

## INTERVIEW WITH VETON NURKOLLARI

Prizren | Date: August 28, 2018

Duration: 120 minutes

Present:

1. Veton Nurkollari (Speaker)
2. Aurela Kadriu (Interviewer)
3. Donjeta 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:** Let's start by introducing yourself and if you can tell me something about your early childhood memories? What was the family and circle you grew up in like?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Okay. I am Veton Nurkollari, from Prizren. I was born in 1962, here in Prizren. In a family where my father was a photographer, my mother was a teacher, a family home where, apart from our family, there were the houses of my [paternal] uncle and two of my father's cousins. A big house {open his hands} with many children, a huge yard, with many *kapixhik*<sup>1</sup>, small doors, where you could go from one house to the other, an interesting way of moving which doesn't exist anymore. These are my early memories, we played in the yard a lot with the other children, cousins, brothers, sisters in that yard, all kinds of games, football, and some other games that have now disappeared. But, it was a childhood with no worries, a childhood full of happiness, games. As I said, these are some memories I have from my early childhood.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were you an only child or did you have...

**Veton Nurkollari:** No, I had a brother and a sister, we were three children. In that big house there were at least... at least ten other children. So, we were like a small army of children of almost the same {puts his finger up and down} age. Then my mother had five other sisters and many children, and my [maternal] aunts' and uncles' children were often in our big yard. So, there were always children there, there was always joy and happiness.

There were no... it was a big, wide yard {opens his hands}. Now in that house there are many walls, it's a development from that yard {opens his hands} for a big family slowly reduced in {narrows his hands} into some micro families, when walls are built, the access is limited, so the yard doesn't exist anymore. It physically is there, but now some walls exist, some food and the access is limited, back then it was open, there was a place to play, there was a garden, tomatoes, peppers, many things.

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<sup>1</sup> Kapicik, from Turkish, small door. House yards were connected with a small kapicik through which people could go to their neighbors without having to use the main street.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Which neighborhood did you live in?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I lived and continue living in the same neighborhood, which is called Bazhdarhane, or the beginning of Bazhdarhane. A neighborhood that is basically the city center, but back then, it wasn't on the outskirts of the city, but it wasn't the center either. It was quieter than now, there wasn't much commuting. But it was a neighborhood in the middle of the city, I still live there.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of neighborhood was it in terms of population, I'm interested to know.

**Veton Nurkollari:** Well, due to the proximity of the building which is now the Municipality, which at that time was a building that belonged to the Yugoslav army and in the vicinity of that building, right in front of the house where I live, there is a complex of army buildings at the time, then, of the officers who lived there. The neighborhood had a mixed composition, because there were many Serbs but also Slovenes and Bosniaks, depending on which officers served at that time in the Yugoslav army. So, we socialized with the children of these officers, so, for example, I learned the language.

I also spent a lot of time in that army building, which was a very interesting building, because it was the only building that had a pool (smiles) inside. There were some tennis games, tennis tables [ping pong], which weren't anywhere else. And since we lived there and met some soldiers we were privileged, we could sometimes during the summer swim in the pool. We saw the officers bowling, there was some interesting, primitive bowling. These are some significant memories of interacting with other people, not only in the neighborhood or district but also with some people who at first glance were a little different than us.

On the other hand, the school I went to, which was not far from home, was a mixed school with many classes, both Serbian and Turkish. So, also the issue of language and, how do I call it, learning it was something organic, normal, not only me but most of my friends learned the language that way in the streets.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I am interested, was it common in Prizren in that time to have had two professional parents in certain fields, in all families I mean, most of the families, did they have this kind of construction?

**Veton Nurkollari:** No, I am not sure. From what I remember, my friends, yes, or I had classmates whose parents were professionals, like doctors, or working in state administration, or judges. Maybe not both, but a huge part worked different jobs, different professions. Now I don't know if both parents were, but in most cases, at least one parent was professional, so...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did your father pursue photography academically, or was it a craft?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Craft, it was a craft because in Kosovo there was no photography school, it still doesn't in fact. But my father learned from the most popular photographer in Prizren, and not just Prizren, Faik Sharri. An extraordinary professionalist and patriot, peer and friend of Ibrahim Fehmiu, father of Bekim Fehmiu. He taught until the moment when Faik Sharri emigrated to Turkey, he was a hard worker. And the moment Faik and his family moved, they emigrated to Turkey, my father inherited the title of so-called "Photo Sharri" and continued it until, until almost, until he died. In the meantime, my father graduated as a photographer and graduated in 1957 as a photographer, although it was not a degree that you get today from schools, but from... something between a course and practice, where you had the right to prove your skills in front a professional team and get the degree and he had a degree {shows the size with his hands} I remember from 1957.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were there many cameras, many photographs in your house?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes, of course, there were cameras (smiles) Cameras, everything that had to do with photos. One of my early memories, which has to do with photography, was in fact something I saw only then and for a short time until... now I don't remember exactly, but my father would come home, he had a big box {explains with his hands}, then I realized that that box was a box of candy, but a big metal box, like this {shows the size with his hands} and inside there were some bottles of small and some small bags, in each of them, there were some chemicals. Powders of different colors, which he measured each time with perfection.

He had a strange scale, I remember that scale {shows the shape with his hands} a scale on which he put some pieces of paper to measure, at least ten, maybe even more, very small chemicals, something much more. And then he mixed them one by one {pretends to mix something by hand} to get a solution which he then used for the development of photography and film. Alchemist! It seemed to me like, like, like I don't know how to call it. It didn't... as a child I didn't have a clear idea of what was going on there. He measured something one, two, three, four {as if he's dividing something} then one by one until they dissolved {as if pouring and mixing something} first, he dissolved the first, then the second, then the third.

He had a book {pretends to open the book and look through it} in which, each time he consulted how many grams for which chemicals to use to make the solutions and those, the book was also part of that big box, it was inside (laughs), with some notes. Then there was no need to make those solutions anymore, but this is one, one of the memories that I remember that are related, the first memories that are related to photography. I also often remember that he brought the photos home, to make the last wash and dry them, he didn't let them dry in the studio because the machine was like a two-sided machine {explains with his hands} in which the pictures were pasted and then it was like baking bread (smiles).

These are the first memories related to photography. Before I started visiting the studio, part of his work, which I then continued for a long time.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What about your mother, what kind of influence did she have since she was a teacher?

**Veton Nurkollari:** My mother, my mother was a teacher for a short period of time, I don't remember when she was a teacher. She was a teacher in Suhareka in primary school for a short time. I heard since my uncle, my mother's brother, was a professor of mathematics, once a teacher then a professor of mathematics for a long time in the technical school here. But I heard that uncle, my mother didn't say much. She said, "Well, then my father begged my brother to try to find me a job." So, she worked as a teacher before she got married, which was very rare for, for the time, the '50s. I mean, sometime in the '50s, before, before the '60s because she got married in the late '50s.

**Veton Nurkollari:** {shrugs} I'm not sure (smiles), I'm not sure, but I know she worked for a short period of time as a teacher. Then when she got married she was a housewife and her whole life she took care of us, of the house. A mother, like most mothers, who are very caring of their children and so on.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was it like for you, I know that at that time it was very, very interesting that they played mainly in more closed areas, what was the public area like for you, did you ever out in the neighborhood, beyond the yard?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was the neighborhood like?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Well, we went out in the neighborhood. The neighborhood was interesting, a little different than it is now. There was, in fact, I think that there was more room to play than now. Because now the part in front of the house is a kind of park which is visited by a lot of people, but I don't see children playing there. Maybe it has changed a lot, we played a lot, so we went out of the yard, and it was like one, to call it a big neighborhood yard, another space that was almost like a boulevard, half closed. Most people in Prizren don't know, but it was a beautiful boulevard, with a market in the center of the boulevard and was it the only market in Prizren for dairy products, cheese, milk, and dairy products.

