



**SID-0014X0001M0**

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**Interviewer:** Gill Maxwell  
**Interviewee:** Romana Ramzan

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**GILL:** I think we're ready to record. Thank you very much for coming, Romana. It's 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014. I'm Gill Maxwell and we're speaking about the Stepping Into Diversity project at Glasgow Caledonian University. Can I start please, Romana Ramzan, by asking you to state your full name with its spelling, and also when and where you were born?

*ROMANA:* Sure. My name's Romana Ramzan and I was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1983 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. What was the other? Spelling?

**GILL:** Yes.

*ROMANA:* Right. And my name is spelt as follows. So Romana is R-O-M-A-N-A and Ramzan is R-A-M-Z-A-N.

**GILL:** Thank you. Could we start by your telling me a little about your experience of coming to Glasgow?

*ROMANA:* Sure. So I came to Glasgow with my family back in August 1992. We were living in Rome, Italy, and because of my father's job we relocated to Scotland and I had no idea where Scotland was, let alone Glasgow. I mean, I'd heard of England and the United Kingdom but I was unaware as to what to expect coming over here. But I had this image of homes in the countryside with lots of greenery, and I always had this image that when we would move here I'd also have a white, fluffy dog, for some reason. I don't know where that came from. But, yeah, I was nine years old when I moved to Glasgow.

**GILL:** Thank you. Do you have any stories in your family about your parents, for example, coming to Glasgow, what their recollections are, what their experiences were?

*ROMANA:* I think for all of us we were excited because it was a new place that we were going to that we'd never been to before, but it did take us some time to get used to living here as well. It was so different to having lived in Rome. Glasgow has its own history, but Rome's... The architecture, the whole... getting used to a foreign language was a struggle there but when we came to Glasgow the thing that we found easiest to adapt to was knowing the language. It was a lot easier for us to integrate... for me it was easier to integrate into school. And I know for my parents, as well, it was easier for them in terms of work. My mum's an oncologist. When she was in Italy, one of the things she had to do was learn the language, whereas over here obviously she knew how to speak English so that wasn't such a big challenge. But we've all pretty much got the same sort of memories, coming over here. It was just an exciting new adventure for us to embark upon. None of us knew what we were going to get once we got here. But, safe to say, we've thoroughly enjoyed living here. So much so that it's now home.



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**GILL: Thank you. You mentioned that you came because of your father's job. Could you outline a little more about that?**

*ROMANA: Sure. My father's a diplomat and he works for the embassy of Pakistan. As a diplomat he moves after every three, three and a half years. After his posting in Rome he was asked to move to Scotland. That's how we all came about.*

**GILL: From what you've said you did have some expectations of coming to Glasgow. To what extent were they fulfilled?**

*ROMANA: Well, the one about the weather was not fulfilled. I was really excited and I guess you read stories about what England's like and what the countryside is like, so I think those were the stories that I imagined to be true for Glasgow as well, because I thought it was in the same sort of region, so of course everything would be the same. I think the biggest thing that didn't add up was the weather and that took some getting used to. I think I still try and get used to the weather now. But in terms of everything else, I think living here exceeded expectations. I know certainly in terms of everything, like quality of life, education, feeling like you belong as well... Because I find sometimes when you go to other countries, because you are a different ethnicity, sometimes you feel that you don't really integrate into the culture or the society as much. Whereas over here I've never felt that. I've found Scottish people to be really warm and welcoming, and that's the thing that I took to immediately. I guess when I moved, it was more when I went to school everyone was just curious as to... because there was never anyone who'd come from another part of the world, so they were really curious as to my background. I found that that allowed me to make friends a lot quicker. Of course, education-wise... I feel personally I achieved a lot more than I thought I would. I certainly didn't set my ambitions to do that at that time anyway but... So on the whole I think it did exceed expectations, absolutely.*

**GILL: Could you explain a bit more about the sense of belonging that you have? You say it's to do with language and friendliness.**

