

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH ZIJADIN (ZIKO) VARDAR

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Duration: 61 minutes

Present:

1. Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar (Speaker)
2. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
3. Bengi Muzbeg (Interviewer)
4. Kamer Şimşek (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.

Bengi Muzbeg: Now let's start with your name, surname and how old are you, and lastly your profession.

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: I was born on the tenth of the second month, 1937. And my profession is cinema operator, now, how shall I say this? Cinema operator. I completed the school on that, I have a diploma in that craft, in that craft. In '54 I was... anything else to say there...

Bengi Muzbeg: We can continue with your childhood, those years when the Second World War happened. How much do you remember? You were a kid. How were the relationships, those things?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: I remember them well. Our house, our neighbors... there was a garden, when the Germans were bombing we dug a trench. We kids, all of us, you know, dug a trench. The planes are flying, all of us, that is all neighbors would get inside, we did this as kids. And after the Second World War, in short, when it ended, our communists came, they gave five hundred grams of bread to each family, it means our share of bread was one hundred and fifty grams for the whole day. So, we would manage with that. They gave sugar for example, hundred or fifty grams, whatever would come up in a month, that sugar, in a month they would give us sugar, rice, half a kilo or a kilogram for the whole month. So... We went through hard times, didn't have anything.

The rich people who owned something, what they had was all taken by communists. For example, there was a Haxhi Fahri here, and there was someone else, there were people, they took all the rich people's possessions. But it's not known who took them and where they went. So what I want to say is that since the '50s, we had a hard time, yes, since '45 up until the '50s, quite a hard time. And after the '50s, [the system] was giving more and more, people were finding more jobs.

There was the [railway] Šamac – Sarajevo, those things, to go build the railways in Belgrade, in *Novi Beograd*, how shall I say it, New Belgrade, going there with *radna akcija*.¹ Those people were going, why? Because of food. There was no food, so they were going because of food. But then it began, slowly slowly. When I got the job here in '54, for example, my wage was five hundred dinars, the second year it increased to a thousand dinars, the third year to a thousand and five hundred. And the second year, I went both to school and to work here, the second year it was a thousand dinars and the third year a thousand and five hundred, in '57.

¹ Serbian: *radna akcija*, work action. It was a volunteer program for the Yugoslav youth.

In '57 I graduated from school, but there was the need to [incomprehensible 3:31], you were supposed to go to Belgrade for example for the exams. And in Belgrade, we didn't know the language, didn't know what to say, it remained that way. After '58, I went to the army. When I came back from the army, I started working right away. And, so, after that, they formed a commission, for this thing, for the exam, I passed it and after that, from 1960, I became the cinema operator.

Bengi Muzbeg: So, before you became the cinema operator and, I mean, during wartime, were your mother and father alive, how did they describe those times, 1912 and those events of that time?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: I wouldn't know. I would only know my father, God bless him, him and also my uncles, the coffeehouse keepers in Bazhdarane there, them and my grandmothers, this is all, and I don't know anything about the wartime.

Bengi Muzbeg: No, what would they tell you at home?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: During wartime they told me that they were oppressed, they mistreated Muslims, for example. The Bulgarians were keeping Rauca [Rahovec], and Zhur was in the hands of the Austro-Hungarians [sic], Zhur. So we were here all surrounded, they did whatever they wanted, they tortured us. They say that Bulgarians are worse than *giaours*.² They said it like that, they said Bulgarian *giaour* was worse. But I don't know, I don't remember.

Bengi Muzbeg: What about school, which year did you start it?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: Which school now?

Bengi Muzbeg: The first, elementary school.

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: Aha, elementary school. I started in '46. In '46, which means that after the '50s I started high school, gymnasium in '50, gymnasium one [the first year], a year there, and let me tell you ... [incomp. 5:53] directed me to Turkish, to Turkish, and I stayed there for two more years, so until this vocational school opened. There was a *giaour* here, his son was working in trade at the same place, we would work, labor, there. We made *suxhuk*³ and marmalade, nothing else, from rosehips. And he said, "Ziko, I know you are from the town and that is why I'm telling you, go to Mustafa, tell his brother thus and so, so that they will take you there, since my son is going to the army, they shall take you to work there." In this way, in '54, I came here to work, in '54. I worked from '54-'57 and in '58 I went to the army.