And around that market, there was a market of fruits and vegetables, they were sold on the streets and on Wednesdays it would be a mess, a mess, people came to shop. And we liked going around where there were a lot of people, play (smiles) and watch all that mess. So, also the army officers' building, it was also another place. So, we had plenty of space to play. On top of all, this was the

school space, which was very close to my house and when we wanted to play football and stuff like this, we went to school and played (laughs). We had enough space as far as I can remember.

**Aurela Kadriu:** When and where did you go to elementary school?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I went to the elementary school that was then called *17 Nëntori* [November 17] which is, I don't know, 300-400 meters away from the house where I live, but with a road that is a little longer. But, we still had some, some cuts from one house to another house, to another house, and got to school immediately. So, we used these (laughs), but it was relatively close.

**Aurela Kadriu:** When was this, '68-'69?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I went to school from '68 to '76, yes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What do you remember from elementary school? I mean you started school in '68 which is a particular year, very interesting.

**Veton Nurkollari:** I don't remember anything about '68 (laughs).

**Aurela Kadriu:** Of course, just...

**Veton Nurkollari:** Since then I remember an excitement for school, I know I was very happy, but I don't know why, but everything about school seemed very interesting to me and I was very excited to go to school every day. Probably because I liked playing, not that it had anything to do with, with learning and so on, those probably came later. Yes, it was a part, so those years were very innocent, so to call it. We didn't know what was happening in the world, the atmosphere here was relatively calm. So it was good and interesting for us... playing, hanging out with friends... slowly growing up. At first, my mother took us to school, until we learned to go by ourselves (smiles), she waited to take us back from school, then my sister took us to school, she was a little older. But in the meantime, I don't know, in the third or fourth grade, we went and came back by ourselves.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of function did the classroom have, were the classrooms divided, so Albanians, Serbs, Turks?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes {nods}.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Really, were they divided?

**Veton Nurkollari:** At that time, there were classrooms of... Albanian, Serbian and Turkish. So, since

then they were segregated.

**Aurela Kadriu:** You learned Albanian, right?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes, in Albanian.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Elementary school is usually a period that isn't very memorable and it's weird. But, high school, I wanted to go back to how, when did you start going to your father's studio? First let's talk a little more about high school because it's important. You can continue... how did it continue?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Okay, high school... so, I wanted, like most people I was in school with, I exclusively wanted to go to gymnasium. It was like some kind of an achievement and I went and registered at the gymnasium, I was admitted to the gymnasium and, even when I was registered, I had to register in... because there were only two directions. I had to decide if I wanted to study linguistics or, or sciences (smiles)? So the vast majority enrolled in science, then some didn't get in because of results, but I finished it as a group, most of my classmates also chose science.

The gymnasium was like Stanford University at that time (laughs) something. At that time, the quality of the professors... I don't want to underestimate it now, but it certainly was on another level. So, personally, the time I spent at the gymnasium helped me a lot and somehow fulfilled my need for education. So, when I went to university, it seemed a lot to me and immediately left university (smiles). Twice I tried to go to university, twice I passed some exams, but I said that, the need for education, somehow it wasn't enough. I was convinced that I learned in high school as much as I needed (laughs). And I have never regretted it.

**Aurela Kadriu:** A more specific memory during high school, I think this is the period when your generation begins, because you are the same generation as my father, high school has a period when rock and roll starts, it starts...

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes, a lot of things started in gymnasium. From, from, from Beatles for example, I had a friend who was a big Beatles fan and they brought us records and gramophones in class. During the break, if we missed a class, we listened to music in class there, these are some memories. A cafe opened very close to the gymnasium, so we often skipped class to spend time in the cafe, with music and... We had the first parties in our homes when we were in high school. Some, some freedom or attempt to be as free as possible was born then. In elementary school I neither needed nor showed that desire.

However, the desire to rebel a little, to escape the norms and stigmas of family and society rose during high school. We did both good and not so good things, but it is the period, the period of some liberation. I was fortunate that those years were relatively quiet years. Immediately after I finished

school, even when I went to the army, the beginning of a kind of change started, how do I say, the deterioration of the situation. But, until the '80s, when I finished high school, it was a worry-free time, if I can call it so. The only worries we have were how to do better. I have a lot of interesting memories from high school of course.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What were those house parties like, how did you organize them? (laughs)

**Veton Nurkollari:** (laughs) But actually, we had to organize the parties in houses, since there was no tradition of having parties somewhere outside, it was like heretical to go out now in cafes to have parties. There weren't many cafes like that, we didn't have places, we had to organize them ourselves, some had birthdays, this and that. So, whoever had a place, we just organized ourselves, bought drinks, music, invited people and had a house party. They were known (laughs) house parties, not too late that none of us could stay out late, especially the women. We gathered, usual parties, music, someone trying to play with someone {joins his hands like a hug}, we had crushes, trying to approach them, do we talk to them, what do we do? (laughs) Things like this, a bit naive at that time, so were the times then.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was the music like, you mentioned the Beatles, I'm interested to know about other bands, other kinds of music, and what did it represent for you, also now when you look at it in retrospective?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Look then, now I personally was more or less interested in every kind of music. These are, as they say, the first years of formation, so it's not like we knew a lot about Stones, the Beatles or... we were interested . Where Hotel Theranda is {points to the left}, there was a terrace which no longer exists, the terrace was once known because there was live music and in the evening we tried to get it because we weren't allowed in every time. There was someone at the stairs who looked at us, "No, you are too young, you can't." Sometimes we would walk with someone and we went to listen to, for example, Lumnjansit, it was a kind of band, one of the first indigenous bands of Prizren to perform pop and rock and somewhat rock and roll. Some, some kind of mix with [Luljeta Çeku](#) as vocalist, Nijazi Bytyqi on guitar, there was also Daut, the late Daut, on drums {pretends to play the drums}.

We were also interested in that kind of music, until the interest for disco music rose (smiles). Disco music is an interesting thing for the capital, because there was a disco here and through the disco we got acquainted with disco music. In the late '70s, there was a boom of disco music, so more and more of us wanted to and unintentionally entered the disco. I often, not often but quickly started getting interested in other genres of music, from rock, punk and many, many others. In those years, I can say that the late '70s people were more and more into disco music. We also had fun dancing, going to the disco, playing with that music, but we also started to be interested in some things, how do I know...



For example, I remember when Rapper's Delight came out, which I think it's the first hip-hop song in the history of hip-hop music. It's... when it came out, it was like disco because disco's played it (smiles). But, today it's considered like the first songs that put rap and hip-hop in the scene. We had the chance to listen to them in discotheques. Not it, we only had one discotheque here..

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where was it?