*ROMANA: Absolutely. I found that when I went to primary school... The first thing that I found really difficult going to Italy was obviously because I didn't know Italian it was so much harder to communicate with people. The kids who were in our neighbourhood, it took a bit longer, but through sign language we had to communicate, make friends, whereas here that was a big difference. Straightaway we were able to speak to other people, speak to other kids. So it was much easier because you knew the language, and also I just felt that people were really warm. Whenever you'd meet anyone... Even with the teachers, they'd try their best to make sure that you felt you were embedded into the school community. The thing that I found difficult it wasn't initially going into primary school. I was a bit nervous on the first day of school, obviously as anyone is, but I found that day 2 of school – my parents remember this as well – there was about five, six of the kids that I met on the first day were waiting for me outside my house on day 2. So that was really nice. I used to look forward to school every day. But then when I came to high school, the difference I found was the primary school that I went to was a feeder school for a different high school, so all my friends that I'd made over the two to three years were going to a different secondary school and I ended up going to a different one. And I think that, for me, was more difficult than the initial coming to Glasgow, because at that point I didn't know anyone in high school and high school was ten times bigger than what primary school was, and so many new faces. And it took me a bit of time to get used to... The first two or three months, first year of school. But then, once I'd made friends, it was OK, but I just think that knowing the language helped so much. And maybe it was the communities or something, but my friends who I became friends with, their parents would*



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*try and invite me over to their house and then I started joining these different sports clubs, so that kind of made me feel a bit more integrated, but there were differences in vocabulary that I used as well. I remember in primary school, the teacher said, "Get your jotters out," and I had no idea what that was. I was looking around trying to find the clue. Eventually I realised it's what we would call like a notebook or a notepad. Small things like "aye", and those were things that I found really funny and interesting but...*

**GILL: "Aye" for "yes"?**

*ROMANA: Aye for yes, which was strange. That for me was pirate-speak. That's where I'd heard it before. So there were obviously some differences in the way things were spoken. And I had an American twang because I went to an American school in Rome, so when I came here it makes you stand out a bit because obviously everyone's got a very strong Scottish accent. But I soon found that after... By the time I got to secondary school my American accent was gone. It's interesting because my brother still has a bit of the American twang, so I don't know if it's because he was older when he came here but my accent completely... There was no trace of the American left. I was very strong Scottish.*

**GILL: Thank you. Your brother's experiences and your parent's experiences of settling into Glasgow, are there any particular stories that come to mind from that, or did they have a similar experience to yourself?**

*ROMANA: I think it was a similar experience. I think the other thing we found was, certainly over here, was that there was a much larger Pakistani community. Whereas, in Rome, it was very very small. So when we came here, straightaway, because my dad's job, part of it was knowing the community, so we got to meet a lot of people from the same sort of background that we were from as well. In some ways, again, it was easier, in terms of getting Pakistani food and things. It was so much more easier over here. We thought it was a godsend because I know in Rome it was so difficult to find local spices that you might have used. So it was similar stories. Even my brother, he went straight into high school because of the age difference – he was older. He didn't have any problem integrating and making friends. If anything, same as me when I went to primary school, he had lots of friends. I think being slightly different helped him stand out a bit. I think he struggled in terms of getting to grasp with things, like the curriculum and obviously the differences in language, but in terms of settling in and getting to know people very very quickly, to do that. We always said that the biggest challenge we faced was just getting used to the weather. That was the biggest thing to adapt to.*

**GILL: OK, thanks. We've talked about accent and Glaswegian words and the English language. How many languages do you speak and does your family speak?**

*ROMANA: We can speak a few languages. I can speak three languages, so that would be Urdu, English and Italian. My brother is also the same, but we can also speak a bit of German, as well, because my dad, one of the places we lived in was in Germany so we went on a German learning course just to learn beginner's. So I wouldn't say I'm very advanced in that, but my parents can speak quite a few languages as well. My mum can't speak Italian but my Dad speaks Italian, Urdu, English, but then he can also speak Farsi as well, which is Persian, and he know a couple of other languages. He's quite good with languages.*

**GILL: Speaking these other languages, polyglots that you seem to me to be, has that enabled you to interact with different cultures within Glasgow?**



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*ROMANA: Absolutely. I think maybe that's part of the reason why we've been able to relate with people a bit quicker as well. I know certainly over here when we've been to Italian restaurants, if you can tell and the owner's are speaking Italian, if you start speaking with them in Italian immediately you form some sort of connection or a bond with them. So I think certainly knowing different languages and also having seen and experienced different cultures made it that much more easier to, not only relate to people, but it didn't seem alien because it wasn't the first time that we'd experienced it. But certainly it was much easier than previous experiences we'd had.*