Bengi Muzbeg: So you're saying, how are you saying was it at that time in Prizren among Albanians, Turks, Serbians, Muslims, and Catholics?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: Look now, I'll tell you this, nothing of this was known, we did not know whether someone was Turkish, Albanian, Roma, Serbian. Here for example, in the cinema, there was a Catholic, a Serb, an Albanian, a Turk. But our life there was like living in the same house, like a flower,

² Infidel, a derogatory term for non-Muslims, especially Christians, used in Ottoman times.

³ Turkish: *sucuk*, sausage.

just like that. Never a *giaour*... I was fasting, during the communist times, “Ziko please go home to have *iftar*,” [he’d say] this. He wouldn’t smoke in the office, he’d go out to smoke a cigarette. Which means that they had manners. But also those, the Catholics too, them too. But what I want to say is that they wouldn’t let me [work], “Go home for *iftar*,” for example, “Just sit here for an hour and rest,” and so on and so forth. When I came back later, he would go out to walk around somewhere

Bengi Muzbeg: Outside with your friends, were you together as friends here in town?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: Together, together yes, there were never any fights, for example, things like, he has beaten the other, why has an Albanian beaten a Serb or why has the Serb... it never happened, I never knew this. We would go out to the coffee houses, never would anything happen. There was fear, as a matter of fact, there was fear. When they took you, they wouldn’t really care if you were Serbian, Albanian, Muslim, Roma, they’d take you and beat you. You would know the customs for example, the law that there shouldn’t be fights at the coffee house. You were there to take a seat and listen to the music. However, fear brought manners, whenever there was fear, there was civility.

Bengi Muzbeg: Where did you do your military service?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: I did it in Podgorica, in Titograd, Titograd, as a driver, I did my service there for a year. After that they transferred me to Mostar, I was there for a year. There I worked as a courier. There was a squad over here of *giaours*, in Montenegro, in Serbia, or in Kosovo, it was in Deçan. So later we came to Deçan, at night, we arrived there and there was a Slovenian captain, you’d say he’s a Muslim. “You’d say he’s a Muslim”⁴. Anyway later, I’m telling you, he asked me, “How far is Prizren from here?” But he knew that, [he was] from Deçan. I answered him, “There are around fifty-five kilometers.” “Bravo, let’s go to Prizren.” We arrived in Prizren, he wanted to walk to the fortress, we took him there, you know, showed him around and took him back.

We went to Montenegro, let me tell you this too. He had a friend, and he was... an officer. He went there to say hi, we went inside the room, a conversation was going on. He wanted to prepare dinner. He said, “*Nemojte nešto svinjsko meso za ovoga moga šofera, nemojte svinjsko meso.... Nešto drugo.*” [Don’t make something with pork for my driver, don’t make anything with pork.... Something else.] “*Turčin li je?*” [Is he Turkish?] “*Turčin je.*” [He is Turkish] He says, “*Kad bi bio ja maršal, sve ove šiptari,*⁵ *turčini sve bih zaklao.*” [If I were a marshal these *šiptari*, Turks I would chop them all off.” You know, I’d chop them off. He says, “Sali, weight what you are saying!” He says, “What I say is right.” The captain right away, he did not eat dinner or anything else, right away he said, “Come on, let’s go.” You look at this thing. And he left without dinner. This show how many rotten people were included among the elders.

⁴ *You’d say he’s a Muslim*, is an expression that compliments someone for being good, pure, just, etc.

⁵ *Šiptar/i* Serbian for Albanian/s. This is a derogatory term for Albanians from Kosovo, to distinguish them from Albanians from proper Albania, *Albanac/Albanci*.

