

INTERVIEW WITH SAFETE ROGOVA

Pristina | Date: June 3, 2012

Kohëzgjatja: 79 minuta

Present:

1. Safete Rogova (Speaker)
2. Mimoza Paçuku (Interviewer)
3. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Camera)
4. Sara Nicole Baxley
5. Sara Nicole Baxley
6. Athina Doutis
7. Paula Astorga
8. Rachel Cleary
9. Anna Di Lellio

Symbols used about the comments in the transcript to support non-verbal communication

() – Emotional communication

{ } – The interviewee explains through gestures

Other symbols in the transcript:

[] – Additional symbol in the text to ease the understanding

Footnotes are editorial additions to give information about place, names and expressions.

Mimoza Paçuku: Can you tell us something about your childhood, what do you remember about it?

Safete Rogova: We, who are of a certain age, remember with joy the beautiful time of our childhood. I was born in Gjakova, a beautiful town in Kosovo, to a large family with many kids. My father and mother made crafts, so we did not struggle to make ends meet, although we were many children who needed to be dressed, fed, educated..., and fortunately our neighborhood too was filled with kids, so I have many memories of a very pleasant childhood.

In my neighborhood there was a school, a mosque, and there was also a *teqe*.¹ As you know, in Gjakova there are many *teqe*, and since my school was nearby, in the afternoon if a ceremony was taking place, we children in the community would go together, and since there wasn't enough income in Gjakova, we witnessed a sort of performance, the singers wore those very interesting long vests, and performed the ceremony in the *teqe*. This was very appealing to us children and even though we did not know what the theatre was, we thought that was theatre, that a performance was going on. So later, I often remember, in my youth and also through my first steps in the theatre is that the initial attraction I felt for it, came from the *teqe* in my neighborhood, which we would often visit and we were happy with all the ceremonies performed there.

However, it was the post-World War II period, and Gjakova had experienced large destruction. Families had just enough to eat, and we didn't have any particularly nice clothes, there were no nice clothes, no ready-made clothes. My mother, since we were many daughters, often had to take apart her own *dimia*,² because that is what she wore then, and she created dresses for us girls.

We helped her cut them with scissors, to look as pretty as we could. Our house had one floor, with a large garden that had a big apple tree. Sometimes, when we were naughty, because as a child one gets into trouble, we would hide under that leafy apple tree {shows how they hid}, and our mother would never find

¹ *Teqe* in Albanian, *tekke* in Turkish, is a lodge of a Sufi order, in this case the Bektashi. It is inhabited by a *Cheikh* or *Baba* and by dervishes.

² Billowing white satin pantaloons that narrow at the ankles, Turkish style. They are made with about 12 meters of fabric.

us, for a long time she never knew where we hid, you know, we have many, many, beautiful memories of that time.

We had two one-story houses under one roof, and we shared the attic with a neighbor {makes a roof top with her hands}. The girls' meetings, although we were young then, around eight or nine years old, always took place there, in the attic. I recall it was a tough time then. Children didn't have toys, so we made them ourselves. We got sticks, drew faces on them, and dressed them up. From those sticks we made a sort of doll game. Now that I am a grandmother and have many grandchildren, who have lots of toys, and who often throw them away - they don't want to play with them, because they have ready-made toys - I wonder, sometimes should we let children create their own toys, and have the fun which is found in making a toy themselves, rather than have a beautiful doll, an expensive one, with which to play and play and ultimately throw it away.

The beauty of that time, of my childhood, is that I created everything myself. We had a cow in the garden, and as we had no footballs then, we cut the hairs of the cow and with a bit of water we created a type of ball (laughs). That was our ball because we didn't have plastic ones then, or other ones, we created every type of game ourselves, and there was a beauty in it, that it created a fantasy, it stimulated the imagination, because we did what we liked with those toys, and now unfortunately, but also fortunately, children have many ready-made toys. I think that we should let children free to create, to imagine their own lives.

Then school started, it was a beautiful school nearby. I stood out next to my sisters, who each had their particular talent, it looked like mine was acting. In the first and second year of school I had immediately begun to recite well, and they had noticed I had some talent and I would become an actor. We didn't have costumes for school's performances, so our teacher made them from paper. We helped, we also wove paper into tiaras. I have many photographs from the time we created our own tiaras from paper {creates tiaras with her hands}, our dresses from paper. We had school performances of either singing, or plays, and in this way the school developed children's imagination.