**GILL: Can we go on to talk a little about cultural similarities and, possibly more importantly, differences? Can you identify anything that stands out in either category there?**

*ROMANA: I think the similarities it's that warmth that I've experienced with Scottish friends that I made over here. It's the same warmth as I've experienced with other people who are from a Pakistani background – very welcoming, very hospitable and also very open. I think that's one of the similarities. Differences... [pauses] I think these would be differences just in general with any sort of group of people. Because I've travelled a fair bit, and I've seen lots of different cultures, I guess my experience of the world is more open than what some other people's experiences might be. But at the moment there is no immediate differences that jump out, although I'll keep thinking about it and if something comes to mind I'll bring it up later.*

**GILL: OK. How would you describe yourself now in terms of nationality?**

*ROMANA: That is such a good question. It's hard to identify yourself. I know my roots are... I'm Pakistani. That's where my parents are from. I was born in Sri Lanka. But then again I've grown up here in Scotland, so I've got that Scottish identity as well. At times it feels like you don't really belong anywhere. Because I know sometimes when I go back to Pakistan, I get really excited because I'm going to see my family and friends, but when I get over there it doesn't feel like I'm really from there anymore. So at times you feel like a nomad, in-between places. Certainly I've got a very strong sense of Scottish identity as well as my Pakistani identity.*

**GILL: I wonder, as an extension of that, how you see yourself within the communities that you engage in?**

*ROMANA: It's interesting because you need to juggle both things. Within the Pakistani community we've obviously got a lot of events and activities going on and it almost feels like Clark Kent-esque, in that you take that cape off and then you switch and you're into one frame of mind, and then you switch again and you're into another frame of mind. And it's almost like juggling the languages as well that you speak, because I never know what language I think in. I've always been used to switching between... At home we speak Urdu. Not with my in-laws but with my own parents I speak Urdu, and my brother and sister. But then even with other Pakistani people I know I speak English, because they don't speak Urdu at all. So it's constantly switching back and forth, back and forth. It's hard. It's hard when you think about it but it doesn't feel so hard when you're doing it because it's almost like learned behaviour. You get used to it. Without thinking you just go into auto-pilot and you just do what you have to do.*

**GILL: OK, Thank you. Are your brother and sister and parents all still in Glasgow or have they moved since?**



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*ROMANA: My dad's moved since but we stayed on. My mum, brother and sister are also in Glasgow. My sister was living in Cardiff for a bit. She was studying her PhD while she was down there but she's now back home and much happier for it as well, I think. So my dad continues moving, but this is home for us so we stay here.*

**GILL: So this must have been the first city that you all stayed in then?**

*ROMANA: Yes.*

**GILL: When you came here, as a family, do you know if your parents expected you would stay here?**

*ROMANA: No. They never did, and my mum was always of that notion or mindset that we would always move. We would move with my dad. I know at the start, she'd be like, "There's no point." If it came to... either doing something to the house, like extending it or getting a conservatory, she'd be like, "We're not going to be here for that long." So it was always that thing where: This is only temporary and we'll move on. So no, none of us expected that we'd stay here, or stay as long as we did, but we ended up doing so, and, again, it came down to the fact that in terms of education, and also language, because we don't always move to English-speaking countries, and so my mum thought now that we've settled here and we seemed happy she didn't want to uproot us, because that would set us back in terms of university and so on, so that's why we stayed on.*

**GILL: You mentioned visiting family in Pakistan. How frequent are your contacts with your family?**

*ROMANA: It tends to be very frequent actually, because almost all my family are in Pakistan – cousins, aunts, uncles, so we tend to go once a year, but sometimes it ends up being twice a year, or sometimes it ends up being once every two years, but usually I think on average it's about once a year we end up visiting.*