There was a Despot, a Despot. And Dançe, his son was a doctor, he used to come here. Later, there was the “*imaš kuču vratiš stan*”⁶ and mine was the same situation. And later your father and Despot arrived, they arrived at the same time, and another who was taking notes. I called my brother, my older brother, as if to help me complete the building of the house. They came there and looked around, the basement was all painted except the wooden floors were missing. The toilets were working. On this other side our daughter-in-law worked as a hairdresser. On the second floor, that’s where we were living, on the third floor everything was good, everything done there too. And also that, they did it, and were asking, “What else is left to be done?” They were saying that, “There isn’t anything else to finish-up. You need to get out of the apartment!” “No.” “Yes, yes, from the apartment.” Anyway, whatever the law is, we did not have a choice. But what I want to say is that your father came that day. But he’s here now, for a while now I see him. Who had... was that your house where your father is staying, the law office?

Bengi Muzbeg: No, my aunt’s.

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: Oh you aunt’s, I thought it was yours. But, this is kismet, we had to let go. We had to “*imaš kuču vratiš stan,*” so, I remember that your father came.

What else shall I tell, where shall I begin now?

Bengi Muzbeg: Now we were left with the issue of military service, I mean, when you came back and told us about that Slovenian, after him, when you came back to Prizren, you can tell me that and I’ll take care of the rest.

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: Right, that Slovenian man. And after that. I hadn’t taken my leave, I took my leave after seventeen months. Even then my captain said, “You should take your stuff, there is room for them [in the vehicle].” So I took my stuff and came back to Prizren, and that was it.

Bengi Muzbeg: The year?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: 1960. But here, my friend Shefki’s relative was working here. He was working but not that much, but he was working. So that Shefki and Shaban Krusha didn’t want to employ me back. I asked, “Why? I completed the school for this job. “Did you go to school for this job?” “No.” Remzi Namlexhi, the director there, said, “If you want to work here you can, but he has worked here for three years and he shall work here.” “You can’t just not want to take him to work here, he has completed an education in this craft. You can’t, he has to come to work here.” I saw them, they were angry, I mean, both Şevki, he was there, I mean, he screened the movies, while Shaban Krusha was working as an accountant. Later a commission was formed, you know, to look at this issue, to give the exam for cinema operator. And in that commission they asked, asked, asked. Then later, it was done. And later I took the exam, you know, in that craft. Thus, I started working in this craft, I mean, at the cinema.

⁶ Serbian: you have a house, you return the apartment. It was a Yugoslav policy that requested owners of houses to give back their government- assigned apartments to someone else.

But I want to say that our work was good. Our salary was good and there was unity there. We would stay there, converse, go on a break together, talk. The movie would end, for example, "Let's go to Shadervan for coffee or something," and then we'd go there. I want to say that we had a good time. There's nothing to be done now, those times have passed, there's no more that kind of life. No more of it.

Way back, for instance, we would work, we had days off, we'd go to vacation, we had breakfasts, we had holiday money, we had, what else, loans. Try to go and take a loan now, try to go on vacation now, how would you do it? For example, I'm gaining one hundred and forty, now it's sixty [Euros] a month. Can you go to the seaside with hundred and sixty Euros? We had it before, the life, but what else to do now. They say that it changes every thirty years, always, I mean, something happens, like a war or something, like now, with these terrorists. What I'm saying is that it changes every thirty years.

I have three sons, may they be healthy. One of them finished the school for agriculture, at the faculty in Prishtina. He has a shop. One of them is working at Albi, one of them works at a smaller one in front of over there, [it sells] home appliances, he works there. All of them are engaged, married, we had the time for it. That will, you know, we had that will, we married them, they all have children now. But at home, no, there's a lack of harmony. "Dad, take the sign outside so we can sell the house." "Alright, I'm putting it outside." This, what I'm telling you, is before the war. I'm putting the sign out and no one is coming, everyone is afraid, the war, who would come to buy. After the war, "Dad, put the sign out." "Alright my son, I'm putting it out." One would come, another would come, this and that.