Up until fourth grade, there were many students in the school and I had lots of friends in my class who are all the same age and when I visit Gjakova, I still seek out the company of my friends of 60 years ago. I finished fourth grade. Because we were many children, we had to move to Pristina. My dad wished for his children to be educated in Pristina, because Pristina was a big center with a secondary school, a Gymnasium³ and a *Shkolla Normale*,⁴ because at the time there was no university in Pristina. When I got to

³A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

⁴The *Shkolla Normale* opened in Gjakova in 1948 to train the teachers needed for the newly opened

schools. With the exception of a brief interlude during the Italian Fascist occupation of Kosovo during WWII, these were the first schools in Albanian language that Kosovo ever had. In 1953, the *Shkolla Normale* moved to Pristina.

Pristina, I felt upset for leaving my beloved neighborhood, my friends, my teachers, whom I always remember with longing even though they are no longer living. However, we adapted quickly. The area where we lived was near the Gymnasium Sami Frashëri. As I said, my family adapted quickly, we children fortunately lived near the school, my mother and father continued their work. They made quilts, and worked very hard so that we would be educated and stay on the right path.

I have fond memories of Gjakova. In the winter it gets very cold and a lot of snow falls, and during those great snowfalls the roads would sometimes close, because there was no way of clearing them. When we wished to visit our paternal aunties, my father, bless him, would have one child on here, another on there, and me too {puts palms on her shoulders}. I don't know how he held us because there was a lot of snow, so much that you couldn't see people. To keep us happy he would walk through all that snow, but here in Pristina the climate was different, it was more gentle and I did not experience the harsh weather of Gjakova, the snow of my childhood.

We settled into a big house that luckily also had a big garden. The children had now grown up and were ten, twelve and fourteen years old and the time had come to start helping my mother sew the quilts. As a child and even now I can sew lovely quilts, but now there is no need for that because they are done with machines. As a family, we were professional quilt makers. We sisters, six of us, and three brothers, have always made beautiful quilts, so in addition to our academic schooling, we learned a craft, a skill, and that helped us materially very much. We worked and we sold what we made so that we could go to school, dress ourselves.

Luckily, I had a very good group of friends. However, we were only the children of a craftsman, and in my class there were the daughters of public officials, whose names I won't mention now. When I went there, those girls were dressed so nicely, in their petticoats, and I went home nearly crying.

And my mother sees me sad and says "Huh?" I tell her, "I have the daughter of so and so and the daughter of this and that [in my class], and they are dressed beautifully, they go to different cities in the former Yugoslavia to find clothes," and my mother says, "Don't you worry, I am going to sew you dresses," and my poor mother ruins another pair of *dimia*, makes another dress, makes another headband. She tried to fulfill all our wishes and to not make us feel like we had nothing to wear, but I could never be equal to the children of the wealthy, who had plenty. Even so, we didn't feel out of place, even when our finances were tight, our parents tried very hard for us children.

It is then that I also found my passion to sing and play. I sang beautifully, and I danced ballet, although then there was no ballet school. We created parts, made up songs that we knew by heart, and we girls did ballet since primary school. It was indeed a beautiful and pleasant time. For example, we had school competitions in ballet, or singing, or playing.

Fortunately, at that time there was a school called Vuk Karadžić, later named Elena Gjika, which won every competition. We noticed that from that school many actors, singers, and famous doctors emerged - even now there are two or three doctors living in America - and well-known engineers, I mean,

it was as though that school produced talents, it produced children who later achieved very much.

The neighborhood girls gathered in our garden along with us children and girls and there we created scenes and sets. As my father was a quilt maker, his material came from around former Yugoslavia in big crates where my father put the cotton and materials he worked with. When they were empty - and it is at this point I realized that I would one day become an actor - I would create a set in the garden using two or three crates {shows the size of the crates with her hands}. In the garden we had plants and wood and with some bed linens we created curtains, and we played a game of "theatre," aware that I was creating something, also that I had talent for the theatre, and that one day I would become an actress. These are the first steps that relate to my fate as an actor.

