

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH ZANA NIXHA

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Duration: 58 minutes

Present:

1. Zana Nixha (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

Aurela Kadriu: Introduce yourself, I mean, name, last name, birthdate and tell us a little about your early childhood memories, your family, your family background, what you remember from your very early life. What are your first memories?

Zana Nixha: OK. I am Zana Nixha, now Osaj. I was born in November 1978 in Pristina. I am a child of two architects, I mean, both my mother and my father were architects. What can I remember from my childhood? Maybe from early childhood there were many... I mean, I remember a lot because we, it was my parents' wish to travel a lot, to see a lot.

Maybe since they were architects, they wanted [to travel] a lot and I have many memories, maybe very early photographic memories of various places. I even remember...maybe the earliest photographic memory that I have is somewhere in Turkey, the Trojan horse, I was only three and something remained in my memory. First, I thought it was only because of the photographs, but the photographic memories that I have do not show in photographs, I remember myself going upstairs, inside. I mean, it is an experience, maybe the earliest that I remember. Yes, and I guess all these influenced the fact... that I want to travel and see...

I don't know, I always...what can I say about childhood? It was typical for that time, education until... same, I mean, close friends. I don't know what can I specify about my childhood. I lived with my grandparents, and they have a big influence on my formation. But I believe that my parents, particularly with their profession and wishes, have influenced me mostly.

Aurela Kadriu: In which neighborhood did you grow up?

Zana Nixha: In Dardania.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember, do you remember the life in your neighborhood at that time?

Zana Nixha: Yes, yes. It was exactly as everybody describes that time. We stayed out playing all the time, I mean, *hop* after the school we had to go out and play all the games we would play until late at night. I mean, we had homework and everything else but we went out nevertheless. I mean, it was the period when the only pleasure we had was going out and meeting our friends, especially those living near us, in the neighborhood... playing all day.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us a little about the period of elementary school, how do you remember elementary school?

Zana Nixha: I don't know, in elementary school... I was pretty introverted as a child, but I always had a lot of friends. I don't know, I still don't know how to explain it. But I don't know, we were a very good circle of friends until the fifth and sixth grades when the division of schools began, and the expulsion of some teachers who were more engaged in activism, for example [Naxhije Buçinca](#) who is now an activist for women's rights and so on, started. And we, I mean, I remember myself going to protests from the fifth grade (smiles) where we demanded our expelled teachers back.

The physical divide of school... walls physically divided school. In the part where Albanians had to stay and I mean in the part where you walked in the school corridors, walls started to be erected and to define parts in which you were not allowed to go. But I don't know, maybe this made us become closer to each other and feel more... to want to be close to each other, to do more. We didn't have today's problems of harassing each other or... maybe it happened, but not like children's problems nowadays. I believe the situation of that time made us be like that.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember the first contact with... you mentioned the physical divide of the school, the first contact with... when did it happen and how, how is it? How do you remember it?

Zana Nixha: I don't... I don't know, we were, somehow we understood what was happening. It didn't seem, how to say, surprising or you know, "Wow! What happened?" Somehow we were prepared. Maybe because there were conversations at home that something was wrong or we heard our parents, or you had expectations that it would be divided that way. I remember the period when we didn't even have classes for two, three months, before all this. We were supposed to start school in September but did so only in November or December because we weren't sure whether they would allow us to enter the school. I mean, when we went there and saw it, we weren't caught by surprise, we expected it.

On the other hand, there were times when you would see children of Serbian nationality who would maybe greet you. I remember someone speaking Albanian to me because they continued learning Albanian until late. Then we started [learning] in Serbian, we started earlier and they... we tried to, I mean, Serbian teachers, we tried to rebel against them, we didn't want to listen to them and so on. But there was fear, I mean, we didn't dare to (smiles) always express what we felt.

Aurela Kadriu: How was your relation with people of Serbian nationality before this divide, be it with neighbors or children with whom you played in the neighborhood?

Zana Nixha: I am a child who didn't have many contacts. In our neighborhood, we didn't have many...different from my friends who all spoke Serbian because they had friends...I learned it very

late through television and newspapers because I didn't have contacts. But I don't know, I didn't have any prejudice or opinion that they aren't... that they are different or something like that because, in my family, they always discussed how the problem comes from above, the problem is not between people. I don't know...

Aurela Kadriu: How did your parents communicate the whole situation to you? Or you to your parents, when you saw the divide at school and...

Zana Nixha: To be honest...

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember the narrative of your parents' story, the discourse?

Zana Nixha: To be honest, I don't even remember whether we mentioned it at all. You know, I really don't remember myself telling them like, "Wow! They divided it!" Or something like that, because it seems to me like these were all expected. Maybe the discussion was more about how our class monitor was expelled and we thought she wouldn't return, and how we went to protests and our parents would look for us, "Where are you, what are you doing?" Because I mean, we were in the fifth grade, and we were so little when we did such things. But they were never afraid about what we were doing and what we weren't... "You should be wherever the others are." I mean, there was no such... for us, we...