After the war it was different, they would come, take a look around. One would come, another, another and another. It lasted for about two years. One of our neighbors brought a customer. When there's good fortune, that's it the good fortune, there's the saying, inshallah, may God never leave you without good luck. The house was sold in half an hour. In half an hour. "Come on, let's make hundred and twenty," "No, hundred and fifteen," "Hundred and ten," and we brought it down to hundred and ten. And finally, at the end, an apartment for each. I mean, one of them, the middle one was in a little jam, we bought one for him then, for the younger one too. And one for us.

Now, I live with my oldest son in hundred and five square meters. We were saying to our son, "Look son, let's buy a studio apartment, and that's enough." "No father," he says, "I saw how my older uncle was living far away by himself, no." He is a compassionate son. "You will stay here, look, I won't let you go." Whatever I say now, he says I can't do it. Now, it is agreed that I stay there. We even had, I mean, some money was left for a studio apartment. "Do whatever you want," I said to him, "whatever you want." I gave it to him. He is looking after me, he serves me, but I have served them too. Even until the ninth month of last year, until I got sick, then I couldn't handle it any longer. Now he goes to the market by himself, he brings stuff upstairs, he goes to the market here and there to take stuff, and that. "Let me take it." "No father, you just sit, you sit."

It's like this, sometimes I fool myself, for example, I try to carry upstairs something by myself, while doing it my body lets me down, I sweat, the body lets me down. But there's nothing to do, it appears that life is like this for us. Living seems to be like this. I hope that these young people will live better from now on. That thing, they put it on the thing, on the internet, in English, I said it there too, I

answered all the questions they asked. But I said, I hope that from now on, the youth, the youth will advance, that they be employed, live. But also the government, look now, the government first needs to take care of children and the elderly. The children and the elderly are the same. If you don't look after the children, after the elderly... The young people will find a job, will find something in a day to get by for that day. But the children need milk, someone needs to give them formula. The elderly need milk or something to eat. That's the most important thing, the elderly and the children. If you go to other governments they go crazy after kids. They pay and pay, give and give more, and here with us, no, what can we do, it seems to be too much. Is there anything else there?

Bengi Muzbeg: We kind of skipped a bit but, what are the best years, I mean, what are the best times that you have lived, the '60s, the '70s? Or after that, continuing with the '80s, how did things go down in the '90s?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: For example, in 1962, I got married. My wife was working at the printing shop. My salary, we would make ends meet. My first son was born in '63, the second in '68 and the third one in '71. But thank God they were paying *dečiji dodatak*.⁷ We got along as a family. There were Lirija's apartments over here, my wife was working at Lirija, I mean later she moved to Lirija. Gani Demir, the director at that time, started selling the apartments.

Anyway in my house, my brother used to live in the old house, I was comfortable there. And, they were selling the apartments, they would come here to play cards, the director Gani Demir, and some others, some old people. He came to the office and said, "Ziko what do you think?" I said, "Yes Gani, about what?" He says, "The apartments are being sold, shall I give you one?" I said, "I don't have the money Gani." Thirteen million. "I'm asking you if you want it or not? If you fancy it?" I said, "Alright, I will ask my wife," and I told this and that. There was a loan for five million, I had four and a half million from the house that I took, nine and a half million and let's say, I won't pay the three. I'm telling him this. He says, "Look, I'm looking out for you, if I hadn't look out for your interest I wouldn't have come here to you." I said, "Alright, should I bring the money I have tomorrow?" "Yes, bring it." I brought the four and a half million, my wife gave me five and we bought the apartment at Bazhdarane.

We bought it, but we couldn't enter it, it was in '72, exactly '72, we wanted to go there. The villager who lived there didn't let the place go, we went to the court and stuff, he had someone he knew. He would find things about a wall that won't do, some furniture. Later he was replaced by a townsman, a townsman, he was Albanian but a good fella. He said, "You should vacate the place in 24 hours and if you don't, we are calling the police." "No." The police in the morning took all his stuff out. He says, "*More, bre*,⁸ you'll see!" "Here am I, tell me, tell me what will I see." "You'll see." He went away.