My mother gave birth to another two children. There were six of us in Gjakova, and with these two, nine. My mother was pregnant, but we didn't know because she wore *dimia*. We didn't understand that she was pregnant until later on, until she was due. We treated her normally, in her *dimia*, freely, until the moment she said, "Mom is almost due," "What birth, where is the belly!?" We could not see it. Then my little sister Igballe - Igo -, was born. "Igballe" means good luck and my mother brought us "good luck."

It's interesting, usually in Albanian families they always shoot a gun when a boy is born, but in our family no gun was used, although for us all it was still a day filled with joy when my sister was born, and later we sisters fought for the rights of women, precisely because our family educated us in such a way, because my father did not distinguish between girls or boys, and when my little sister was born, the fact they named her "Good luck" (smiles) expressed their happiness, and we also were happy. We had many sisters so we didn't need many girl friends, we had as many sisters as we wanted, and we could help each other in doing school work or housework. In those days we did not have the same means as now, our living room was very big, very clean, but it had no sofa, we would sit, ordered like this, in fact I think, just like these {points to the interviewers} girls sit here now (smiles).

We did not have a sofa [laughs], so we sisters sat like this, or when we ate we had a big *sofra*,⁵ we always sat like this. Although it may have been a bit primitive - thank God the day has come that we all have furniture in our houses - however, sometimes that primitiveness can be very beautiful, can bring you closer. You know, when we were together, when we ate together, we actually saw each others faces - we were happy. Sometimes I compare that time to this one. My daughters have both succeeded and have made names for themselves as artists (sighs), yet I see them stressed, tired. In my time we were not so stressed, I don't know, maybe because we were less informed, with no television, newspapers or politics. We didn't know who the President was, who were the members of Parliament, who was involved in corruption [giggles], you know, the entire beauty of life, of family, was around that *sofra*, and we enjoyed one another, each other's achievements if we did well in school, and when we saw that our father had a lot of work, we helped him, and we earned more for our living. In a way, we didn't tire our heads with other things, we preoccupied ourselves with growing up, getting educated, learning, and so I think, our

⁵ Low round table for people to gather at communal dinners, sitting on the floor.

food rituals, our way of eating on a *sofra*, had its own beauty, so often we told stories there, shared events, laughed with one another, this has its own beauty.

In secondary school, we had the same luck in Pristina as in Gjakova, in that the school was very close. We had our primary school, and behind that, the Gymnasium. I went there with my sister, and my brothers went to different schools. I remember, now, we were very interested in the achievements of the children in different lessons or subjects, and how they went!? I remember that when the school year ended my mother would ask “Did you pass, or didn’t you?” she didn’t know much else about what we were learning, if we had coursework, or other obligations, no, no, just “Did you pass?” and I would tell her “Yes, I passed at the top of my class”, and she would say “Well done, good for you.”

Nowadays, there is a lot of stress, then, we were not so burdened. I think that this specifically helped us live healthier lives, being less bothered by politics. I, for example - maybe it is not customary to mention it - had many friends, some Catholic, some Muslim, because for us it did not matter what religion one had, like now for instance, this religion or that religion, it is a problem. I don’t know, then we were not concerned with religion, nationalities, we played as children as that is what we were, not burdened with these problems that they have now. I empathise with today’s youth and children who are concerned with problems of religion, nationality, and it bothers me. They need to have some independence, a freedom of their own.

Maybe when in those early years I began to mature, to grow, and I began to be a bit more self-aware, I adjusted to the Gymnasium, and we were luckily a great generation of girls and also boys in the context of an excellent school. But always, when I talk about this, I relate it slightly to my profession, because there were many subjects that I loved, math, art, physics, philosophy, yet, even in the Gymnasium.... my wish was to recite and dance. At the time we began to perform small plays.

So the years are 1960-1961-1962, a new theatre for children had opened, and even though there was the National Theatre, we didn’t follow it. We did go later on, but it was not until I had graduated from high school that I saw my first show there (sighs) because at the time we had begun to put on shows at school, and it was there that I began to find myself, because truthfully, I saw my wishes, my dreams and my future there. Often girls dream. We have beautiful dreams, maybe more so than boys, when we are teenagers we dream of maybe becoming ballerinas, singers, actresses, you know, we like to swim in our dreams a little.

Mimoza Paçuku: Can you tell us of a specific event which defines your childhood?