**Veton Nurkollari:** It was here {points left}, we call it the Building of Progress, it is a building, the building when you enter the city center, the tallest building, in front, in front of the Hotel Theranda, and it was in, in its basement {moves his hand down}. It had an amazing entrance like, like in New York, like in The Bronx. Some kind of half maze to get to the disco. The disco was an actual disco, a disco with a DJ, with a DJ booth, with a bar, with a place for dancing, stuff. Prizren in the late '70s was a wonderful place.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I want to know, since you mentioned disco, are the discsos the reason you started listening to music, or is the reason you started going to the disco because you were listening to music (laughs)?

**Veton Nurkollari:** No, I started listening to music before going to the disco.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I mean, as a generation, what kind of music, was it, did the disco create the culture or did it already exist?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I think so in Prizren. Since it was one of the rare places, or maybe the only place where you could go to listen to music, and dance. There was no other place. In the late '70s, there were two or three small coffee shops in Prizren, that was it. In the city center, at the Shadërvan, there were two big coffee shops, where you could listen to live music {pretends to play guitar} but with some singers with some songs about {pretends to drink something} with *rakia*<sup>2</sup> so to say. The only place so to call it, not alternative, but a place where you could go with the family was the terrace of the Theranda Hotel, where there was live music from bands in Prizren.

These were it, you didn't have many choices if you were 15, 16, 17 years old. Those were all sporadic, the only place you wanted to go to was the disco, and youngsters' goal in the evenings was to go to the disco. We had two things: the cinema and the disco {points left and right}. These were the two main things in this city during those years.

**Aurela Kadriu:** When did you start going to the cinema?

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<sup>2</sup> *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

**Veton Nurkollari:** I started going to the cinema regularly maybe when I was around 15 years old. Maybe even earlier, but before that, I came to the cinema, because in primary school, they took us to the cinema. There was a tradition that, time after time in an organized way, to come and watch movies. Especially movies, back then, they were called partisan movies {makes quotation marks}. So, movies about the Second World War, with partisans and Germans and most of them were organized by the school.

But, I was interested in the cinema and I came to this cinema, but there was another cinema where the Europa Center is, it was a rundown cinema, it was more alternative. It wasn't as big, but with a very interesting repertoire for that time. I especially liked watching western movies because they played a lot of western movies, for me western movies were a main discovery. The best thing I discovered (laughs) we called them cowboy movies at that time.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Is there any origin of your interest in cinema in general or how did it all start?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Now in retrospect, I never thought I would work in the cinema the way I do now. I was genuinely interested, I really liked watching movies. Later I understood, after my father died, I realized that he also was interested in cinema. To the point where he took his workers to the cinema to watch a movie together every Wednesday.

I realized that later, I never talked to my father about this. But, what I remember as a child is when I went to ask my father, "Can you give me two dinar because there's a new movie?" On the road from my home to the shop, there was a huge pano {explaining with his hands} with posters and the schedule of the movies and I often stopped there and saw which was the next movie, was there something that interested me? I said that most movies interested me and I often went.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did the cinema have a big audience?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes {nods}, in comparison to today or the last year since there was no other entertainment, there was a huge audience. To the point where it wasn't easy to get tickets, even if you had money. You either had to wait in line for a long time, or you had to buy your ticket from resellers (smiles). But often the cinema halls were full. It was a tradition, not just for young people, but also older people went with their families to watch movies, especially during the summer. Also Prizren had an open-air cinema, which was very attractive for people, during summer days and nights watching movies here in the garden {points left}. We called it Lumbardh's Garden.

## Part Two

**Aurela Kadriu:** You mentioned that you stayed in your father's shop a lot, did you apprentice? I mean, how did it start?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I didn't start with the idea to be an apprentice, but with the idea to help him because he needed help. So, slowly I started to learn so I could help him. I couldn't, it was logical that I didn't start taking pictures because I was little. It's not easy to trust someone to take photos. So, I started learning other things, cutting photographs {pretends to cut something}, classifying them, learning to develop, print, at home, I dried the photos {explains with his hands}. I learned all these other things until I got to the age and I believed that I could get behind the camera and take pictures.

Just to remind you, the cameras back there were bigger than me {shows the size with his hands. The first time I took a picture I stood on a chair because I wasn't tall enough to be able to see {makes a square with his hands}, so I got on a chair to see the {makes a square with his hands} mirror, to see what I'm photographing. But then slowly I learned, and I helped, and I worked even after my father stopped working in the shop, I worked until 2007-2008.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you take pictures until 2008?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes (smiles).

**Aurela Kadriu:** What were the services, I didn't know you worked until then (laughs)?

**Veton Nurkollari:** (smiles) Yes, I took all kinds of pictures. I mean, the shop was a classic photography shop, where I took pictures for anything. Pictures for documents {counts in his fingers}, we developed pictures, at first for a long time black and white. After a while, in color, we took pictures at family parties, weddings, even funerals, very rarely, but we also did that (smiles). We did what photographers do.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Before, before modern time, when you were little and took pictures with your father, who took pictures and for what reasons did people want to take pictures?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Mostly they came for documents. So, for each document of that time, which is different from today, you had to have a headshot for the identity card, for the passport, for driver's licence, and for different documents. The authorities at the time asked for pictures, and the only ones who could take pictures were photographers. The most important aspect of a photographer's work at that time were photographs for documents and memory pictures. Now memories could be family pictures, couple pictures, for the wedding, before the wedding, {counts with his fingers} after the wedding, photographs during the wedding, photographs with wedding clothes, these kinds of photographs. Most of the time, memory photographs, for memories' sake, to immortalize the

moment.

So, people wanted to get photographed to remember a moment, and there weren't many, video cameras were almost nonexistent, and the only tool to preserve memories, to create memories, were photographs. So, the need to take photographs was high because, even today, I say that the moment a screen is presented on which one can see without the photograph is the moment when the film photography died. Or maybe it is, it didn't die, but it was a very important moment in how photographs are perceived and their need. Today we take pictures with our phones, we see it immediately, the moment you can see the pictures immediately after you take it is the moment, in my opinion, when the need for... or, or film photography has begun to disappear.

Because it was different if you took pictures yourself, and when you went to the photographer from the moment, you took the picture to the moment you got to see it, it was a period of one, two, three or five days. For days, and for each of us, it was a moment of waiting until we saw it. On the other side, I had clients everyday, I don't know what to call it, reacting differently the moment they took the pictures and looked at them {looks at his hands}, "Aaa {onomatopoeic} this and that. Or when some were disappointed because often they brought film that they didn't know how to put in the camera, so there was nothing there, they were disappointed when they came out, those were moments of great disappointment of people who thought that they took pictures {pretends to take picture} and then there was nothing.

**Aurela Kadriu:** In the past was it, was this service expensive, I am interested to know was it a privilege of rich people to take family photos, take photos for fun?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes, to an extent, but not in the aspect that only rich people could take photos, since the division between rich and poor was not as apparent as today. Today we have more poor people who are actually poor, and {puts his hand up} or just a few people who are very rich. At that time, there were more people who had money, but there weren't people who were very rich. Even those who were poor could take pictures.

I don't know how, how to say it better, to say that then photographs were very accessible for all. I don't know what I can compare photographs with, if we compare it to phones, it's not accurate because everyone has phones, I don't know. It was, it was very accessible for most. Even though not everyone could have it, since if you wanted to do it yourself, you had to have a camera which was some sort of investment, then you had to buy a film and then develop it and pay for it. But it didn't cost much.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where was your shop located?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Our shop wasn't very far from here, from Shadërvan {shows with his hand} the road that takes us to church. In between the Catholic church and the Orthodox church, if you where *Kinezi*

[Chinese] is, below.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes, yes. I'm interested to know about when color photography came about in Prizren, what kind of a moment was it for you?