Then the time came when we sold it and the lot too and built a house. But in the '60s, '70s, in '62 or '65 that abundance had started, the atmosphere started to rise. People were going to Turkey, other places and stuff, the atmosphere, to Greece, but with money. Until '82, '81, when these demonstrations here started, when the police came here, all kinds of people, the drug addicts and

⁷ Serbian: child allowance.

⁸ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

convicts from Serbia. They would send them here. The nice atmosphere started to fade, but it didn't last long until about '89. After '89 it started again... all the blame was put on us, on Albanians. Always Albanians doing this, Albanians doing that. A man never sees its own face, always sees the other man's face. I was thinking, you should take the mirror and look at yourself first and then judge the other. All the blame was put on Albanians, Albanians.

What I want to say is that when the war started in the '90s, in Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, to a lesser extent in Slovenia, my son was a soldier there in Slovenia, the younger one, he pulled through by a hair. I went there, waited and waited for him and, nowhere. Another captain, a Slovene, a good person, brought him to Ljubljana, put him on a train to Belgrade, that captain, so good. He goes to Belgrade and I went there, waited for him, took him and brought him back. I brought him back, but he had to do his service in Mitrovica. There was that thing, the refugee soldiers were taken all there to finish their duties. My brother's daughter was married there. I went there to see my son. But you can't really go there every day, only on Saturdays, Sundays. When they saw me there, my brother's daughter in there, you know, from Kikinda, "Oh and you are from Kikinda, you are from Kikinda," I mean, "Come in freely, come in." So he did his duty there.

Later, my older son got married, I went there. I didn't go alone, took my brother's daughter with me and his son-in-law. We went to that captain in Mitrovica and I explained the situation, this and that, "His brother is getting married, would you let him go for a couple of days?" "Yes." "Would you give us a guarantee?" "Yes." Alright. Later he came to the wedding, you know. But they let him, they didn't make it a problem, they didn't touch him or anything, torture him or oppress him, no. When he was fully released, "Were you under pressure?" "Nothing happened, everything was normal." What I want to say is that the situation worsened afterwards. Who did it, ruined its own people and us too? Ranković.⁹ What can we do. Is there something else? I'm tired.

Bengi Muzbeg: How were the movies, the public, sales, can you tell us?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: Now let me start from here, for example, the movies. The movies, when I started working in 1954, they would watch cowboy films. Those were popular, cowboy films, and then the Indian [native Americans] films came, the Indian films begun in the '60s. And then people started coming to the cinema. Then there came the serial films, the Italian cowboy films. They would last 45 minutes, but [the cinema] would be full, a serial of 45 minutes each. There was profit from that, also from cowboy films. Especially when there was John Wayne, Tony Curtis and another famous actor, the hall was full, it was so crowded. Then the romance films began, the more educated would come to see those. And the youth always watched cowboy films, eh, bam bum, bam bum, when the gangsters won they would applaud. And later the Indian movies started.

Many would come to the garden. Before, the entrance was this way, where the window is, there. The entrance was there but there was also...I forgot to bring the photographs to show you, the

⁹ Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of the Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.

photographs. The entrance was there and the sidewalks, the street was further away, next to the bridge, but they shortened it and it arrived closer to here. There was enough space, the sidewalk was about three meters. But there wasn't, when people went out, there wasn't enough space. Then there was a problem when many people were going out right and left and the cars were passing by, I mean, there was danger from the drivers. I just want to tell that the street was further away, but they shortened it because of the appearance. And later the Indian movies.