What I remember is having architects as parents. I always saw them working on their projects, and I remember myself at that time working on projects on how I would like my school to be. Maybe I heard it from them, but I know that I took and drew them the way plans are drawn and I know that I divided schools according to the dreams I had, with laboratories and so on. Maybe that was a manifestation of something that I don't have but would like to. But I hid them [plans] so well that my parents wouldn't find them because I was afraid of what they would say, whether I did them good or not. I didn't want them to see me... but in fact I know that I got a lot of good words from them when they found it, "Wow!" You know, "How did you know how to do this project?" But I believe that it was a way to reveal what I was missing, the big desperation I had. That was my way of expressing what I was missing. I don't know...

Aurela Kadriu: Then... high school, I mean, the transition...

Zana Nixha: Then high school... Most of us weren't going to school buildings. My generation, I mean, those born in '78 and all the others chose schools based on which one of them had a building. Xhevdet Doda was one that still had its building, and we didn't even think about it. Some would say that maybe it is a special school, mathematics school, "Are you sure you want to go there?" But that wasn't very important to us. We simply wanted to go to a school that was a real school, at least with my friends with whom I was at the same school. Then, Xhevdet Doda turned into a general school, even though the school was more in worse condition than the elementary school. I mean, it was a building that didn't even look like a school; it was very old. But we were happy nevertheless because we were in a school building. You could at least feel the spirit of being in a classroom.

Aurela Kadriu: How do you remember the way professors lectured? Were there... what kind of nuances were there in professors' lectures in high school?

Zana Nixha: They were very politically charged, I remember... a lot. I mean there were some who were very charged. We even joked about it because when we would do something wrong, some professors would call or associate us with UDB,¹ Serbs and so on... they always connected it with something political. We always laughed about it and took it as a joke [when they told us] that we were part of UDB. We were like this. We did bad things. Yes, there were many who were politically charged. I remember later on the roof of the school, when I was in the fourth year, someone wrote UÇK [KLA]. It was painted on the roof of the school. That was, even though we were... to me it seemed unnecessary because we were a school, and we didn't need to take sides, here or there at the time... but maybe this happened later when there was a divide between the Peaceful Movement and the Armed Movement. It had an impact, they were pretty much politically charged, there were professors...

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember how you joined Post-pessimists?

Zana Nixha: In fact, I had started going even earlier to...for example, I remember that it had a big influence, maybe I will begin from that, a meeting we had with Ilir Rodiqi, a conversation. He organized it in the church once a week... this was when I was in the eighth grade, and we would talk about various topics.

Then at school, I guess I was in the first year [of high school], fifteen years or I don't know. I knew that someone, we told each other about it, "There is a youth organization." I guess I was intrigued by the fact that they go abroad and hold seminars in various countries as a youth organization and, "Would you like to come to the meeting and see what happens?" And like that, I mean together with two classmates we went and attended the first meeting.

Aurela Kadriu: How do you remember your time at Post-pessimists? Maybe the first memories from the first day you went there, where did you hold the meetings and...

Zana Nixha: We held the meetings at homes...

Aurela Kadriu: What did you talk about in those meetings?

Zana Nixha: At homes, mainly... I guess Petrit's was the first. Petrit Selimi was the first person who informed us about the plans, what was going to happen, what was the goal, and that's what I remember. I mean, we were a group, those of us who were in that meeting remained there [part of Post-pessimists]. First a meeting in Austria was organized. Of course we couldn't all be part of it, but that meeting was preparation for that. And then the other ideas came.

But more or less, we were all familiar faces to each other; most of us were from Xhevdet Doda. I don't remember whether someone from outside was part at that time. Even though we were not in the same class, and they were not the friends that I would hang out with day and night, they were there. I mean, as young people from the same school, we started and set the other meeting for the next week,

¹ *Uprava državne bezbednosti* State Security Administration

then the next and so on; so it began. To tell you about the feeling, I don't know, for me it was interesting to see what was happening. But it was also the eagerness to engage in something more interesting outside school, something attractive that can also be entertaining, but why not also educative.

Aurela Kadriu: What were the main activities with which... that you organized within Post-pessimists?

Zana Nixha: When the office was established, we received a donation, a kind of donation, financial aid from the Norwegian government, and that is the time when we started planning in a more detailed way. Besides the office and the organizing, we had structure, we had to establish the organization. I even remember that it was at that time when I first learned what a statute is (laughs), and what organizing is. The newspaper was one of the ideas... to publish a newspaper dealing with youth concerns, because we thought that there was nothing addressing our generation directly.

But then many other projects. It depended; people could come to us with a project and ask for financial aid, we considered it, and we mainly supported cultural projects or... but also ones that had entertaining character, I mean, through Post-pessimists we tried to do everything that we were missing at that time.