**Veton Nurkollari:** You know how you can tell when the photograph... Some color photographs came much earlier than the possibility of taking color photographs because of the people who were in other countries. I remember seeing the first color photographs from a cousin of ours who lived in Canada, he sent some {makes a triangle with his fingers}, some Polaroids with color, those were the first photographs I saw even though I was a child.

The first photos people took, so citizens of Prizren, were actually taken in Prishtina. Since my father brought the first color photo printing machine, now I'll try to remember the year... but before that we developed color photographs at Nesha, for a long time, there was a system to take the films there and take them the next day, or two days later. So we went to Prishtina twice a week to develop and take the photos, for a period of time, probably a few years until I convinced my father that it's time to invest in a machine, and then I went to Vienna and Zagreb, and Vienna. Then we organized and put together the first machine in the shop.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you go to Vienna by yourself?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Tell us what was it like, I mean, I really want to know about when you traveled on missions like this because it didn't happen often then. What was Vienna like?

**Veton Nurkollari:** To tell you the truth, I didn't see much of Vienna the, since I went to Vienna to the headquarters of Kodak<sup>3</sup> for training. We bought the machine and arranged it through an intermediary, a company from Croatia but based in Austria. We arranged it, but it was the time when a machine which was never seen before in Kosova, including me. I didn't know, I had no idea how it worked. I went to Nesha a few times, but it was very complicated, like a laboratory with many things. When we signed that contract and made the payment, we found out that the intermediary company arranged a training at Kodak in Vienna. So I went to Vienna, I went to Zagreb actually, from Zagreb to Vienna. And there some interesting moments happen, which you thought would never happen. I got to Zagreb and there was a huge crowd of people.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Veton Nurkollari:** I got on the train and went to Vienna, and in Vienna I was at Kodak for a few days,

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<sup>3</sup> American tech company that makes camera-related products with its historical base in photography.

in all-day training. When I wanted to come back, I went to get on the train to Zagreb and I had an airplane ticket from Zagreb to Skopje, and before that, I had to make some payments in customs to put the machine in a truck and bring it to Prizren. When I wanted to get on the train, they didn't give me the ticket, they said, "There's no train, no... it's war." (laughs) There I understood that war had started in Slovenia (laughs). I had no idea what was happening, there were riots and so on, but I didn't think things moved that fast that the Yugoslav army got into Slovenia and closed the border, the train from Vienna to Zagreb goes through Slovenia so there was no train {puts his hands together} so I found a flight somehow and came from Vienna by plane.

We put the machine in a truck with Ohrid plates, and I remember I struggled to find a plane ticket to Skopje. There were a few interesting moments but... I didn't see Vienna then, I didn't see much but then I traveled a lot when I was young with some friends, we explored and... someone told us there we could travel with Air Inter <sup>4</sup> tickets, so we discovered Air Inter then Europe seemed near. I used it many times, I traveled through almost all of Europe by train, with little money.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Was it easy to travel at that time? Can you tell us where you traveled to, which years and it is very important because today there is discussion for example, for my generation, Europe is far, very far. For your generation, there was a time when it was very near, for my father, for example. Many European places, which are a challenge for me to get to, my father went only for a weekend because he felt like it.

**Veton Nurkollari:** Well, first we have to understand that in those years going to Europe was like going anywhere, there were no visas. The only countries I remember which had visas were Greece and England, but you got the visas at the border. You got the visas at the border, there were no obstacles from other countries. If you could, you could travel by car, bus, train, even by plane you could travel for a little money. We used this opportunity. I traveled, I was 22 years old, in 1984, I did Air Inter for the first time, I traveled to Western Europe, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, England, then to Spain, France, Italy, Greece, and back to Kosova. The next year I went to Scandinavia then to Spain and from Spain back to Scandinavia, Europe seemed near because you got on a train and went there. The train took you, first {raises index finger} bought the ticket which cost something under 200 euros. So 300, 400 marks. A monthly ticket for trains anywhere in Europe. And of course (laughs) it was something we looked forward to. We traveled with little money, often we didn't even pay for a place to sleep in because we slept on the train. We traveled during the night and visited cities during the day, we ate cheap food.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Cheaper food..

**Veton Nurkollari:** During the night, again on the train, until we got to the other city, sleeping on the train {claps his hands}, super.

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<sup>4</sup> A ticket that is paid at a fixed price and used to visit several different countries.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of friendship did you have, were you close?

**Veton Nurkollari:** We were a few friends, mostly male friends. Some of these friends were similar to me, liked adventures. So we all saved money during the year, we all worked something, one of my friends had a small shop and sold ice cream. The other one had a souvenir shop. One other friend worked with his father, they had a dry cleaning shop (smiles). But all of us worked, we each gained something and saved. Until we decided to create our bank, one of use said, “Can we,” he said, “since we meet daily, each of us to put some money.” And we created our bank, everyday we gave 5 dinar or marka, a little money, and during the whole year there would be enough money to travel for a month (smiles).

**Aurela Kadriu:** (laughs) Very interesting, saving money is such a good idea. Was Prizren a touristic destination then, did you notice, since you said there was a souvenir shop?

**Veton Nurkollari:** There were more souvenirs made out of wood {describes with his hands} something, but not the number of tourists there are now. You could always tell who was a tourist because there were so few of them. If a tourist came each of us understood, “Did some Germans come?” or, “Three Germans came, let’s go see who they are,” (laughs) this was the atmosphere. Apart from Theranda Hotel, there was also a smaller hotel, like a motel. It doesn’t exist anymore, but it was an interesting environment with some tiny houses near the river and tourists came there and we went to see who they were, who came to Prizren (laughs). There was a strange fascination with foreign people coming to this city, to see them, to meet them, to talk to them. I mean, it’s done now but, at that time, the news traveled fast when there were tourists.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where did you do your military service?

**Veton Nurkollari:** In Bitola and Ohrid. The first part in Manastiri, it was called Bitola then, and the second part in Ohrid.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was it like?

**Veton Nurkollari:** It was a very inadequate time (laughs). I was 19 years old when I went, immediately after high school. I didn’t know anything and I wasn’t prepared like most of my generation. I think we were the first generation who went to the military right after high school, there was the condition to go to military service for a year to come back and go to university and after university to go to military service for another three months, since it lasted for 15 months. I thought I was very young to go then, I wasn’t even 19, we had a sort of freedom in the family and in our friendship, and a rigorous system (laughs) where... That was one thing, the other thing was that we were in the military service in 1981 where the first demonstrations were happening in Kosovo when there was a radical change in perception of Albanians in the military.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Aurela Kadriu:** Talk more about military service.

**Veton Nurkollari:** Okay.

**Aurela Kadriu:** You stayed there for a year, what was it like going from high school to military service?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Well it wasn't easy, you know, you're used to a certain comfort of an 18-year-old, to go to school, I worked with my father in the shop. I had enough freedom to do anything, do anything, to go out and for a moment that stopped and I found myself in a completely different place, space, different system unprepared, but after a while, I adapted. I said the second part was the problem when the first demonstration began in 1981. And it wasn't a good feeling, I had to admit it, to be Albanian in an environment which almost immediately became hostile.

