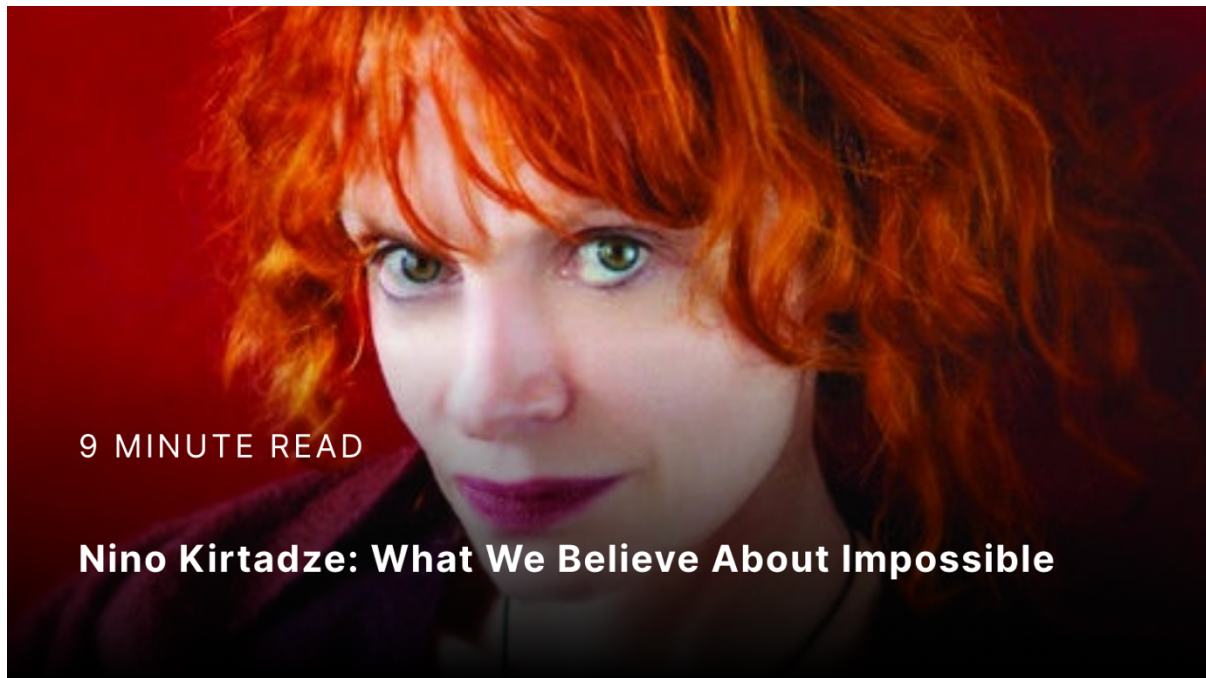


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NINO KIRTADZE - Georgian-born French journalist, actress and film director (CREDIT: Khatuna Khutsishvili)

What are you as a person and how to understand yourself, one way is probably to leave home and test yourself

What do you believe?

I believe in the impossible, because it gives life a new meaning; in art, it is a way to surpass limitations. They say I believe in fairy tales even today, and maybe that's what a fairy tale is: making the impossible possible.

Can you tell us about the impossible thing you overcame in your life and made possible?

I can look back at my life and see that I have spent it trying to make the impossible possible. It was even the fact that I live and work in Paris today that made me come here in 1996 to pursue my dream of directing and making my first film here in France. The fact is that I didn't arrive in Paris as an established director; I started everything from scratch and it worked out because there was no way I could believe otherwise, and the same was true of my way of life when I was a war reporter in Chechnya. I wanted to leave the safe place, the house, and discover who I am, it also happens in fairy tales: if the hero is not exiled, he does not find out who he is, he finds out on the road; this is very interesting, there is a deep philosophical meaning in it, what are you as a person and how to understand yourself, one way is probably to leave home and test yourself.

What brought your life to Paris?

In 1996, Nana Jorjadze began shooting his French-Georgian film “A Chef in Love,” which gave me an opportunity to visit Paris for the first time. At the time, I already knew I wanted to produce a documentary about the war in Chechnya, which I had covered so far, because I believed that the most compelling, interesting, and profound stories lay beneath the journalistic reporting. This offered me the opportunity to take the project on and see how it worked.

I found an entirely different environment in Paris, which was nothing like what I knew in Georgia. The peacefulness, the organized life, the calm people, you begin to wonder where you belong in such an orderly world, and your heart breaks in fear. In truth, youth has this amazing ability - you think you can finally do anything you set your mind to, yes, I was afraid, but I didn't consider that it wouldn't work, almost unconsciously, you go towards something that calls you and you do it. When you lose this ability, then maybe you become old. When you are young, you don't see the need for caution, you think you are invincible, and perhaps that's why you end up becoming invincible, just as the mood theory states, what you believe, you become.

How did you become interested in war journalism?