Aurela Kadriu: What was the nature of articles you published in the newspaper?

Zana Nixha: (Smiles) The articles, that was — in the beginning it was a challenge because we didn't know how to do it. Each of us, some did translations of other articles, and some wrote. There were some who also wrote, for example, real stories, we were a bit unexperienced in this sense. Then, when we got engaged, we became part of *Koha*, at that time it was *Koha Javore* [Weekly Times]. People from *Koha* helped us in this sense. I remember it well: there was Dukagjin Gorani, I guess Baton Haxhiu and...it was kind of their duty and maybe their wish to come and tell us how a newspaper is made.

From them, we learned how to be focused on a particular topic, to have every article looping around that topic, to be very genuine in everything we write and how the cover should be connected to that. I mean, there were some of us who dealt with the layout of the newspapers, with articles but there were some of us who also dealt with marketing. However, we needed some financial support in order to make the newspaper. We didn't want to use the money from the fund because we tried to save the fund as much as we could for other things that we wanted to do, so we asked the donor...sponsors or advertisements and so on. I mean, there were some who worked separately to find sponsors.

But that also became then... I mean, we tried to find sponsors that were somehow related to youth like a youth clothes shop or something. I mean, we took the first lessons on how a newspaper is made from the journalists of *Koha*.

Aurela Kadriu: Then this, do you remember...how do you remember the other activities which you are calling cultural? What were these activities, how did you organize them and where?

Zana Nixha: There were, for example, requests for personal exhibitions, but the condition was that the artists who exhibited had to be young. Or there were requests to organize parties from other

people and we financed them, but they were always themed or something. This is what I remember. I don't know what else could be in this sense, I mean, mainly something about culture or concerts with bands or this... These were what we tried to do. We had to organize for the following meetings that were held, I guess, annually.

We held meetings, contacts with them... For some time I had to be, for example, I was appointed the leader of the office. I remember I had to report every activity that we did, where we were spending the fund and how. At an age of 15, we had to take care of spending the fund throughout the year and not have money left for the end, the next year. I mean, it was a responsibility for me. Now that I think about it, it was a big responsibility for a 15-year-old. Then, it was a dilemma to choose between projects, I took the role of assessing the financing how... but we always did that together, it wasn't only one person.

We took the project, considered whether it was good or bad, what can we contribute. This is how I remember it, but what I remember mostly is the fact that we went there everyday. That meant to us what going out means nowadays, going to the office of Post-pessimists and spending time together. We had a place where we felt comfortable, like home, Post-pessimists after school.

Part Two

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us what was the structure of people who were part of Post-pessimists, and what was the criteria for the people who wanted to become part of it?

Zana Nixha: I don't know whether there was criteria at all. We were interested, many of us, whoever was interested to work and contribute in every sense, with ideas, new ideas, especially for the newspaper. Because we needed people for the newspaper, because there were many requests for it, I mean, whoever wanted to be engaged in that direction. And I know that, at some moment, when we were holding the meetings, I guess the weekly meeting, I was leading it, and there were many people and the coordinator of the office, Violeta [Selimi], came to me and said, "Zana, it is a bit dangerous to have so many people in the office." Because, I mean, at that time, every gathering, every big gathering of people was suspicious.

And I know that I had the very difficult task of telling them "You have to go." I know it was disappointing, but we didn't dare and allow that crowd to discuss inside. It was like, I mean, it could be dangerous if they [police] came, "Why, how, what?" I mean, we tried to avoid these situations. Maybe there were some who felt bad or expelled at those moments, but individually, whenever they wanted to come and engage, I don't believe we had a certain criteria.

However, people were selected to go to meetings. For example, if six people were selected to go to a seminar in Norway... The selecting process was a bit more difficult. Trust me, I don't remember why someone was selected and someone not, but mainly each one of us got the chance to go... I mean, if someone couldn't go this year, they would go the next year and so on. I was, for example, in Norway

two times. I got to go to two meetings which were organized later, not in the first year that I joined them [Post-pessimists]. And so, I guess nobody remained without...

Aurela Kadriu: Where were your offices?

Zana Nixha: The office was where Strip Depo coffee shop is now, exactly that apartment. It was Petrit's apartment, we took that apartment and... we found various excuses to say that it was Petrit's apartment in case the police would come and ask, "Why, what are you doing here?" or something. Even though, later we... it was registered. I know that we had to register the office in Belgrade at that time, but we also had to have Serbian members as well. I mean, we took all the funds with Post-pessimists because it was not only an organization of Albanian children, but an organization of Albanian and Serbian children together. Even though we invited them [Serbs], they never dared to come to the office of Post-pessimists.