They looked at us as if we were guilty, even though we didn't do anything (laughs) but just being Albanian in that time meant you were somewhat guilty and to tell you the truth I couldn't wait for it to be over, the military service and come back home, then I adapted here fast after I came back. But on the other hand, since that year was completely different, in retrospect, it was very useful. For me, to adapt to strict system of discipline and other things which I didn't like, I think later helped me to understand that in life (laughs), you need some discipline, to gain some abilities which I wouldn't have if I hadn't gone there.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were there other Albanians?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes, there were many. There were many Albanians, I even had friends from high school, it was fate for us to be together. I know that it was quite good because you could spend some of the free time you had with people you knew, especially in the beginning because then you adapted, but the beginning, the first few weeks, it seemed so weird to me, you didn't know people and you couldn't wait to have some free time, or when you waited in line for food to socialize and talk your own language and so on. To be with people you know because otherwise there were many unknown people, many people from all over Yugoslavia. You had to be dressed and wear shoes, respect some rules, some things. But there were, there were [Albanians] and I think it was very good those first few weeks you could spend time with people you know.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What did you do during your free time in the military? Could you more or less have some taste of that life of listening to music music or...

**Veton Nurkollari:** They didn't let us listen to music, I had a transistor radio, it was the only source of,



of (laughs) of information and a little music. A small transistor radio with batteries. Otherwise they wouldn't let us listen to music, no way! At all! We could play sports, football or run and walk around the cantonment, but even there were restrictions. You could spend your free time, there was a canteen, you could buy a drink somewhere, things like this. There weren't many choices. I joined an artistic group and we tried too, so to initiate a theatrical show, we initiated small things like this so we wouldn't, not to just stay there because it was nonsense, when you have nothing to do or you stay in bed, it was nonsense.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was the show, can you tell us?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Some {looks around} I don't know, I don't remember the show exactly but we did a show about, about a day, about a day of socialism, but I don't remember what. I know we cut some letters {pretends to cut something} from styrofoam and... a show. Something half banal (laughs), not to say revolutionary but somewhat in that spirit.

**Aurela Kadriu:** When you came back from the military, you said you wanted to, you started to study, what did you study?

**Veton Nurkollari:** (laughs) When I came back from the military, I studied economics for a year and it seemed boring to me and I quit and immediately enrolled in English language and literature, I studied, I finished the first year and that was it.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Why did you choose these two branches, economics first, why?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I didn't choose economics because I wanted, I had to enroll somewhere so I could finish military service three months earlier.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Ah.

**Veton Nurkollari:** I ideally wanted to study tourism but the only two faculties in the former Yugoslavia then were one in Ohrid, one in Rijeka and I missed...

**Aurela Kadriu:** The deadline.

**Veton Nurkollari:** I missed the deadline for the enrollment exam because of small stupidity during high school I had to... I couldn't graduate immediately, but I graduated in the second term and that late graduation made it impossible for me to enroll, to apply in fact. So I had to enroll somewhere so I wouldn't stay in military service for 15 months, but 12 months so I enrolled there so I had a document {pretends to write something} so they would let me out three months earlier. That's how it was then, it was called twelve-plus-three, with a certificate of enrollment in faculty you finished military three

months earlier, then when you finished it you went and did the other three months, which I never did (laughs).

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you live in Prishtina those two years?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I studied, then it was called distance education, I never... I went to some lectures and exams but I never lived the student life.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was this life for you like, minimal student life, did you travel to Prishtina?

**Veton Nurkollari:** (laughs) I traveled, yes, traveled...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were there then regular travel lines?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes. Yes, yes there were.

### Part Three

**Aurela Kadriu:** Before we get to the '90s as a long period, I want to talk a little, I am interested to know if you had a gramophone at home, and did you have...

**Veton Nurkollari:** (smiles) Yes, I have the story of the gramophone, even now I have three gramophones. I have a gramophone, actually many things are connected to that gramophone and the story of the gramophone. I had my first gramophone a very long time ago, in essence, when my father moved from one shop to another, and the shop where my father started working, it used to be a TV service, radio service, they were called TV services there, and when we went to the shop, when my father got there, there were many broken TV, radios and a gramophone {raises his forefinger} (smiles). But the gramophone worked well and, of course, as a young person who liked music, I confiscated that gramophone and brought it home. But, I didn't have disc records.

Luckily in Prizren, at that time, a disc store existed. Where you could buy folk music discs, or Yugoslav music, but there were also discs of the music I was interested in. So I started to buy discs and these are the beginnings of my interest in music. After a while, of course, I started buying more serious discs, so to say, discs which interested me and in my travels, in the meantime, I bought another gramophone, after a while I bought two other gramophones, so I have a collection of gramophones still at home and a huge collection of discs. But luckily or I don't know what to call it, a good part of that collection went to Germany with my daughter who somehow inherited the love and taste of my music, so a part of my collection is now in Munich at Aneta's (smiles).

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you know the importance of the gramophone, I am interested even today in retrospect, I want to discuss with you a little in terms of values, what was the gramophone to you then, what value do the discs have for you today and why you're still a fan of them?

**Veton Nurkollari:** It was all in the gramophone (smiles). In high school I listened to music through the radio transistor and gramophone. You had to listen during the night to see what good, trendy and interesting music was because here there wasn't much music to buy or the kind of music I was interested in, there wasn't. There were few, if someone traveled, or I brought something when I traveled. But during high school, when I didn't travel, I listened to Radio Luxembourg like most people of my generation. At twelve, there was a top list to listen to which were the hits in the world at that time.

So from that we could tell what were the hits and actually we tried to record them in some cassettes, even though the recording wasn't that good, sometimes it was good, sometimes the recording was bad. But just to have information, that was a popular radio station then, I don't know if it exists now, but then it was called Radio Luxembourg even though it was broadcast from London and it broadcast the top list of the most voted, most popular songs, songs which were in the top list. So more or less we knew what was trending. But I started buying the discs after a while. When I started traveling and started saving a little and I bought them, slowly I created a collection.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Can you do anything with them now, or do you keep them just for fun?

**Veton Nurkollari:** No, I keep them. A few days ago I received a shipment, a letter that is a kind of shipment and I went to the post office and saw a, a small package and I received two packages of Radiohead albums which were sent to me by a friend from New York, because we met somewhere and I saw an album of Radiohead, but it wasn't about buying it, because it was not a store, but it was like, like something like Dit' e Nat', and in the collection I saw it, and then he remember and sent me, not only that one but also another. It's a collection, I don't know, for me it is valuable not only as something from where you can listen to music, but I am somewhat sentimentally connected with many records, I have some records that are, I think, they certainly have some value but for me they are very valuable. I have the first single "London Calling," for example, The Clash, I have some albums that are rare, at one time I found a way to order from America in the time of Yugoslavia by paid mail and get them. As an opportunity, I discovered somehow I regularly ordered discs, sometime in the '90s. I have Nirvana's first album, for example, with all the spelling mistakes that are now being talked about that are valuable because the second release has no mistakes and they have printed them properly, but I have them with those mistakes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Ah, okay. I want to talk about concerts, Anita and Andrra told me you were in many concerts and we talked about it a little yesterday, when did you start going to concerts and why was it so important for you to listen to live music when you had discs?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I don't know exactly when, why but quite early I discovered that concerts are something else so after the first, second, the love increased somehow to go see the bands that I enjoyed live I saw many bands, not a lot but I never missed an opportunity, I went, I traveled especially for concerts, sometimes by myself, sometimes with someone. My brother lived in Germany, so I had some connection and convenience, and an opportunity to travel to Germany often either by bus or with someone, I didn't have any big expenses to spend the night there because I had a place. He is just as passionate as I am about concerts so we took the opportunity often when I was in Munich we went and saw something. But I also went especially for that. I once traveled to Ireland to see U2, a long time ago. Once with a friend we traveled to see David Bowie and the Pixies, without any other obligation, we got on the train here, we took my brother and we went up to near Stuttgart somewhere. Once it happened to me, I saw Radiohead by chance, because I was in a city and they were there, I found a ticket. I recently went with my family to see Nick Cave.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Nick Cave.