Safete Rogova: As I said, I have many fond memories, there are many instances, many nice reminiscences, and I remember this one as well. We didn’t have a washing machine, but there was a river close to where we lived, the river Erenik.⁶ My mother would collect a large basket of clothes and us behind her, just like in the movies, went to wash the clothes on a big washboard in the river Erenik. We, the

⁶ A tributary of the White Drin, it runs by Gjakova.

sisters, were young, and my mother did the washing, she scrubbed them with soap, and we didn't know at the time that the river had lots of water. Interestingly, the rivers have dried up because of global warming, but at the time that river was very deep. There was an instance, when we sisters were washing together with our mother, that our three year old little brother, in a split second, fell and the water took him, we were terrified, none of us knew how to swim, not my mother, nor we sisters who were just a bit older, and I remember a village-boy jumped into the water from a hill {moves her hands}, he jumped from a great height, and luckily saved my little brother from death. That day, there was a great celebration in my family, a huge joy, the boy was reborn. Now he is in America with his family, and other times when my mother wanted to go and wash clothes we said "No, we won't go to that place, we will move our washing spot," (giggles) because we were terrified by what had happened to us.

I remember another time, we used to bake bread at home, but in a wood oven because we didn't have electric ones then, and if we wanted to make other meals my mother would have to put them in clay pots to cook in the wood-oven. Once, when I had gone to retrieve the clay pot from the oven, it fell on me and I was burnt badly. You know, all of us children had some tough experiences (giggles) which we all survived thank God, because even I could have burnt myself and be left scarred but I survived as well. Every child had a similar memory when we were younger in Gjakova.

In the years 1955 and 1956, my maternal uncle and his family relocated to Pristina. We only had one uncle, one grandpa and one grandma, because my paternal grandparents had died very early on and my father never met them, and we never met our grandfather and grandmother either, so the single joy we had was visiting our uncle in Gjakova, to see my grandma, my grandpa, and we suffered from their absence, so we begged my father to go to Pristina, because we couldn't live without our grandma and grandpa. Maybe that too influenced my father's decision to move to Pristina. Maybe it was our luck, to be educated, although the journey to Pristina was also very interesting, because in those days there was no bus, nor car, and one would have to go to Peja in the morning, wait for the train for three or four hours at the station, get on the train, and be on it all day "rranga, rranga"/"Choo choo"/ {imitates train} until we arrived in Pristina. So, we left Gjakova in the morning and arrived in Pristina by dinner time. That journey was a very special one, later I travelled to Germany, France, Turkey, America, and no trip was as interesting as that journey on the train (giggles). It stopped in villages, picked up passengers, continued, stopped, let them out. A person could easily walk as fast as the train it was that slow, I don't know why. Maybe because the engine was not powerful enough, I don't know why. But, it went very slowly. Our biggest delight was that our uncle had come to wait for us at the train station in Pristina with a horse and carriage. We had no taxi then, and that carriage took us from here - the train station, home {shows distance with her hands} in about two hours. You know, transport was very slow then, but it developed quickly, roads were built, and they paved the road from Gjakova-Peja, Gjakova-Pristina. All things considered, the beauty of that journey stayed in my youth (smiles).

I said that moving to Pristina was a huge joy for us, not just because we were close to our grandparents and uncle, but also because fortunately we were accepted into good school, us sisters, and brothers, and we graduated from these schools. All nine of us finished school, and then we dispersed everywhere, the girls married in different cities, and the family began to shrink, there were only a few of us left....I always

like to remember those moments in my career, and why I stood out among the others? Why the others, if they studied literature, or philosophy, my older brother who became a craftsman, each with their different profiles, but why me? My talent and desire were to pursue acting, sometimes I ask myself "Why acting? What made me love it so much?"

As I mentioned, even in school I was praised in every subject for the way I recited, I would prepare a good monologue, even at home I would always make theatrical plays, I created them when we ate, when we laughed, and when we hung out. Luckily all us sisters knew how to sing well, and my older brother played the violin. My house had its own little orchestra, two of my sisters did not play the guitar, but the tambourine, and our tambourine could be heard throughout the whole neighborhood (smiles).