I know that we took, how to say, the blessing. I know that we asked the political class of that time what was their opinion that we were opening an organization together with Serbian children. I know that someone I remember that someone came to the office and said that they even talked to Ibrahim Rugova about this, and he was very positive about it, "Yes, very good that you are doing this activity, you should continue like this." And, somehow, we felt comfortable, especially on our side, but the Serbian members didn't have... in fact, they didn't dare to come to the office because of their people.

Aurela Kadriu: You said that the organization was registered in Belgrade. Do you know how the whole process took place? Were you there?

Zana Nixha: Yes, because, at that time, I wanted to be selected as the leader. I had to write the statute and send it there. I don't know, I didn't deal with it...

Aurela Kadriu: What to do?

Zana Nixha: We had to send the status to the Center of Registration of Organizations...

Aurela Kadriu: In Belgrade?

Zana Nixha: I guess it was in Belgrade. As much as I remember it was in Belgrade. It had to be sent there, and I don't believe we had problems. We didn't have any problems to register.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us a little about the experience in the city, the activities that you organized, those that you called cultural activities? Did they take place in spaces... probably alternative ones... Can you tell us the experience in the city in general? You lived in Dardania, went to Xhevdet Doda, from Xhevdet Doda you went to the office at Strip Depo, then the activities that you organized somewhere else, if you can...

Zana Nixha: They were mainly like all the others, not only our activities, but all of them. Every exhibition that was organized at that time took place in coffee shops and we continued like that, or there were certain coffee shops for parties. I guess there was a disco club, a big space which we used, at the Youth Palace. You know, I don't remember other places except these. You know, I mean, there

was no other space. We knew that every event would take place in these small venues, adapted for a certain activity. I mean, there was no venue which you could use that was proper for, let's say, an exhibition and so on.

Aurela Kadriu: How did you do the distributing of the magazine?

Zana Nixha: Eventually, the newspaper became part of *Koha Javore*, and people could buy it together with *Koha*. It got pretty famous. At least young people knew about it, it seemed interesting. Then, if they weren't engaged in the newspaper, many new people from all around worked on the cover... Pristina was small at that time, most of us knew each other, you know, there were no cases where we recruited someone whom we didn't know. If you didn't hang out with them, at least you knew who they were. I mean, we were a kind... whoever was featured in the newspaper, I believe everybody knew about who they were or why or... It was interesting and entertaining because of all the ideas. You must've seen some of the covers and it was mostly entertaining, even though it was a job. But...

Aurela Kadriu: How was your participation, I mean, your activity at Post-pessimists perceived by the people, family at that time when it wasn't that easy to move in the city?

Zana Nixha: In fact, they were very happy that we were engaged in something more worthy than just staying home after school. I was thinking about it; Maybe they knew each other. My parents knew whom I was hanging out with. I mean, they felt safe because I was in a good circle of friends... they were all very positive, and I know that there were friends of mine who weren't part of it and their parents would ask them, "Why not?" You know, "Why don't you become part of it?" I guess they all were very happy for us being part of it.

One moment I had one like...from my parents, respectively from my father. When they appointed me the director, or how to call it, I know that he gave me a long lecture on how... because it seemed strange to him how I might like having a leading position, and I know that he held a long lecture on how, "The chair is not important," (laughs) from that time. "The profession is important and what you are doing." But to me that was banal because it happened in a way that someone simply came to me, "Ou, Zanë, do you accept?" I said, "Yes." It is not that it was something that I took with...

But I know I was hesitant at first, and I know that I had to go and discuss with the coordinator of the office and see what I was supposed to do, what were my tasks, to find out what I was getting into... But then I saw that it wasn't anything much, I mean, it wasn't something of big importance. But I remember this as a detail; I remember that I returned it to him later when he got into a position (laughs). I told him, "You are [fighting] for the chair just like me." But I always had that, I mean, that I had to work for my profession and not be engaged in the other things because they are not important and not worthy.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us about the synchronization or coordination of the activities with other groups of Post-pessimists in Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia?

Zana Nixha: We always...with other groups, aha you mean with other Post-pessimists?

Aurela Kadriu: Yes.

Zana Nixha: We mainly only met them in the meetings abroad. I don't know that we communicated much. Maybe, individually, yes, we might've had contacts or meetings. But we were way more active in every project that we did here. Maybe we got the critique that we had to be together with Serbian children and that we didn't communicate, but somehow... it never was the reason why we didn't do it...

When we met there, we had a really good time. It was very well organized. We had morning meetings with psychologists where we talked about how we were feeling in our countries, but we also heard each other telling how they were feeling. And we saw how many things we had in common, more similarities than differences. Then there were the post-war meetings where usually somehow the discussion always came to the point of politics, offices, communication. International coordinators always insisted for us to come together, and we always told them why it was difficult for us to come together in such a situation, how dangerous it was. And it resulted in accusations and in... but only during the meeting, as long as it passed, we would still continue without holding grudges or... this is at least as far as I remember.