**GILL: And how does that feel when you're in Pakistani?**

*ROMANA: It's nice. The weather's great so that's always a bonus, but it's great because you get to see your family again and you've got that connection. Some of my friends who are of Pakistani origin, they have their families over here. And I like that connection that they have because aunts, uncles, or their grandparents are here, but, for us, in order to have that connection we always had to go back. But it was something we always looked forward to. And I think because we keep going back so frequently we never felt alienated from the culture so it wasn't unusual to us when we went back. But I know the only thing was whenever we used to think of holidays it would never occur to us to go anywhere else but Pakistan. My parents would say, "Do you guys want to go to the US or do something a bit different?" We'd think about it a bit but if all your friends and family are in a certain place, and you've got that once a year trip you're going to make, it just always made sense to go back home.*

**GILL: What role does worship or faith, if any, have in your life?**

*ROMANA: It plays a strong role in that I'm Muslim so... I don't pray five times a day like I should be doing but... I still try and follow the practices and teachings of my faith. And certainly some parts of the year it's a bit stronger than it is in other parts. I think it still plays a strong part in my day-to-day life.*

**GILL: And are you connected to a place of worship in particular?**



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*ROMANA: Not so much, no. There are quite a few mosques over here but I find that I don't tend to go to them.*

**GILL: OK. Now you've been here since you were nine years old, I think you said, can you identify any changes you've seen since then?**

*ROMANA: Changes within Glasgow itself?*

**GILL: Yes.**

*ROMANA: Yeah, huge amount of changes. I remember when I first came here and you compare it to a place like Rome, it seemed almost primitive in some regards. The town centre was just small. It was Argyle Street back then, I think. Buchanan Street wasn't even in the picture. Then, over the years, I think the economy strengthened and just general growth improved. So in terms of shopping, there's Buchanan Street, Argyle Street, Sauchiehall Street, it's become much bigger. So there's been that. Also in terms of restaurants, that's also increased as well. Whereas before you'd get a very limited range of cuisines or things you could get, now there's more. But also there's more ethnicities as well. You start to see more ethnicities. Compared to when I first came here, the city's completely transformed. I think in parts you wouldn't recognise it. I know some of my friends' parents visited Glasgow or Edinburgh when they were studying back when they were younger. When I'd meet them they'd say, "Are you living in Glasgow?" and I'd say, "Yeah." They'd say, "Well, we went back in '72 or 1980." I'd say, "Well, if you go now, you probably wouldn't recognise the Glasgow that you once thought it was." It feels more cosmopolitan and more of a hub than what it was before.*

**GILL: Has that been reflected generally in a particular area or areas you've lived in in Glasgow?**

*ROMANA: Not so much the areas because I've lived in the suburbs. I suppose the differences I've noticed there is maybe... maybe local shops opening up. But it wasn't so much in the areas I lived in but certainly when you cross over the Clyde and you come into the centre, that's completely changed. I know there's been some regeneration and regrowth in other areas as well. But it does feel like a completely different city.*

**GILL: And would you be able to make any comments on how Glasgow might change in the future, in particular in relation to diversity?**

*ROMANA: I think it's only going to become stronger in terms of diversity. As it is already, you see so many more different ethnic groups. I think because it is a welcoming place, I think you will see more and more ethnic groups coming in to live here. So, yeah, I think it'll grow stronger in terms of diversity, yeah.*

**GILL: Lastly, I would like to ask you to explain the basis of your award of Woman of the Future, awarded recently at the Scottish Asian Women's awards ceremony event.**

*ROMANA: Well, that was quite humbling but it was also an honour as well. I know that... Growing up myself I didn't face any prejudices or any difficulties in wanting to pursue my career aspirations. My parents were very very supportive, and if anything they said the emphasis should be on education. So I always felt that in anything that I did I was always supported. But I realise that not everybody has that same opportunity. Certainly, I'm sure it happens in lots of cultures, but certainly in our culture as well, it's harder for girls sometimes to want to pursue careers or want to study, so for me it was... It's a huge*