They closed it all, the door, and they opened one this way. In '70 something, '75 or something, the entrance was this way and the tickets were given over there. They closed it, in order to change something. The toilets were in the basement, you'd go downstairs, to the basement, disgusting. They repaired the upstairs and built the toilets there, they closed the other place. You'd get to the balconies from this entrance over here. Not right away. How shall I explain this now, right from under here, you'd get up to the balcony. {Call to prayer, he recites *shahadat*.}¹⁰ That was changed, there used to be a door there that opens up to the balcony, you would enter from that door and go up to the balcony. And later they closed it, they made toilets there, both for men and women, so there weren't any problems left regarding the toilets. But previously, there used to be problems, for example for the women, the women. You would go downstairs, the toilet there, right away, you know, the women. But now it's different, now it's a different atmosphere, they did it differently.

When the Indian movies arrived, I'm telling you, there would be a huge crowd and no place. All the tickets in the garden would be sold out and hundred or two hundred more chairs and the ones standing on the sides, during the Indian movies. It was crowded. There was profit, there was a living. What is that saying, "you reap what you sow." We would watch the Indian films and people would come to another, to another, another, we would do it all the time, once, twice, three times, four times. even play it five times. But these kinds of films came only to Kosovo, not to Serbia or Macedonia, maybe Macedonia yes. But the other places, Slovenia, Croatia, no, only Kosovo. But I would like to say that we had, we had our profit from them. And so like this, the romantic movies would come, the older ones, every year, people would get used to it.

For example, the people from the army, they came, I mean, on Sundays, the soldiers with their families. We had to give the whole balcony to them. For these romantic movies. They came as husband and wife, and their daughter or son or whoever, and no one else was allowed in the balcony, it was just for them. They would pay, "How much?" "This much," and no one else would go there. And I want to say that.... {Call to prayer, pause} and I want to say that we had good times, we had really good times, really, really really. Sometimes we also had problems with these things, I don't know if they are still here, on the walls there were one, two, three of them, both on the right and on the left. It would say in Albanian, "No smoking allowed." And there were those guys, for example, they would create a lot of problems, they would smoke. They wouldn't understand that, they would just open up their jacket and show it.

And there was Mehmet, he was a traffic police, he would always beat those school boys. I said, "Why always those Albanian schoolboys? Why do you tell only on them? They are town people." "Their

¹⁰ Shahada, a prayer that one recites each time the imam calls for a prayer from mosque's minaret.

mother and father have put taxes away for them to go to school and learn manners. Why are they making problems? They should work, study, finish their schools and become something and not come here to make problems.” So, I want to say that, that was the only problem, the cigarettes. They would smoke. I’m telling you, there was, he would only open his jacket, show it.

Look, if I ever get sick, it would be from this water. Who knows how good these are. The best water is the one from here, that flows here. It’s really good. But the old tubes from the ‘60s. Now they have put new tubes that the river’s water gets in, these are the older one.

Bengi Muzbeg: Now, what we spoke about earlier, let’s say the ‘90s, that you said things started to deteriorate, now can we start with the ‘90s and until the war starts, then if you could link it with Lumbardhi, meaning the private work here, when did you retire?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: In the ‘90s, when the war started in Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, in those times people were terrified. They were terrified that the war was happening. They knew that it was going to spread to Macedonia, to Montenegro and to Kosovo. Because given that the demonstrations were held here, it was known that the war would spread here too. People were quite, you know, they were quite scared. After the war was over in Bosnia, in Croatia, but there was still fear, we didn’t know when it would start here. We would go to sleep, close all the doors, do this and that, turn on some light outside so that it would illuminate because people were in fear, you saw what they did, what they were doing.

My father-in-law, we should now back up a bit, he had fit in with Germans, the translation work, translating from this language, an officer, he had gone to Germany and had studied there for six months. But when it happens, I mean, when it went wrong, the war started, they escaped here and there to Italy, Turkey and from Turkey to New York, from New York to Canada. And then he was saying on the phone, “Come here before the war starts.” “No.” Now, who would go first? My wife and I, my son with his wife, the other one with his wife and the other, all three of them were married before the war. “Come, come, come.” On the phone with the older one, he says that there are jobs, you can work as an agronomist. The fear, should we go or not, should we go or not, should we go or not, no. The boy says, “No, I won’t go.” Anyway, no and that’s it. Now, you can’t always be in fear, you should, as they say, to risk sometimes, not always be in fear. They didn’t go, any of them. “Alright, let us stay here and you go.” “No.”