I don't know, maybe sometimes we felt a bit excluded because of the language. They gathered sometimes, they had the same songs they all knew, with guitars and so on. And we were a bit like...because we didn't know them (laughs), we had our songs. And here we had a critique, for example, during our stay in Norway, during the seminar that, "Why you Albanians are staying more on your own?" There was no particular reason. It was simply that we wanted to hang out with each other and sing in Albanian. Then we said, "OK, do you want? Let's sing in Albanian, listen to the other part." But they had more in common in that sense. You know, maybe because of the language and...

Aurela Kadriu: How many meetings did you get to attend?

Zana Nixha: The main one was that in Norway. Then we went to another meeting with only two of us from Kosovo. It was more for refugee children, but then Post-pessimists were established in Norway from those who were refugees there. I mean, there were Albanians and Bosnians, but some of us went from every country. It was a meeting where we went there to tell them how to do it... then I went to some other meetings as well... there were meetings in Subotica, Novi Sad, here in the region. I don't remember any other... I guess these are all.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember the trip to... we are talking about Norway since it is further?

Zana Nixha: Yes, I remember it very well. We had to, I guess we all gathered in Zürich. I guess we went to Belgrade by bus, yes. We went to Belgrade by bus, the bus that took off at 5AM, then we met with the Serbian group. Then we all gathered in Zürich and continued to Norway. I guess it was the same both times that I went to Norway.

I don't know, in Belgrade we saw it that... from here it was like, "Wow, where are you going?" But nobody knew what language we were speaking there, or who we were, or...I mean, you wouldn't feel bad for going there. There was a song when we wanted to find a mutual song which we all knew. In the

airport, I know, when we gathered... I know that we decided to sing Branko's song. There was a TV show for children which we all watched on Saturdays and Sundays...there was an introduction to that TV show, and we all knew it, so we decided to sing it together. But we hung out, we had fun together no matter what was happening between us.

Aurela Kadriu: What were your parents working during the '90s? I am sorry for returning...

Zana Nixha: Yes. My parents were expelled from their jobs. They both were professors in the Faculty of Architecture, and they both were expelled. Then they tried to find... I remember that, in the beginning, we opened a shop of car part, if I am not mistaken, I remember my father going to Greece with all those who had shops to buy parts and to sell them here. Why I remember it is because whenever he went there, he would bring us toys from Greece, and we had a collection of Barbie dolls in the living room, bedroom (laughs) and everything. I remember that, I mean, it is not that I had any feeling that, "Wow, this is really bad." To me, it seemed normal because everybody was going through the same thing. We all had the same problem, and we didn't feel bad or more...

I know how, for example, there was the time when they said, "We cannot go on vacation." There were years, during that time, "We cannot go on vacation." It was very normal that most of us didn't go on vacation. I mean, you didn't feel like you have less or you are in a worse situation or something because we were all the same. That's how I remember that part. Then my father went to Albania to work for a long time, in Tirana, as an architect, then I joined him in the last year together with the whole family. And I lived in Tirana for one year.

Aurela Kadriu: In which year?

Zana Nixha: '96. In '96 I went to high school, the fourth year of high school at "Sami Frashëri" in Tirana.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us a little about that time?

Zana Nixha: Yes...

Aurela Kadriu: How did it happen that you went there first and then your time there?

Zana Nixha: Then I didn't get to go to school much because... So, my father had been there for a long time and, at some point, we decided that we had to be together, that we cannot live separated. We also thought that the perspective of studies there would be better for us there than in Kosovo. My mother had the chance to start working there because, in Kosovo, we didn't have opportunities. So, we all decided to go there. Even though, until that time, we would go there for holidays and so on since our father was there, but, this time, we decided to go all together and start going to school there, each one of us, my sister and I, our brother in kindergarten and so on.

I went with a... I don't know how to say it, I guess Post-pessimists helped me not to go there with prejudices but to be open and accept to be part of them. I mean, because most of us who went there had a kind of, "They are different, they don't know, they speak..." No, I was very enthusiastic about going there. Because life was different there, you could go to the theater (smile) much more often, or

there were concerts almost constantly. And I know that always after school with classmates... in fact I immediately started hanging out with them, and I know that they came and told me, "Zana, you are different from Kosovars." I said, "Why?" "Because you don't tell us about how you know more than us." They had a feeling of inferiority because we were always more open to the West and so on.

In fact, for me, it was interesting the fact that let's say, my classmates didn't ask, "Are you reading a book?" But they asked, "What book are you reading?" And I always mentioned this because they read a lot there, they all had more general knowledge than most of the students or young people here. So, I created friendships very quickly. We went on excursions together, and I still have the friends that I made there. It was a very short time because the troubles began there in '97, and then we had to move to Kosovo again. But I have the friendships from that four-five months stay. We had to take additional classes in order to catch them. There were two mathematics classes there I had. We always took additional classes.