I guess perhaps I am a kind of initiator, an organizer, because I created something, I made up small plays at home, in school. Time after time I think why did I go to school? And time after time I think, why did I pick acting, why didn't I study medicine, for example? I liked medicine and the other subjects in the Gymnasium, they were the good days, the days of youth. In these days there were no cafes or bars in Pristina, the only recreational activity was found in the *Korzo*, a long and wide road that still exists today, where we strolled. We, young women in the Gymnasium, dressed up to go to the *Korzo* and look at a boy, someone we liked, we had sympathy for. However, we were under strict discipline in the family, my friends and I, and my dad would say go out until 18:30, or 19:00, or 20:00, and then we had to return, because the door would be locked. Sometimes it happened that we would stay out until 5 minutes to 20:00, so we would take our shoes off and run to get home as quickly as we could, because at 8pm, the door would close. The rules were very strict, and I sometimes asked, why...? Maybe it shouldn't have been that way, maybe it was because there were such large families with many children, that sort of discipline was needed. In a family with seven, eight, nine children, each of them free to go out, you know, if you were to go out late at night, your parents could not keep track of you, control their own children. The discipline was necessary to keep the order and to keep children under the control of their parents.

In fourth grade, Kris Berisha, an actor and a director, came to the school and said "I need a girl to play the role of Nita," and all eyes turned to me. They said, "This is Nita." However, to tell the truth, my parents didn't want me to act in a play, I was grown up, I was a young woman, but my parents always insisted "We need a doctor in the house, you are smart, you should study medicine so that we have a doctor in the house." I promised that I would study medicine and that I would return as a doctor. When I graduated I played "Nita" and it was a fabulous play. I was scared to call my parents and tell them that I had acted in this play, I had promised I would study medicine.

And at that time there was no university in Pristina, we had to go to Belgrade to study medicine, and I went without fail to Belgrade with one of my friends to apply for medical school. On the way there, I said to my friend "I'm coming, but my mind isn't with medicine, I'm going back, I'm only coming to make my parents happy." In that same year, 1966-67, the first drama school opened in Pristina, it wasn't an academy but an advanced school for acting, I prepared to go there, and returned to pass the admission exam. My girlfriend, who is now a successful doctor in America, Zana Dobroshi, said to me "I would love to be with you during our studies, but if you wish to go back, stay a night here and then return to Pristina." We were tired. But still, we got to Belgrade by train, with my friend Zana, we both loved music. There was

an opera house there and she had connections that could get us tickets. She said, "We can reserve our tickets and go," I said "We're not dressed to go," and she replied, "Come on, we are going, we are about to start our studies so were going," and the minute we sat down, we fell asleep (smiles) because we were tired from the journey. We had left our bags somewhere and it was only until the final big applause that we woke up, "What's going on?" (laughs), I mean, it was one of those youthful adventures that one experience but that can also trick you.

I returned to Pristina and my parents asked me, "How did your admission exam go?," I told them "it was very hard," and in fact it was very hard, it was in the Serbo-Croat language that we had learnt in school, but further studying was required. I told them "I had not prepared enough," they said, "Well, what do you want to study?" And I couldn't tell them in the beginning, I just couldn't for a long time. I applied [to acting school], went to auditions, and I was accepted, the year was 1966 and only two or three girls applied for acting school. At that time girls were not allowed to go to the theatre, and I had been accepted but I was afraid to tell my parents that I neither wanted to study medicine nor biology, but that I wanted to be an actress.

After a while, I mean after I was accepted, and luckily they had secured scholarships for us because we were such few students, there were ten of us, and I took the forms to fill out, I carefully told my mother, I am going to acting school, and bless her, it's not that she didn't want me to go, but she was scared of my father. He made many of the decisions in my house, about our professions, our clothes, our education, our schooling, and it was hard for my mother to communicate with him that, "Our daughter," I was the third, "Wants to be an actress." Maybe it was hard because of the prejudices of the time, the years were 1966, 1967, and there were negative judgments about the theatre then, about actors, they were considered second hand, especially the women. So naturally they did not want me to have that experience but it was up to my mother's skills in this case to persuade my father, "Because we can't ignore her wishes to go to the theatre and become an actress."

For a while, I felt perhaps a coldness in the relationship with my father, I didn't know how to act, maybe I should have been closer to him, should have talked to him more, maybe because he was a craftsman and he didn't know nor understand what this profession meant, that profession, and it created a distance for some months, you know, I finished the advanced school but in order to fulfill my parents wishes I attended and completed a degree in Philology, Language and Literature, to show that I could finish another university as well. Luckily I finished them both, and even though there were such few girls in the theatre, I was accepted straight away.