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*responsibility because what I would like to do is maybe educate young girls that... Not necessarily of the same ethnicity but just young girls in general that technology and games or something that they should consider as a career option, because there's always, I guess, the traditional career paths that people always, certainly in our culture, view to be the ones that you should go down. I know, for instance, my grandmother, unless you were a doctor or an engineer, she couldn't comprehend that there were other careers beyond that. It wasn't in a bad way, it's just that when she was growing up those were the things you do, and it might explain why most of my aunts are doctors as well, because that was her focus. I know when I wanted to... IT was something my parents were supportive of, they thought technology was great, but games was something at that time that didn't really fit into their thoughts of that's what I was going to do, and it never featured in mine until I was in fourth year of my undergraduate. I think it's just about opening up people's eyes to the different kind of career opportunities that are out there, but also getting them at a much younger age to start thinking about this. There's always that stereotype that games are geeky or they're for boys, but if you can start telling people, "Actually, that's not true," it's more about educating them. The award for me was a great honour because it recognises the work I've done to date, but it also ensures that at the back of my mind I keep that focus on trying to work more with schoolchildren, and girls in general, and give them role models, so that they can follow paths that they want to and they have somebody they can reach out to in terms of a mentor if they so decide to go down this path. And even if they don't, it's always good to find out what you don't like as well as what you do like.*

**GILL: Thank you very much. In that you referred to "our culture". I wonder what's in your mind. What does that culture refer to?**

*ROMANA: That would refer to the Pakistani culture. This is what I'm saying. Sometimes I switch in and out, but it would be the Pakistani culture. But in terms of women in general, they're grossly under-represented in this sector anyway, so I wouldn't necessarily differentiate between the groups, but I know that sometimes in the Pakistani culture girls have a much tougher time to... even if they get to university to beyond that furthering their careers. It presents more of a challenge. So it's just showing them that it is possible, it's doable. Because often this whole thing of marriage then comes in as well and how do you continue your career once you're married. So it's just showing them that, yes, it can be done. There are people out there doing it and introducing them to other people who are doing interesting and amazing things as well. That's one of the things that I learned when I went to the awards. I met these women who are doing amazing work in different areas and it was a privilege to meet all of them and speak to them and find out about their experiences as well. There was a girl on the night who won an award in the sports category and she was a kick-boxer. Never in the life did I think... female kick-boxers are few and far between, but then on top of that somebody who is from a Pakistani background... I think she was Pakistani. She could have been Indian, but either or, to be a kick-boxer was something that blew my mind. But it just shows you there are people out there doing so many amazing things and sometimes you don't hear about them, and it's just shedding light on those different areas.*

**GILL: And when you say the Pakistani culture, that's located in Glasgow?**

*ROMANA: Yes, yes.*

**GILL: You referred to the sector in gaming, that leads me to ask you to just outline a little bit about your occupation or profession.**

*ROMANA: Sure. So I'm a lecturer in game design here at Glasgow Caledonian*



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*University. Prior to that I was working for a games company called Denki. They were based in Dundee, so I was with them for a while and then I started teaching over here, which I'm thoroughly enjoying, but my route into the industry was slightly unconventional in that I come from an academic background, and most people who get into the industry aren't academics. But again, it's something that applies as a principle in general. I think it's these unique things that you can bring to the table that help you grow, but also add an extra interesting dimension to things as well. So, yeah...*

**GILL: To close, is there anything else about heritage, diversity for yourself or your family in particular, or more generally, you'd like to comment on.**

*ROMANA: I don't think anything comes to mind at the moment other than I think the heritage here in Scotland is so rich and it's so diverse, and it's the one thing I find when speaking to my friends is that a lot of my Scottish friends I find that, compared to when I've met people when I've been to the US or something, people here seem to be more aware of different ethnicities, different beliefs, whereas if you travel to other parts of the world they're not so aware, but I think it's because society's so well integrated here. Most people have friends of multi-cultural faiths which helps build that understanding. Whereas you can travel to some parts of the world and it's the first time they'll have seen somebody of a different ethnicity, which in this day and age is still baffling,*

*I guess I know once we went to Germany and we went to this really small town. I think it's the first time they ever saw a Pakistani person there because as we were walking through the town centre, people would just stop and stare at you, which was an interesting experience because it's never happened before. And it was surprising as well, because you'd have thought in this day and age with everything on TV, media, internet, the whole thing, I guess maybe they hadn't seen a real live person, a tangible thing in front of them before.*

**GILL: Romana, thank you very much.**

*ROMANA: No, thank you. It's a pleasure.*

**GILL: Thank you so much.**

**Transcript ends 0:30:32:7**