As a student, I wrote articles for various magazines. One of the foreign journalists invited me to Grozny, so I accepted, then I went; it happened like a fairy tale when a choice is made: “If you turn right, this will happen; if you turn left, that will happen.”

From 1992 to 1994, we visited Grozny constantly, once we could not return to Georgia due to the war. To begin with, the situation looked like an operetta in Grozny with Dudayev as the president, people dreaming of independence, believing in the future, all of this seemed like a dream, and then, to my dismay, I saw how it was all destroyed, I remember it very clearly.

The desire to make a documentary came about that time, as I was seeing incredible things, more importantly, I was very close to the mystery of death; you begin to think of what responsibility you have as well as the worldview you can create when you are so close to the limit of existence, which is absence, how life and death are fought, what choices you make, what you can fear or not fear, how you act and how a person shows himself in this time.

In Chechnya, at first they did not control me because of me being woman, however, after the second war started, this changed; I remember how the city was destroyed, and how radical Islam and Sharia law was introduced, a kind of doom has swept over everything; unfortunately, this is a story that keeps repeating itself in different countries and different places.

After the montage, a closed screening of “Chechen Lullaby” was organized on Capitol Hill, before the first meeting between President Bush and President Putin, in which it was claimed the Americans could no longer bring it up because 9/11 had already happened and America needed to cooperate with Russia. This is when I realized what Realpolitik is, my childhood ended and I was no longer convinced that if the world finds out what is happening, it won't happen again, it was a belief among us who covered the conflict in Chechnya at the time.

What brought you to the movie set from the war?

It was a miracle; during this time I was working at France-Presse, the first war ended and the Chechens won, the Russians made some concessions; the Chechens defended their own country and managed to push back the enormous Russian army, this was also the possibility of the impossible. It was then we did not understand that Russia was only gaining time and preparing for revenge, it was after Putin became the President in the middle of the first and second war, and then the second war began, much more horrible and cruel, and we see the same thing today in Ukraine.

Upon hearing of Pierre Richard's arrival, I returned to Georgia, as we were discussing creating a TV report on Nana Jorjadze's film. It was the first Georgian-French co-production, so the interest was high. After that, they called me and asked me to attend a casting, so I went, and even though I wasn't an actor, they approved me for the lead role. While playing in a foreign language was a major challenge, trying to figure out how to say some text and be convincing, I'm still left feeling like I'm wearing someone else's dress. Since it's my native tongue, playing in Georgian is much easier than in French; when I got the lead role, I was worried. It was a big responsibility, but I went for it.

What is happening in your life right now? Have you found your way yet or do you still search for something new?

Documentary was a great discovery for me since literature, music, painting, everything is woven into this work, and I realized that everything I've done has been beneficial, such as standing in front of the camera, getting close to death, studying literature, relationships with Zurab Kiknadze, Rezi Tvaradze, Rezi Siradze; I have learned a lot from them.

Now, I would prefer to work on feature films, since I have exhausted my interest in documentaries. Additionally, I would struggle to work in an area of conflict, since I am thinking more often about death and responsibilities to those who are dear to me.

Maybe, it's not just a matter of aging and possibly due to the fact that you live in France, an organized country, it is much more difficult to travel from such a country to a conflict zone; when you went to Chechnya, there was not much different situation in Georgia than what you experienced in Chechnya.

It might have been, but I lived in France when I went to Russia to film Durakovo, and I will never forget this experience. Prior to this, I thought I understood what the Stalin period was, but by shooting this film, I experienced what it could have been like. There I learned how one can break down people into simple multiples, keep them under such fear for such a long time that it breaks them; a person cannot endure everything, even if he endures, things are destroyed forever by this process, and nothing that doesn't kill you makes you stronger, so it always comes with a price, and it is quite costly.

It was always my greatest fear during the filming of Durakovo that the crew would be attacked, such was the terror created around the main character that the entire group was also affected. I also remember, when we entered Grozny illegally, how much anxiety there was when the car suddenly stopped near the Samashki forest, there were cases when Chechens ran out of the forest and attacked suspected Russians.

I realized during my stay at that forest that I wasn't willing to keep going like this any longer; maybe something told me to take a break, stop playing with death, after all, when you are

shooting at it, you think nothing will happen to you. Many of my acquaintances have suffered because of this.

As a writer, who would be the hero of your fairy tale, what would be his greatest challenge, and how would you end it?

The feature film I'm currently working on has almost the structure of a fairy tale, the main character is a dedicated father, a reliable person who takes his job seriously, but he's been directed to wipe out one family. He's following the order because hierarchy tells him to. Throughout the second part of the film, this man convinces himself that he has done the right thing, even when he is fully aware that it is wrong. This is like Dante's Inferno.

In truth, how does light and dark coexist in a person, at what point does the darkness overpower the light; this tale ends badly, but leaves us with questions that come very close to our everyday lives; how does a person break like a clock spring when they take a fatal step, disappear somewhere in the dark, and never return; this is my future fairy tale.