yugoslavia you could travel wherever...As if we started the war and we...We had everything but we asked for more...I mean, you could notice how little knowledge they had about what happened in Kosovo.

The experience in Belgrade was different, of course. There was a lot more curiosity and it felt so interesting when I saw older generation, then younger generations visiting the exhibition with their children. But for us, the space that was used for the exhibition was also very important. In every place, we ask for the gallery to be part of a public institution, not a private gallery, because I believe the audience is very limited that way. Because of the fact itself that it was in the Cultural Center of Belgrade...And then, of course the participation of the back then prime minister Ivica Dačić, I mean, raised a lot of curiosity.

Even though, just when we started setting up the exhibition, they told us that it wasn't going to open. So, it was a very difficult process, but we didn't stop. I mean, we said, "We will do our work, if you don't allow us to open it then, we will remove our things and continue somewhere else. But until the time comes, when we have the date to open it and until we don't get a more concrete answer, we will continue." I am sorry, "We will continue our work."

Aurela Kadriu: So there was resistance...

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes, yes...

Aurela Kadriu: From the institutions?

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes, of course. But, before...The moment the announcement was given...Before arriving in Serbia, to start setting the exhibition in the gallery, there were a lot of articles in the Serbian media that this is Albanian propaganda. The opening night, there were protests all the time, there were policemen all around because of safety issues. So, it wasn't easy, but in such moments, the moment it becomes difficult and you give up, it cannot happen. So, for us it was important to realize it as a project and to be honest we didn't think much about safety or anything else.

Aurela Kadriu: When did you finally return to live in Kosovo?

Saranda Bogujevci: In 2014. I came here in May 2014, in June 2014 I decided that I will stay for some time.

Aurela Kadriu: Let's go back to independence, I mean, you were in England at that time...

Saranda Bogujevci: No, I was in Canada (laughs).

Aurela Kadriu: Okay, you were in Canada at that time. Do you remember the summer of 2007, or how do you remember the summer of 2007?

Saranda Bogujevci: The summer?

Aurela Kadriu: Of the year 2007, the summer before the declaration of independence.

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes, now (laughs) now I remember. Actually it was, 2007 was a time when a lot of things happened. We had a project with artists from Kosovo who for the first time exhibited in, in England. So during that year I came to Kosovo often. It was, I mean during my studies, for me it was a loaded year, with interesting projects, with interesting things that happened. In... the summer of 2007, I can say that I spent most of that time in, in Albania, and a part of it in Kosovo.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us when you first heard or when you first realized that Kosovo will declare independence?

Saranda Bogujevci: I can't say, it's hard because sometimes you focus on particular memories and you don't think of the rest.

Aurela Kadriu: What do you link it to when you think about it?

Saranda Bogujevci: To tell you the truth, I link the independence of Kosovo with, I mean the time when Kosovo's independence was declared I was studying in Canada, I was an exchange student from the university in Manchester. And I was in Canada for six months so during that time when it, when it was talked about and when the independence was declared I was there. So everything, when we talk

about the memories of the time that Kosovo declared independence I was in, I always link it to, to Canada (smiles).

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us what independence meant to you? What did you think the day it was declared?

Saranda Bogujevci: To tell you the truth, it was a big celebration, I mean it was immediately organized in the center of Toronto, Albanians gathered. I remember, it was an honor for me, they asked me to talk, so to address all the compatriots that were gathered in, in Toronto. I remember I had... I mean with, with the family I had, the friends I had in Toronto, I drew the eagle like the one in the pictures on the cheeks of all the kids and the younger generations. It was a huge celebration.

I remember a day before declaring independence, because the Albanian community was big, everywhere you walked, it seemed like, like you were in Kosovo. You would see them celebrating in cars, with the flag.. And then, the next day, when the independence of Kosovo was declared, there was a, a huge celebration. It was really cold (laughs) but there was, was a huge celebration.

Aurela Kadriu: Did you watch it live or... the session?

Saranda Bogujevci: Yes, yes. Of course, of course. First, I mean, first we watched the declaration of independence then all the Albanians organized... So the roads to the center of Toronto were blocked because all the Albanians who lived around Toronto gathered there. We celebrated in that part of the city, in the center of Toronto. And then later there were other events, events that gathered...

It was interesting, because during that time I met a lot... because as a community it is pretty big and, I mean, the community of Serbs, Croats, the community of the Balkan countries, where I was in Canada. And the experience with the young Serbs was interesting, and their perception of Kosovo's declaration of independence. Most of them were very young when they went to Canada, or they were born there. Or most of their family were Serbs from Croatia or Bosnia or... You know, not, not exactly from Serbia. And it was really interesting to see the debates between young Kosovars and Serbs.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us details from...