**Veton Nurkollari:** So I have, still to this day, I have a great love to go to concerts. With Andrra I went to see Kraftwerk for the second time. I saw Nick Cave for the third time, so I've done it for a long time. As a young man in fact, even maybe the first big concert I went to was Eric Clapton in Belgrade, where almost no one went, I mean no one more popular came at that time, in '83 I think, somewhere in the beginning, around January '83, those years. I just got on the bus during winter, I went (laughs), I went to see Eric Clapton, something extraordinary, I always thought Eric Clapton was a young man, I could not believe that it was Eric Clapton, I thought, "No, it is impossible." But after that, I was even more motivated to go, now I don't hesitate if it is something interesting and I have the opportunity to go. Now I'm getting ready to go see Peter Murphy in Belgrade in November.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you have any specific memories from concerts that you want to tell us?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I have many, many memories, I don't what would be more interesting for this conversation. I have a memory of Radiohead because I didn't even expect it, I was already in Paris and I saw the posters that in two or three days there is concert somewhere, I was in France and I went and tried to find a ticket, the tickets were sold out, so I tried to go the day of the concert a little earlier and I got a piece of paper, a card like this {pretends to write} I asked someone there I said, "How do you write 'I'm looking for a ticket' in French?" (laughs) and I wrote there *Le cherche bileta* (laughs) something like that and I left it {as if holding a letter with both hands} until someone approached me, "A mister, mister..." something, 100 euros, 80 euros and I bought the ticket. I bought it but I was half convinced that he was a fraud, I wasn't sure, even though the ticket looked very original to me until I got inside, when I got inside I was so happy, like this.

I went to see U2 without a ticket, without anything, from here to Ireland alone, I spent three days traveling by train, by boat, to a place that {raises both hands} I had never even heard of, that a city by

that name exists. I found the city with a map {as if browsing a book} with an atlas, because there was neither Google nor internet nor anything at all, nor... I just left. Once they didn't allow us to take cameras inside to a David Bowie concert, I'm so sad about that, they returned at the door, we had to go and find {as if he puts the key} a locker and leave the camera there and so on .

**Aurela Kadriu:** I'm interested to know if you still go to concerts...

**Veton Nurkollari:** I was drunk at a Sonic Youth concert, I remember that (laughs).

**Aurela Kadriu:** (laughs) You went to concerts then, and now music is more accessible than then, since then, you liked to go to concerts since the music you liked wasn't very accessible, do you notice the difference?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes, and you know what I've noticed, what bothers me in fact, that because of all this accessibility to music, I listen to less music. From all over the internet, YouTube, Spotify, the amazing opportunities to listen to music, I'm actually listening to a lot less music. I don't know how to explain it, whether it is accessibility or other things have changed, maybe I don't have enough time and now I am finding the issue like this. But back then I listened a lot, a lot more. In my free time, if I didn't do something, I listened to music. Walkmen, when the first Walkman came out, I went crazy, crazy when I got the first Walkman. Like, like I got a car. To be able to get music with me {touches his pants pocket} and walk, a wonderful dream. I ordered the first iPod as soon as it came out. It was something extraordinary to be able to listen to music and walk freely with {show his ears}. But now I don't listen as much, I don't know if it is only a matter of accessibility or I am preoccupied with other things, or I don't have time, or I am watching more movies less music, probably that, I don't know.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were you ever able to balance movies and music?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I don't know, now I just listen to music at times. When I'm somehow in the mood for music, then I don't do anything else, I don't watch movies, nor it overtakes me somehow, and I have moments when I dive again or go back to some exaltation with music. It's less than what I used... I listened to music a lot more, a lot more. At work, {counts on fingers} in the car. I had the gramophone at the shop, I needed music at that level, so much that I installed records and the gramophone in the bar, even when there weren't customers, I played music from the records.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Andrra and Aneta told me that you lived in London for a while.

**Veton Nurkollari:** A little while (smiles).

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was... first, why did you come back, why did you decide to stay in Prizren?

**Veton Nurkollari:** I'll first tell you why I decided to go (laughs) to London.

**Aurela Kadriu:** (laughs) Okay, let's start there.

**Veton Nurkollari:** It is an important moment in my and Zelha's life. When we got married, we decided not to live here and what would we do, where would we live? I said, "We will go to London" and we went to London and "What will we do in London?" We found jobs but the rhythm of life there wasn't, the, the work pressure was too much and some discomfort because whatever we earned we spent it on rent for an apartment, for electricity and for... if we didn't earn, so I decided to return to Kosovo as soon as possible. Maybe sometime later with that, with the idea that let's go to Kosovo a bit and then go back to London. Although initially we went for...

**Aurela Kadriu:** A visit.

**Veton Nurkollari:** To stay and live there and we moved and... yes, a little.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What year was it?

**Veton Nurkollari:** '91 if I'm not mistaken. '90 or '91. Immediately after the beginning of '91.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I want to go back to the place where we are, then we will get to the '90s. We are at Lumbardhi, and I want you to tell us what Lumbardhi is for you. What kind of memories do you have here? And according to you, what is Lumbardhi to Prizren?

**Veton Nurkollari:** For me, I believe also for many other people, especially my generation or maybe even for generations even older than me even more, it is an iconic place, it is a place... I do not know what to compare it to. I said before that we didn't have many places to go out here, one of the places where we went out was here {points to the ground} and the pace of going out was to the cinema first then to the city, not the other way around we went out, we saw a movie, then we went out on the town, especially during the summer. In the winter, it was a little different, but we came here regularly, because there were regular interesting movies, and in this city there was not much to do. The first cafes started in the early '80s, but not in this number, there are two or three cafes from one café to another, it soon started to become monotonous. The same people meet in the same places, the same conversations.

I was very interested in movies and I came here a lot, here and in the other cinema, I attended it quite a lot. I have a lot of memories of... somehow I was educated, I got some film education here, even though I don't know then, it is not that I was so interested in analyzing the films. But I was thirsty for some kind of art, a kind of art that was quite close to what I had in the family. Because my father was

a photographer, there are some similarities between photography and film, and it all seems somewhat natural to me. Even my friends were fans of movies so we came often, there was no one who complained, “Why are we going to the movies?” We used to go to the movies, we came to see a movie for the second time, for the third time, and...

Like last night, two or three nights ago there was a program on TV about, about the day Tito died. And I remembered that day {touches his head} and why I remembered, one of the reasons I remember that day is because this place closed {points to the floor} (laughs). It was closed due to mourning, they closed it around a week or two and even removed the movie *Saturday Night Fever* from the repertoire, and we went to see *Saturday Night Fever* every day because we wanted to learn how John Travolta plays (laughs). Maybe we could play like John Travolta, Tito died and, at that time, the film was in the repertoire and of course they removed it, it was not forbidden... forbidden, you have to mourn for a week, two weeks I don't know how long (laughs). But interesting moments related to this place.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What about the '90s, how did what happened in the '90s affect you?