There was only another girl, there was the theatre staff but only two students. For a long time I had it easy, from the first days, because I had very good roles in the beginning, but it was not easy with my circle of my friends because of the prejudices. In fact, at that time I felt a coldness even with my girlfriends from the Gymnasium, who had gone to study law, economics and medicine and it was as if they considered my profession useless, you know, even the educated had their prejudices.

For a long time I lived inside myself, inside my roles, with my partners and with the collective I was part of. It wasn't easy for me at all, there was a struggle even within my family, because my family members, my

social circle, would say, “Why did the girl go into acting?” But it didn’t last long. With time, things changed. When they saw me in a play, and saw that I was very good, then they began to accept it as the norm, my work as an actress.

However, I considered the theatre my second home, my second family, and there my dreams of becoming somebody, becoming a name, achieving something, playing in big shows, were born. Luckily we had good directors who were from Slovenia, in former Yugoslavia, Croatia and Novi-Sad, we didn’t have any Albanian directors, there was only Muharrem Qena,⁷ and it is a fact that we learned a lot from them, we learned a new school from those directors, but we also did big plays. Sometimes when I talk with the youth that are in the theatre now, they have done plays, and I say, “We cannot change the plays which we worked on, they were so big and so good.” We travelled across former Yugoslavia with those plays, attending different festivals, and we always returned with an award, we always returned with high recognitions particularly because we loved our profession and we sacrificed for it. It was a sacrifice for me to leave medicine and take up acting. Our sacrifice was bigger than [the ones made] in different professions, such as economics and law and other fields, because all our energy and love was in acting.

After some time, I became a mother. I gave birth to Iliriana, whom I brought up in the theatre. At the time, for example, we did not have maternity leave, and while I was pregnant I played in “Bloody Wedding.” I specifically played the role of a pregnant woman, and even after birth, our children were nearby, so my girls have it in their veins, their father being a set and costume designer, and their mother an actress, they have art flowing in their veins. Iliriana became a set designer and a famous painter and costume designer and she also works in Top Channel, whereas Alba, who loves drama, now has a different profession, so I think that my childhood dreams... to create my theatre came true. I played hundreds of roles, in the theatre and on television, and I have many many fond memories. And now I’m going to mix it up a bit. I did a sort of small biography of my life in the theatre once. But I have so much to say about the theatre, as it’s a magical profession, there is no other profession with this sort of magic. One can be a lawyer, but the magic that comes with acting is one of a kind. One must appreciate and honor it, because the times have changed, I mean, now you have many students applying for the Drama Academy, but also the prejudices which were around in my time, fifty to fifty-five years ago, have been broken. And the beauty of all this is that I am successful in my profession, and it is not by chance that I have been awarded three medals within three months, the last being the President’s award, and these rewards and medals are of great significance. They do not have material value, but they hold a spiritual one because you have contributed to something, you have given something to this art. And so in this sense you are appreciated and valued.

“The character of the prostitute, of the villager, and of the mother, and many different characters,” I said, “I can play them, but a prostitute would be difficult,” because it wasn’t in my nature, actresses should be able to play anything, but it wasn’t in my nature and I thought that I couldn’t do it. Milqin⁸ said “You are going to do this” and I said “well, I will try, but it will be difficult for me.” It was one of the best plays which

⁷ The late well renowned playwright, director and singer based in Pristina.

⁸ Vladimir Milqin, a theatre director from Macedonia.

was ever performed at the National Theater, “The hill of deep sorrow,” with a magnificent script, a drama by Teki Dervishi.⁹ And I played these first roles, the roles of mothers and villagers, amazingly. When the final role came, the prostitute, I had a partner, Faruk Begolli, and I said “Oh God, how am I going to act this.” We had to drink during this scene in a brothel and there was real wine there. I don’t drink much wine, I don’t drink *raki*,¹⁰ only enough to get tipsy, and in order to act better I said to myself, “Go on, have a glass”....but without knowing what reaction it would have, that glass of wine, and it was a large one, I downed it....and not only did I play the prostitute, I got drunk {plays drunk}. Faruk...oh what a great actor he was! Faruk melted, he said, “Never in my life have I seen you act better!” (smiles). It’s true that I played the part well, I forgot what I was, I forgot everything, and I was feeling like fainting, a little dizzy, I acted, and the outfits were great, a costume was a little tattered but nonetheless it was beautiful, done by Violeta Xhaferi, a famous costume designer. I had long hair, and well, when I was young I looked prettier [smiles], and I remember well the scene, and I remember that Faruk met with me and said, “O *bre*,¹¹ why don’t you play all your roles drunk?” The play went very well, it was beautiful and had a big audience.