Then it started here too, people started to flee, with all their families. My children, they took my older one, the agronomist, while he was out to buy some sugar, they took him to a labor camp. We didn’t know where he was for two months. That anxiety, those things at home. His two kids were crying, “Where’s my father, my father.” Only my heart knows what I felt. But thank God he was saved, he was saved for a day. They had prepared to send all of them to Serbia the next day, like they did to other people. But there was an exact order for them not to go, and he was saved. Later, after two months, we understood where he was, over there next to Vlasnja, they opened a labor camp, they opened it during the day and shot [people] during the night. Now, who shot them, and who were they, despite all, it was torture. And he was quite, you know, a block had fallen on his toe, he was injured. But whoever escaped, escaped, we couldn’t go away while waiting for my son. How could we? We had a

place to go, you know, to my father-in-law. But you could go, I told to my younger one, “At least you go maybe someone will take you, you don’t have any kinds, go.” “No father, no, no.”

But we went through what we went through, those times of waking up in the morning, going to get some bread. Our house over there, the army’s headquarters was there, all of them over there. I’m going to buy bread, with my wife, right that moment when he passes, during the morning they would, you know, I’m passing from there. Three officers are hiding under the grapevine. They came out, “Where are you going?” “We’re going to buy some bread.” Then he saw that I could speak Serbian you know, “Good, now go, go.” If you didn’t know any Serbian, you know, you had a problem, they’d wipe you out. I would go out every day, here and there, to that son and over to the other, it was miserable! Torture. Never sleeping, nothing, always with worries. But God saved us. No family member of ours had died or had been wounded. There’s nothing you can do about it. But before they said that twelve thousand people in Kosovo, you know, are martyrs. They would say, it will be twelve thousand people, and it turned out to be true. This is behind now. May God give patience to the mothers, fathers and children of the deceased.

Bengi Muzbeg: So, which year did you retire and your family, what were your sons doing for a living?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: Retirement? My wife retired in ‘92, and I retired in ‘95. But we received a payment, we made ends meet. The children worked too, the older one, the younger one, all of them. What’s important is that we had some means, food. A person hopes, “I am retired now and will live my life from now on.” My wife got five hundred and thirty dinars and I got six hundred and twenty dinars. With this income, we would get on well for a month. We would pay all the expenses of the house. The children, they were really earning little but they would also get on well. But what I want to say is that, the hope, you will live after you retire, but it didn’t go that way, we had it rough. But thank God none of the children died or something, that is the most important thing. A man would eat salt and bread just to avoid things like that. But after the war, they were giving us merely some dinars, or marks, at the time. My son was working too.

There was Naser, Naser was my neighbor over there, he was working in his shop. At some point he left it there too. He used to work at *Çuni* over at Bazhdarane, at the shop that he opened on his own with some money. But it was good after the war, we were comfortable. We didn’t have much, but the important thing is that our hearts beat. I’m remembering, it’s not easy, they come to your house, bam bam bam on the door. Now, do you open it or not. Who are they? What are they doing? With fear all the time. But thank God that the war is over now, and we have passed those things. My wife and I got our pensions. There, over at Yugobanka, we would take the marks from there. Twenty-eight, I would take twenty-eight and my wife, we would support ourselves, what shall we do.

Bengi Muzbeg: When that, do you remember let’s say you retired in ninety four, ninety five. If I’m not wrong, the situation here wasn’t all that good. How did it happened that this place failed and closed down?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: In ‘93 the director was let go, the director Masar Drini. And also, there is our collective, we discussed who is going to be the director. Immediately they suggested me. I said, “No.”