**Veton Nurkollari:** The '90s started like a lot of other things here, I don't know how to call it something like a downward spiral {moves his hand down slowly} getting worse, worse and inaccessible. In fact, until the moment that you didn't feel like coming here, some strange segregation started to happen, first they started to bring movies, more Yugoslav movies, something Serbian and of course from erotic movies the cinema started to turn into pornographic films, for a while they have played actual pornographic films during the day, and I don't know, you have cinemas like that in big cities somewhere in the suburbs {pointing behind his back}, some alley but not in the city center and not in the only cinema. But it didn't only happen here, it was one, a, a, how to say, a certain smell of destruction that pervades not only the cinema but also other fields.

One of the elements was the avoidance of so-called normal {makes quotation marks} movies or the normal repertoire, as well as some sort of gradual switch in distribution and pornographic cinema. And we started to slowly stop coming because we weren't interested to coming to the city with 700 people and watch pornographic movies (laughs) something totally banal even at that age, you know, I don't know how it feels, you can watch porn maybe like most people in their room but not with 100 people, 200 people (laughs), it's something really, once, twice I went to watch and it seemed totally absurd, I didn't know how they could. And it started a downward spiral until it closed. It closed a little before the war, I'm not sure exactly when it closed, since it closed something before the war, it never worked at all.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How did you fill the void left by the fact that Lumbardh wasn't a reference point for you anymore?

**Veton Nurkollari:** You know those first years, the gloomy years, the end of the '90s, from '95 and on, I'm not sure, I forgot what we did. I once knew that there was a curfew, that we were locked in our house, around five or six in the afternoon and until the morning you couldn't go out, so even if it worked, it was in vain. If it worked, we could not go out, so as far as I can remember, I had a bicycle for five minutes, before five {touched his hand to show the clock} run home before the curfew, if the police got you, they would beat you up and... These are some things, but it was completely gloomy and it just got worse until war started.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you open your shop at that period, was it...?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes. Yes, we did.

**Aurela Kadriu:** In what conditions?

**Veton Nurkollari:** In those conditions. Before those conditions it was, it was the period of hyperinflation and they were some, some, some, some years that were conditionally {makes question mark} so to say very interesting, where whatever you did was, or no matter how much you earned, you had to immediately turned them into a strong currency so called then, marks, dollar but not dinar {claps his hands} because you lost them. It was kind of crazy (laughs) living during hyperinflation. Where things cost millions, billions, billions,... And that money had no value we had to exchange them immediately to marks. Each of us has had someone who exchanged that money.

**Aurela Kadriu:** *Shfercera*.<sup>5</sup>

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes, *shfercera*, we ran to them. Whatever you earned, those 20 marks, you had to exchange them into marks immediately because you lost it.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Dollars?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Dollars, marks... I don't know, the '90s was a very, very (laughs) interesting decade.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were there any movements like in Prishtina, we can discuss, like in Prishtina there was a peaceful resistance, was there anything like that in Prizren, some kind of group that tried to keep art, culture against repression?

**Veton Nurkollari:** A little.

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<sup>5</sup> Schwarzer [German] black market work.



**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you have some kind of home or, some kind...?

**Veton Nurkollari:** A little, not much. For good things, I traveled from here to Prishtina (smiles). Any interesting thing I got in the car I went to Prishtina because not many interesting things happened in Prizren. Prizren was a little more withdrawn and, of course, there was resistance, there was, as they say, underground movements, movement to raise money to help schools with things, everything that happened in Prishtina, there were also things in Prizren, everything was somewhat related. But in terms of art less.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where were you in Prishtina during the '90s?

**Veton Nurkollari:** In Kurriz (smiles)

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was Kurriz like for you?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Super (laughs).

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you have any memories, I'm interested to know, how do you remember Kurriz during the '90s.

**Veton Nurkollari:** Like New York to tell you the truth. When I came to Kurriz like going to New York, it seemed super interesting, I said why isn't there a Kurriz in Prizren, a place where... it seemed very underground to me. Bauhaus was an extraordinary cafe at the entrance before you get to the, there used to be some iron doors {explains with his hands} before coming to the iron door on the left side was a cafe so all black, dark, with super music, the name was Bauhaus and I went from here to Bauhaus especially, but also other cafes there. The atmosphere in the cafes in Kurriz was much better than in Prizren.

In Prizren, there some cafes here and there, here and there, the only place that was somewhat good {points to the right} is a place that was called like Qylani vjetër or where there was Dyshi, a row of cafes, which at one point, for a quick moment, was completely destroyed somewhere in the mid '90s somewhere it broke down badly and nothing worked. So I and a lot of other people here had no place to go out and when we went out they were very, very much alike. So I often went to Prishtina because Kurriz was very, very interesting. And only Kurriz because other places in Prishtina didn't have anything very interesting, but Kurriz had an amazing atmosphere for a while, not all the time, but for a while I liked it very much.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where were you during the war, here or in Albania?

**Veton Nurkollari:** During the war only for a week, the first week I was here, then I found some opportunity to go to Macedonia, then the whole war, I was in Tetovo, but most of the time I worked with a refugee camp in Stankovec for an organization and I lead a large kindergarten, then another one so I was somewhat responsible for two kindergartens (smiles), for Save The Children, I worked on the first day, the moment when the army, NATO and journalists came, they came to Kosovo, I was part of a team of German journalists and came here to Prizren, the first night. It was a very emotional moment to return to the city.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was it like after the war when you came back, when you came back to Prizren?

**Veton Nurkollari:** At the very beginning, those first days were an extraordinary euphoria, an euphoria that I have never experienced in my life and I do not think that I will experience it again no matter how many lives I would live. A, a... I don't know, there was something in the air, happy people, a mix of great joy but also some danger that still existed. It was mixed, people, a bit of a mess, a mess. I was working with a German television team, so I had the opportunity interviewed and... But, I also went out of Prizren, in some villages, in Gjakova and Peja, and saw the destruction and the places of massacres, scenes, so I have some moments that are not exactly pleasant. But in general, what I remember most is a kind of amazing euphoria of people in the air and something that I don't think will be repeated.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Personally, was your house damaged?

**Veton Nurkollari:** {drinks water} Although we left the house because we were afraid that there would be damage because our house was next to, a few meters from the building I told you about, the building, the former army building, the Yugoslav army officers and immediately on the first day of the bombing, rumors immediately began that one of the targets would be that place. Just one night we were at home and the next day the whole family went to a close friend, we moved to another part of the city and spent a few days with them and then together, we left together. Someone let us know that there is a possibility of going to Macedonia and we left shortly before Bllaca happened. Maybe about ten hours, twelve hours something, we were in Bllaca, but we left somehow {as if pushing something with both hands}, after about 10-15 hours in Bllaca, the Macedonians let us in.

Then I heard... then I started working in Stankovec and I listened to people's stories of how they stayed in Bllaca and it was very easy to be stuck there because people were stuck. They went there but they stayed there and then that big mess of Bllaca was created. But no, nothing happened, at home or the shop. But, I have to say it happened very rarely in Prizren. Prizren was destroyed later, only a small part of the suburbs of Prizren was damaged by the war, then the other part was destroyed in 2004. Compared to other cities, especially when I went to Gjakova from Prizren, even when I was in Peja, it was terrifying. At that time how lucky Prizren was.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Are you talking about the 2004 riots??