We began “Macbeth” with Istref Begolli.¹² I am upset because in every generation there were legends of the theatre who died an untimely death. Istref started “Macbeth” and at one point said, “You, come in front of me” and at that moment I forgot to step out I front of him, he turned and for me. Anyway, we always have slips like this, whether in stage or in life. Maybe among the roles I loved, and I loved a lot of them, it was my first play, “The Good Hero with Many Friends.” It was about the legendary hero Skenderbeg, and I played the part of Mirusha. At one particular point, because Mirusha does not want to fall into the hands of the Ottomans, she commits suicide, and at that moment, I felt that death so much that I nearly fainted when I fell, I didn’t know if I could get up or not. We toured many cities with that play, and they received us very well, in Croatia, Montenegro, in Dibra, you weren’t even born when we were acting {points to the interviewers}. And then later came the roles of mother and later still the roles of grandmother. I remember one time, while I was playing the role of a mother, my girls Ilirijana and Alba were still little, and it was a Japanese text, *Fumikos*, where the burglar came in, attacked the woman and then her savior arrived, and Iliriana was young, so when the burglar jumped from the window onto the stage she shouted “Careful mummy, there is a burglar!” and the whole crowd laughed (smiles).

We had these great moments and these beautiful roles. I love tragic roles, and I am by nature very dramatic, and I live through all the roles which are offered to me. Recently I played in “The Cuckoo’s Grave” in Peja, and “Helter’s Night” in Pristina, both very dramatic roles, very powerful. Many people cried

⁹ Teki Dervishi was born in 1943 in Gjakova was a writer, a publicist and a playwright. He was the editor-in- chief of the newspaper *Bota Sot*.

¹⁰ *Raki* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

¹¹ *Bre*: slang, it expresses strong emotion.

¹² Istref Begolli was a popular Kosovo actor hailing from an artistic family, which included Faruk Bregolli. He died in 2003.

when they left the hall, but I said to them when I met them, I cried as well, if you cried. So I also feel the characters which I play, and maybe because after the war we became more sensitive, not just the actors but everybody became more sensitive because they felt as though they had lived through difficult times.

After the death of Mother Theresa, every year I would recite her poems and teachings and in many places. They actually thought I was Mother Theresa. When I went out dressed like her, people said, "Mother Theresa has arrived." This happened to me in Germany, we were in a town close to Munich, it was the anniversary of her death and there were many Albanians there and I blessed and prayed like Mother Theresa. When it was over, lots of young girls came, and they squeezed my hands, and I said to them. "I am not the real Mother Theresa, I am an actress." So sometimes it happens that you personify a character so well, that it seems you are actually the person whom you are playing.

People believe you, and they wish to believe you. People go to the theatre to see something, to get something that they too have experienced, and if the play pleases them, they leave happy, because they have witnessed something beautiful, and so there is a magic within our profession, and in truth I think it is one of the most beautiful expressions of art.

Mimoza Paçuku: A bit earlier you mentioned that your partner was a set designer, could you tell me how you met?

Safete Rogova: It's interesting with us girls who went into the theatre, I'll start with Melihate Ajeti, on her first play she met Muharrem Qena, and they married after a year (smiles). When Leze Qena came from Prizren, she met Xhevat, and she married him right away and the two of them lasted a while. And then Naxhie Deva, her fiancé was an actor but he was forced to leave Kosovo, and so they separated. I wanted to mention a few couples that arrived in the theatre, lived together and got married.