Saranda Bogujevci: Well... It was really interesting how, how determined they were that Kosovo belongs to Serbia even though they had never been to Kosovo, they didn't know much about Kosovo. It was very noticeable that it was something passed down from their families, not that they understood it. And it was very interesting to see, for example, because they were determined and they gave themselves the right to tell you... They did not dare talk about this with, me because they knew the history of, of my family and they were very careful but, for example, the discussions they had with the others. So they had this determination that Kosovo belongs to Serbia. But you could see that actually they didn't understand it much, it wasn't their belief, but it was passed down from their family. Because, for example, at night when they wanted to go out because you could see them, everywhere you went, because they lived in the same place, they did not care where are you from, or they would forget where their family is from. But you could see how much, the influence directly from, from the family. Not that they cared much. So it was an interesting experience for me.

Aurela Kadriu: Let's go back to 2014 when you decided to return in Kosovo. Why did you decide to return to Kosovo? How did that process of returning happen?

Saranda Bogujevci: Because of the exhibition, I got to travel and stay in Kosovo a lot from 2010 to 2013, in fact, early 2014. And I thought, if there was a chance to find a way and what could I contribute for my country. In 2014 I came here with a friend, with Besa Neziri, Rugova...Which was a project

where in which Besa worked as a designer, I mean, the *paja*³ of the bride, or how it is called in the Llap region, the *qeiz*⁴ that remained from my mother when she got married to my father. And in a way, it remained like that covered and I didn't know what to do with it, how to use it...Then Besa had the idea to turn them into dresses, which I really liked.

And we attended the Femart festival, which at that time had another name (laughs). And we presented Besa's work. The idea was to in a way say that it [*qeiz*] was also a form of art, the work that was done by women. But at the same time, a way for me to represent my mother in another way. I mean, it wasn't, how to say, it wasn't...As women, their life, knowledge and talent was not only in the bride's *qeiz*. All the women had other sides of themselves which they didn't always show.

And so I came together with Besa to attend the festival and represent the work. Then during that year, the municipality of Pristina, Shpend Ahmeti and the Vetëvendosje! Movement came to power. At that time, Blerta Zeqiri was a director of culture, youth and sport, and I accepted to help them for a certain amount of time. Then Blerta had to quit, and I was offered the chance to lead the Directorate of Culture, Youth and Sport, which I felt really good about, in the sense that they trusted me to take such a big responsibility for the capital.

And so things happened like that unplanned...But it was one of the best and most challenging work experiences I had, I am saying that because during my life, I almost always faced challenges.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us how was the time as the director of culture...

Saranda Bogujevci: I met so many people, I met so many people. I learned a lot from many different people as far as the artists' community goes, of different fields. It was interesting for me because I saw how much the work system here differs from the experience I had in England. I was very lucky that the team of the Mayor's cabinet supported me very much and they took care of me. I was the youngest among the directors.

And it was very challenging as a job because there were so many problems. The other thing is that you are leading the sector of culture, youth and sports in the capital. So, there are so many demands. But at the same time, I learned a lot. And what I expected to see and understand is that we have to start learning to trust each other more and work as a community. We are not so well organized as a nation. We have a great potential, so we have to work together.

And the other thing is that we don't always understand that we have great youth. I am speaking because of the experience I had in England. I am not saying this to brag about my country, but our youth are very intelligent. They have a lot of capacity to develop in various fields. We have a lot of capacity within such a small country to, to have various generations of various experts and there would be a need to have people from other countries at all. But unfortunately, they aren't often given the opportunity to develop and move forward.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us what did you continue doing after the mandate?

Saranda Bogujevci: After the mandate in the municipality, I went to England for several months. Then I decided to come back and run for MP, as part of the Vetëvendosje! Movement.

Aurela Kadriu: Okay, if you don't have nothing to add, then I would just like to thank you...

³ Clothes and embroideries that fill up the bride's trousseau.

⁴ See *qeiz*.

Saranda Bogujevci: Maybe since there is the part about Kosovo independence, I would just like to say some things that we have to start thinking about working, as I said before, together, to create trust in each other. To think about a long-term future, rather than thinking about today for tomorrow. Trust in ourselves more, and then this connects a collectivity, we can take decisions for ourselves, what we think is the best for us. Even if we make mistakes, there is nothing wrong with it, because we learn from them. And it doesn't mean that someone else always has to know better about us than we know about ourselves. Maybe we should have a common feeling and thought about each other. And we have to love our country more beyond words, it is better to show it through work.

We are a small country but we have big potential. We have many opportunities. We have abilities and we can develop our country, we can make our country move forward. But we all have to take the responsibility for ourselves and be active. It doesn't mean that we always have to wait from the institutions or the politicians. But as citizens, each one has to be active in their own way, to ask for accountability and to work together to make the country move forward. Because it's been ten years since Kosovo became independent, almost 19 years since the war was over. And for a small country as we are, we could have much better conditions than the ones we currently have.

Aurela Kadriu: Thank you very much, Saranda!

Saranda Bogujevci: Thank you.