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes, in 2004, a part of the city was destroyed {shows with his hand} many houses under the fortress were burnt. So Prizren, Prizren was destroyed in 2004, not in '99.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I would want to discuss in more detail because I don't know if I've ever seen you talk about how DokuFest was created. How did it start, where did the idea come from, I don't know if we ever talked, read about this part?

**Veton Nurkollari:** (laughs) I don't think that any of us has spoken like that, it was probably spoken either, either by me or the other side, but I can tell my part of the story because there are also some, some, some other nuances. {drinks water} I want to tell you how I got there. Ali Riza invited me, one day he invited me to talk, he said something, "Come on", he said, "let's have a beer, I have something to talk to you about, are you interested?" and he started talking about a festival, he said, "What do you think? Are you up for it?" He started talking about a music festival (laughs). I was more interested about that than in movies. Soon the conversation turned to the film festival, but initially we talked about, something about music. But, I often say that we were very naive, we were naive, we believed that he was doing something since the whole conversation then turned into Lumbardh and the initiative to do something ended with some activation of Lumbardh.

We did not have any major ideas, any vision that in 15 years, 20 years will become some kind of big festival. What we wanted to do was to activate this place, we somehow believed that if something happens and movies are shown, maybe the cinema will start working by itself and we would be done {raises his hands}. When we made the first edition, we forgot that we have to do it again, people started teasing us, "Hey, when will you do it, what will you do? It was good" because we did the first edition without, without any money, the only, the only budget we had was 2,500 marks from Soros, the only budget and something we added here and there when we wanted something. In total, it cost around 400 marks, no more, when it was over, we didn't plan on making another one. People, friends, people in the city started to... how do I say it, pushing us, "Hey, when will you do it again, it was good." If it weren't for other people, we might have not done a second edition.

Then in the second edition, it became a little more serious, and I often repeat this, the first edition, the second, now I don't know about the third. But the first two editions I am convinced none of us who had never been to a film festival before. I am one hundred percent about the first one that the people who started the festival were so inexperienced that none of us was ever before at any film festival. Do you understand, you start doing something just with some imagination of how it should look like, but we had no reference, then we started traveling there a little, someone told us, said, said, "Will you print your catalog? "Because" he said, "you can't have a film festival without a catalog." So in the third edition, we printed a catalog, to this day we don't have a catalog of the first and second

edition because we didn't print or know how the catalog is made.

We had to travel, see, bring something and then copy a little, a little. But, it was a kind of initiative of the people, without any major ambitions then, let me repeat it again. Then, of course, it started to develop slowly, learning from our mistakes, and then we started to move from one place to another. For a couple of years, the Municipality did not give us permission to put an open cinema {points my right} on the plateau where it is now, they didn't. I myself went to talk to the deputy mayor, I waited for an hour until he accepted to see me and, in the end, he didn't accept, in the end, he said to me, "You have to wait," I waited for an hour and, at the end, he had some work come up and he didn't meet me, even though I had an appointment and he didn't give it to us. Even though we didn't ask for anything, the place was just like that then. They didn't believe much, we didn't have funds from the institutions, but I don't know, for at least the first five years.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What were you doing when you got the invitation from Ali Riza, were you in the shop?

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes, yes, I worked, I worked as a photographer.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I know that you were also involved in the campaign for the protection of Lumbardhi. I know that we are going back a lot to Lumbardhi but your life is in a way related to Lumbardhi a lot.

**Veton Nurkollari:** Yes, Lumbardhi, I said that one of the main reasons why we started that festival was actually Lumbardhi and very soon we realized that Lumbardhi was included on the list of the Privatization Agency and can be sold or turned into who knows what. We started an initiative, now I'm not sure if it was 2004, it was the first initiative for the protection of Lumbardhi. We made a petition, we collected about 8 thousand signatures, we produced some leaflets, posters, we animated... especially here in the city but also outside the city for the need to protect this place so it would not be sold I think it was a kind of successful initiatives up to a point that it was not privatized immediately.

I think that the former mayor at that time, who was the initiator to, to put down this place, made a huge mistake that cost him a lot {counts on his fingers}, and his party, and his political career because after a few months, he lost the elections for, for mayor and he made a mistake that should not be done, before the campaign. Because he probably didn't think that such a large critical mass could be mobilized and even such a critical mass could then cost him votes, which I think cost him. Almost the same mistake was repeated by the former mayor of Prizren, who again, not him, but his party lost the elections because there is an extraordinary sentiment from citizens of Prizren for this place and I am sorry that they have not understood that, or some have understood, some have not understood.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Veton Nurkollari:** But if I am not mistaken, 2015 and a few weeks before the Dokufest edition starts,

we realized that the Privatization Agency of Kosovo included Lumbardhi on the list of assets for sale, which was another step, to not call it wrong but dangerous for us and at that moment we decided to completely change the concept and the theme and the whole festival and especially the concept of the opening of the festival, we decided to change it completely. And instead of an opening that we have planned, we made an opening in the form of a protest where I read a text written by Shpat Deda together with, with about 50 volunteers {shows behind} or more, a text inspired by Occupy New York and after that we showed the film more or less that has to do with Occupy New York and other ways of peaceful resistance. We wanted to show that we don't agree and, of course, we invited other allies, citizens and all those who thought like us to join us to defend Lumbardhi and 57 civil society organizations from all over Kosovo joined us for an appeal to remove Lumbardhi from the list of assets for sale.

Several things happened there, one was the appearance of the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama at the end of that edition with a message to the mayor who was present at the closing, that, "Mayors come, but if Dokufest goes or if Lumbardhi does, it does not come back." And I think it was a message which fortunately was understood by the then-mayor of Prizren. He made one of the few good things that I remember, he initiated the announcement of Lumbardhi as, as a monument of special importance or something similar in the Assembly of Prizren, which then continued with one, with an initiative that continues to this day, until, until, the announcement by the Government of Kosovo, of the removal of Lumbardhi completely from list of the Privatization Agency and the return of ownership to the Municipality of Prizren. Which I think is an extraordinary victory of civil society and initiative and I wish that from now on Lumbardhi will return and become a center for art, culture and youth as actually envisaged and how it's going. I think that soon there will be much better movement and better things regarding Lumbardhi.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What do you do today apart from those two weeks that we see you at DokuFest?

**Veton Nurkollari:** My work at Dokufest is mainly about the artistic part, especially the festival program so that, a considerable part of my time goes to that. I travel a lot, so I travel to other festivals, I am often invited as a jury member. So I have traveled a lot. I try to imagine what other editions will look like and what I should do, and... In addition to that, during the year, during the year, we work on some important projects related to education and we are more and more oriented to, in, in education through film. So we have initiated about 20 cinema clubs in primary and high schools throughout Kosovo.

We are also in the process of creating a manual for teachers on how to use film outside the curriculum. We are also in the process of creating a database of about 50 films and clips from those films that are the basis for teachers, translations, questionnaires and the like. Which is a trend in many countries of the world and which I think will succeed here as well because it is innovative and enables, enables an approach to many subjects, be it history, sociology and language using parts of the film instead of blackboard or a professor who, who only explains in a way that seems to me to be

more archaic and that technology and advancement now makes it possible. We have created a department in Dokufest which deals with education.

**Aurela Kadriu:** If you have nothing to add, I would thank you a lot for your time.

**Veton Nurkollari:** Thank you for the opportunity!