I can specify a moment when, for example, my mathematics teacher didn't want me to receive the oral exam. They would take oral exams almost in every class, we had ten or fifteen grades for one semester and she would just pass me. The professor with whom I learned mathematics asked me, "Why isn't she asking you to take the oral exam?" "I don't know." And I know that he went to talk to her and told her, "Ask her, it's not a problem." She said, "I am afraid because she might not know." She had a prejudice, and she said, "I am afraid she will look bad in front of other students and then there is nothing I can do." He said, "No, no, ask her." And, when I took the oral exam, I knew everything because I had reviewed a lot and then I know that in front of all the students she said, "I have to apologize because I had a prejudice that those of you who come from Kosovo don't know. I am so sorry." And I know that, even though she was very strict, and we all were afraid of her, she apologized for the prejudice she had against Kosovar students (laughs) of that time.

So, I had a good time, especially with my class monitor. She was our Albanian Language and Literature teacher. Garentina Kraja was in Albania at the same time, so the Albanian teacher kept us close to her., She took us in every meeting, she always selected us among the other students for meetings with great writers like Ismail Kadare or Azem Shkreli. In fact, Garentina organized the meeting with Azem Shkreli. I mean, we were her favorite because she wanted to keep us close and make us feel belonging. I have a very positive, very good experience from Albania.

Aurela Kadriu: Were you active in Post-pessimists when you went there...

Zana Nixha: No, no...

Aurela Kadriu: Or you already had...

No, no. I simply left. I don't remember why. I guess there were some disagreements that made me leave, but they were usual. I mean, I didn't agree with a way of organizing things. They wanted to organize some workshops inside, and I wanted to take someone from outside to organize and lead them. I know that we had moments of disagreement between us and, at a moment, I said, "I no longer

agree with this.” And I continued, but then I also left because I had other interests. I guess that was more the reason.

Aurela Kadriu: Do you remember the time when you returned to Kosovo from Tirana in '97? The experience of returning?

Zana Nixha: Yes. The schooling in Tirana was cut because the troubles started in the South of Albania, and we were waiting for it to begin again, but my mother... my mother was still teaching in the faculty because they didn't stop teaching at all. They held classes so that there wouldn't be shortages at the University of Pristina; she had already returned because of the classes. She took my sister and my brother with her as far as I remember... no, she only took my brother. And then I remained there, and I was like, “I am just wasting time here, why do I not go to Pristina?” That was the time when I just took the bus and left, “I am going until the schooling starts again and I will return.” And I never returned.

Then it was very difficult for my father to get out of... But I mean, I was lucky that I left at the moment... simply to come to the school and see the classmates that I had here. To spend time here because I had no school there.... Then it was very difficult for me to integrate at school here, the same school to which I went for three years. I know that they caused a lot of problems, they were asking me to take some exams, they wouldn't accept the grades of the semester that I had spent there. That was the greatest disappointment because people from the school where I was for three years are expecting me to be worse than those there who didn't know me at all.

I can make exceptions. There were professors who tried, they tried a lot and asked me to take oral exams and everything else, but there were some others who didn't. So, I had been graded in some subjects, and, for the others, I had to take extra exams. I don't know.

Aurela Kadriu: Then what, how did you continue after high school? What happened to you after high school?

Zana Nixha: I enrolled in the faculty and when I did so...

Aurela Kadriu: In which year?

Zana Nixha: It was '97. '97, the first day of the faculty there were the protests of October 1 (laughs). I mean, the day when I was supposed to go to the faculty for the first time was a protest. They were...

Aurela Kadriu: Did you go to the protests?

Zana Nixha: Yes.

Aurela Kadriu: How do you remember them?

Zana Nixha: In the beginning, it was very scary because we all felt obliged to go. There was no chance to even think about not going. I mean, we were expecting everything, but we went to the protest nevertheless. It wasn't fear but a kind of obligation. “We have to go and there is no room for further discussion.” I remember October 1st very well. I know that we escaped when they started with, with,

with these...It was pretty scary, we stayed at houses until it was over, until the evening, we found shelters at home until there was no more risk.

Then there were protests being organized more often. At some point, they became so ordinary that there was no strong reaction from the police. But we went to almost all of them. There were various ways of protesting, but I remember... there were again, there were protests in the city center. I remember when they would throw these {explains with hands} for teargas. I remember how we sat {explains with hands} and they would go over our heads but...

I don't know, it is very interesting when you think about them now. They were very scary, but the moment you are there... scary but there was also a kind of... ordinary. I mean, then we talked about it laughing, "Look what happened to us, where were you? What..." I mean, it was a kind of normality (laughs) which wasn't supposed to be normal, but it is created when something becomes your routine.

Aurela Kadriu: Were you part of the organizing group of the protests...

Zana Nixha: No.

Aurela Kadriu: Or you just were part of them?