If I would become the director today, the next day they would boot me out too. A *giaour* was made director, my colleague, the cinema operator, was appointed director. Imagine the inflation, there was a huge inflation. He would never come out in the evening here, never. He would gather all the money, had a friend, used to go to him to convert it into marks. When the time came for the salaries to be distributed, eighteen marks. But profit was being made, it was being made, not that it wasn't. For a day there would be, there would be twenty- thirty marks revenue. Where did that money go? You'd work for the whole month and they gave you eighteen marks. But he, you know, with all the money.

And I want to say that had I been made director they would boot me out right away and I wouldn't have gathered the working time I did, you understand. They would let you go right away. Like they did to Masar Drini, they would kick me out too. No, I preferred this way. Their word was the law, we couldn't make any difference. Only they, whatever they said was obligatory, and nothing else could be done. Thank God, you know, even to that eighteen marks that you would earn, until ninety-five when I retired, and then, after that I was comfortable. But ninety-two, ninety-three, you know there was so much inflation, high inflation. We take those money, and go. The movie played at eleven, at one, at three, at five and at seven. Five times a day. Five times a day if the revenue was twenty marks, how much, hundred marks. So, I want to say that they profited. But they didn't enjoy the benefits from it. It's better when a person's conscience is at rest, even that little money, it's cleaner.

Bengi Muzbeg: After the war, when the old employees would hang out here, did you use to sometimes come too?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: I, when I retired in '95 only, what's his name? He was a director here, he, Çyse, Çyse. He became a director here, Çyse, he used to be a captain during the war. They didn't have a cinema operator, he calls me on the phone, says, "Ziko, I have a favor to ask." I said, "Tell me what?" And he tells me thus and so, "Can you come to work?" What am I supposed to work, I'm retired and I'm also sick. I think, in '95, the police didn't kill me. I say that I'm sick. "Come on, come work here, someone will help you." You have to lift that thing, it's heavy, twenty kilograms, you know, to lift it up there, for example. So, I went, alright I worked for a month and he payed what he payed. After that I haven't stepped inside.

You know, the thing to which they invited me, there, twenty years later, twenty years later. There wasn't anyone here for me to come, nothing to do. Fejzullah's son, Adnan took this place and he was running it. There were employees here for example during Dokufest¹¹ and Zambaku i Prizrenit,¹² and [the association] Agimi,¹³ when they organized concerts they invited the employees to come here, you know. Whatever they are paying, a hundred or two hundred euros, "Here, divide it among yourselves." No, they didn't invite anyone, he ran it by himself and he hasn't pay all those electricity bills. And, this is it. May God give you health. If there is anything else, please.

Bengi Muzbeg: If there is something you remember, a memory or an event?

¹¹ An international documentary and short film festival, held annually in Prizren, Kosovo.

¹² A local Prizren song festival, briefly discontinued during the war. It is held annually since 1986.

¹³ The Arts and Culture Association Agimi, located in the city of Prizren, founded in 1944.

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: I recall, what can I say now, now it's all without a point, without a point, without a point. Thank God we survived.

Bengi Muzbeg: No, I'm asking about the cinema, something that you cannot forget?

Zijadin (Ziko) Vardar: Oh now, no, we had good times. There was a Mahmut Matiane here, he was my best friend. Wherever we went, we went together. With him we [would] sit here, laugh, talk and everything. And we would go to the garden there was the thing, twenty, twenty-five meters long, it would get hot and we would sit there, sunbathe and wash up. These were good things as well, he would come to the office and we'd say, "Let's have something [to drink]," and I'd say, "Let's do it," friendly conversations and all. I would let the film roll for example, and it would play we would then sit at the table, watching on one side and talking on the other. So there was that, and for example there was a stranger, he would come, "Ziko, it arrived, shall I bring it to the office?" I'd say, "Bring it." He would come, I'd invite him to come sit with us but he would say, "No, I interrupted your talk." These are left, the good memories, all good. We never fought with anyone, you know, no disagreement in thirty-five years, God forbid. We had a good time, that is the most important thing.