Zana Nixha: No, no. Because we had just enrolled in the faculty, we didn't even know, we didn't know our fellow students or... we weren't part of it yet. Our first day was the October 1 protest, I mean... then the protests were organized not only from... I mean, it was a bigger organization, not only from students, as far as I know. There were various organizing of protests at that time. In the faculty we were in home-schooling.²

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell us a little about that time? Where did the Faculty of Architecture hold classes...

Zana Nixha: It was in Arbëria. They were well organized, I mean, there was order. It was a bit of a problem for us because the Faculty of Architecture requires a lot of work, but most of it was done at home. I mean, I guess it is still the same, the drawings and plannings are done at home but the criteria wasn't weaker. It must've been weaker compared to that of the older generations, but I know that they didn't tolerate it, and we had to work a lot, especially in the first year. We studied a lot for our exams, and our drawings were returned many times because they were assessed with pretty strict criteria, I mean it was pretty high. It is not that the criteria were weakened because of the conditions of the situation. I don't believe so. Maybe there were times when you couldn't organize the classes well because of the space, but I know that we worked a lot.

Aurela Kadriu: How was it, Dardania is pretty far from Arbëria, can you tell us about the experience of traveling to the faculty?

² 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 in private homes.

Zana Nixha: We never went on our own, we were always together {explains with hands} with someone. We had fun on the way because, when we walked, we bought something to eat, be it croissants. I remember the croissants because we had to go up. I don't know, it wasn't something... we from the Architecture were a bit distinctive because we all had the big bags with which we walked on the streets. We weren't afraid that someone would stop us or ask, "Why?" Maybe it could happen and we all knew that it could happen but somehow it was already known that there are Albanian universities at homes. I guess that, for some time, it was accepted. We didn't feel endangered.

Then we continued to Punto coffee shop or (smiles) to Santea, I mean, very normal. It wasn't something that... we always had a fear that something would happen, but we lived with it. It was the same, we didn't feel any difference.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell me about the interruption of the war? How did the troubles in Pristina begin? Where were you during the war?

Zana Nixha: In fact, I applied to go to Vienna for my studies, and I went there in January '99. The war began already and the bombings began in March, right? On March 24. For me it was very, I had...in the beginning when you go abroad, you mark {explain with hands} every day that passes until the time comes for you to return to Pristina for vacations. And the bombings began exactly at the time when I was supposed to return for vacations. My whole family was here. I was afraid the first day because the first day we could communicate and they said, "Ou, we are celebrating." But it was very traumatic, what is going to happen... there were many news, this and that, discussions that we saw.

I remember there was the TV room in the dormitory, and I know that we occupied it. Whoever was from Kosovo stayed there for months in a row, day and night, to see what was happening. There was a time when I didn't know where my family was at all. I had no contact. Some said that they fled, some... It was a very difficult time. We often discussed it at home, who was it more difficult for. Of course, it was more difficult for those here, but it wasn't easy not knowing where your family is for weeks in a row.

Most of us who were there... in Vienna there was a big community of students from Kosovo. We stayed together, we comforted, and helped each other. I remember a time when the phone lines were cut, I couldn't find, I remembered the phone numbers of people, and I called whomever I could in order to find out. It was a time, I can say, a very difficult one, maybe the hardest time because you don't know where your family was.

Aurela Kadriu: Was your family in fact...

Zana Nixha: The family stayed in Pristina almost all the time, a bit before the bombings came to an end. My mother with my sister and my brother fled, and my father remained here. He was in Pristina, but he didn't have any phone connections. They moved because we had a house, and they went to apartments because it was safer there. Around twenty-thirty people would stay together in one apartment, always dressed, and prepared to escape in case they come to expel them.

The army was located on the street where we lived... no, I mean, the paramilitary forces, and they didn't expel them from the houses and apartments, so they remained here. But it was traumatic, the fact that you don't know how it is going to end and you don't know what is going to happen. At some point, my mother decided to take them [the children] and escape, with hundreds of difficulties. They went to Macedonia first and then continued to France. I had relatives in France, but this was in the end, I guess, in the last three weeks. Then I went there from Vienna; I went to Paris to meet them.

Aurela Kadriu: Can you tell me a little about the meeting with your family there?

Zana Nixha: I don't know. I don't know, I don't know how long it was. Maybe there were many conversations. We communicated all the time because we had many relatives there. I don't know, we were very happy that it was almost over. I guess the bombings were already over at that time, and we were more relaxed that they could return at last.

But we were mostly concerned about our little brother because he seemed more traumatized than all of us. He was six years old, and he stayed with fear for two months and somehow he manifested that aggressively. I know that we discussed something about him, but, on the other side, we simply talked about what we had been doing for those two months. In fact, I listened, and I felt bad for not having been there. At first, I thought maybe it would be a lot better if I was with them than how it was that I was far away, no matter how they told me, "It is better that at least you are not here." But, at the same time, I didn't think much about my parents as I thought about my sister and my brother, who were a lot younger than me. I couldn't imagine them staying and going through everything. And still, when I think about that time I have a... I don't know, I get some emotions that I don't even want to mention or think about.

Aurela Kadriu: How did it happen that you went to Austria, was it...

Zana Nixha: In Austria, you could apply to the faculty. In fact, the University was free. You were accepted, and you could be admitted by an exam that you had passed. In fact, first, you had to be enrolled in the University of Pristina, and then you had the chance to transfer. Most of us went through this way. You had to take care of the accommodation and food, and my parents made that possible for me. They had been working in Albania for a long time, but when the war exploded and there was no contacts, I had no more money. We were self-financed, and I know that Austria gave a fund for all the students who were there. We received a monthly fee in order to maintain ourselves because the students started to not have money to pay for the dormitory, and they started to be expelled. It became a big deal because their country is in a war, they have nowhere to go, they have no money and now we are expelling them from.... So, there was a sum that they had given to Bosniaks during the war, and then they decided to continue giving it to Kosovars.

This is what I remember... I remember great activism to collect donations. When I realized that I had no income, I started working as well. In Vienna, those who sell tickets for classical music concerts are very famous, and they are dressed in uniforms. We would wear the uniforms and had to convince tourists to buy tickets because we received a commission for each ticket sold.

I remember that time when they understood that I am from Kosovo, there was a moment when they came and gave me money, “Take it!” I know that at that moment I couldn’t, no matter that the account was... there were many of those who were ready to help in that sense, not to talk about those who surrounded me to ask, “Where is your family now?” For them, it was weird, “You are working while you don’t even know where your family is, you come from a war zone,” I mean, there was high awareness, especially by American tourists. It seemed weird to me because American tourists told me that many Americans had decided not to go to Europe for vacations that year because of the war in Kosovo. For them Europe is one. When there is war in Kosovo, there is war in Europe, and we don’t go there. That’s what I remember from, from...

Why I decided to return? I realized that studies in Vienna take a long time. They have a system that has no conditions for the first year., In the second year, you can pass one exam per year, and you can continue. I mean, I saw that they have such a system in which studies can continue for a long time, and I didn’t go there to stay for ten years. I wanted... maybe I could finish the process faster, but, after the war in Kosovo, Kosovo became a sensation. I heard that there were architects and students from all around coming to the University of Pristina. They were holding seminars, exercises, had experience, were walking around. Until the moment when in Austria I heard that they took students from Kosovo to work in design offices as interns because Kosovo was attractive, and it had to.... At that moment, I said maybe I can use this chance. Why stay here when in Kosovo all of this seems more interesting?

And so I decided to return, even though my parents didn’t agree with my decision. They were professors in the faculty themselves. and I wanted to return to the faculty where they were teaching — they didn’t want to have me as a student (laughs). But I believe I made the right decision because, at that time, I got to travel and collaborate with many students from British universities, to see the experiences of architecture schools there. I mean, it was a... I believe it was the right decision no matter the influence of Austria, where I got to see what I should learn and so on...

Nobody would force you to do anything there, while in Kosovo we always took university as a continuation, as an obligation to go and start studying somewhere by the end. In Austria, there was eagerness from students to take as much as possible from professors, from literature and everything else. They asked for it, they asked for knowledge, and I believe I got that from Austria, to continue wanting to know on my own and not expect what the University or school gives me.

Aurela Kadriu: What did you continue after the University, what happened?

Zana Nixha: In fact it lasted around... then I engaged... I came to think that with architecture you only have to work. It is more like a craft, I mean, you should get the experience of being close to an architect or a design group. So, I continued, I worked at other architects’ offices and then at my parents’. I thought that I had to use my parents in that profession if I can learn something from them, and I worked for a long time with them. I only later started working on my own because I needed to be independent and see how much I can work on my own.

However, I don’t think that this is the right time for architecture in Kosovo. At the moment or the following period of time, the profession is not valued enough. Architects are to be blamed for that as

well. But, also, in general, the education, there is no licensing, you cannot define who is what and then... with the new bachelor system, in Kosovo everybody can design... the criteria of being an architect is weakened. Almost everybody can be an architect. The market defines more or less what is wanted. The creativity that you want to give as an architect is not sought for, at least not yet, let's see (laughs).

Aurela Kadriu: What are you doing at the moment?

Zana Nixha: I work privately, I mean whenever there are projects, depends on the projects. I mean, it is not a job from 9AM to 4PM. But when there is work to do, I have to work intensively and then it might happen that I have leisure time until the next project and so on... this is the nature of the work in fact.

Aurela Kadriu: If you don't have anything to end, I think that we can conclude it here and thank you very much!

Zana Nixha: No (laughs), nothing. Thank you!