I too came to the theatre, but you know, on the other hand, the boys I fancied were at the university also because I didn't think that I would find my life partner in the theatre. And in the play for which he created the costumes, "Keep My Secret" - it was a brilliant play - he made my costume beautifully, and I thanked him a hundred times. I thanked him for my outfit and the sets he had made, but I think I thanked him so much and so many times (laughs) that he thought, "This girl is not ok." Anyway (laughs) it was mutual admiration.

So we met in the theatre, and Nuredin worked on the costumes and sets of every play I was in. So our professions linked us and with good luck Iliriana arrived shortly after. I gave birth in '72, and at that time we were working on "The General of the Dead Army." I had two roles in "The General," and I was two-three months pregnant, but not showing. Straight after that play came "Bloody Wedding," and I had a stomach {shows how big her belly was} and my character was also pregnant. Interestingly, there were three pregnant actresses, there was Shirine Morina, who was pregnant and Zana Tafashiku, and having three pregnant actresses was very beautiful (smiles).

Zana gave birth to her son, Sherina to her daughter, and I to mine....Children make your life more beautiful (smiles). I say to these young actresses "Don't get married, have a child," and I think that they are

listening to me, two or three right now are pregnant. I guess it is harder when you have children and you have to act. We used to do lots of tours, now they don't go, back then you would go for a week around former Yugoslavia, around Kosovo. I had to leave little Iliriana alone, but I had a strong mother and my sisters, and then Alba also arrived. I have two girls who are incredible, and I think they have made my life more beautiful. If for example you have a problem in life, and even in the play you don't feel well, if you get upset with your group or with different situations when things go wrong, when you go home you see your daughters, that's the beauty of life.

I think that I am very happy, now I am also a grandmother, and I have also nephews and nieces, but I think that life and its beauty are enriched by children, nephews and nieces.

Unfortunately for Nuredin, we were involved in the activities of the association *Motrat Qiriaz*¹³ in Prizren in '92. It was "Teacher's Day"¹⁴ and we went to acknowledge the 100 year anniversary of the school in Albanian language and he suffered from a big stroke which left him dead on the stage. It was a very sad affair and not because we were partners, or activists, as we worked together in *Motrat Qiriaz*, but it was the speed with which it happened, it did not even last an hour, not even a moment, and he was dead.

Later, many people said to me "what a beautiful death," but I was in deep personal sorrow. After a few years I said, "It is true, it is a beautiful death, it is beautiful for an artist to die on stage." I read somewhere that Moliere, another great artist, also died on stage. So I think to myself, "God willing, I will also die on stage, it is beautiful, as it is written," but it was difficult for me at the time that it happened when we were not together, we were away for an event and he passed away there. But he left his mark on the theater, also with his activism, because he was very active in the reconciliation of the blood feuds, and in the association *Motrat Qiriaz*. He worked just two years, but we continued with my sister Igballe and other activists. But he really left a big mark on the arts.

The women of Has¹⁵ were oppressed, maybe not by their families but by prejudice. Their husbands had mostly worked in the bakeries of Croatia, Slovenia, and the Diaspora, so they were women without husbands, women who raised children, and did not have the courage, for example, if they were sick or their child was sick, they hadn't the courage to go to Prizren to sent the child to the doctor. We worked on this, to free them, to teach the women to go by themselves, take their children and send them to the doctor in Prizren. There were no health centers in Has, just a small one, but fortunately *Nëna Tereza*¹⁶ opened two-three health centers through Has. The fate of those women, but those women recovered, we

¹³ NGO founded by Igballe and Safete Rugova in the 1990s to promote women's and girls' education. It was named after the sisters Qiriaz, who founded the first school for girls in Korça (Albania) in 1892.

¹⁴ Kosovo holiday on March 7.

¹⁵ Rural, mountainous and traditionalist region in the north east of Kosovo, at the border with Albania.

¹⁶ Mother Theresa, the self-help organization that during the 1990s, at the height of Milošević's repression, supported the parallel society of Albanians, expelled from all state institutions and services.

talked constantly with them (smiles).

There was this *Qendra e Gruas*¹⁷ of Sevdije Ahmeti, and there we had gynecologists, pediatricians, all of them were specialized doctors. And we told the women, “If you have gynecological problems come to Pristina to Sevdije’s, here in Sevdije’s *Qendra e Gruas* there is a gynecologist.” “But how can we come alone?” “You have to learn, buy the ticket, ride the bus and come to Pristina” (smiles), but the women of Has, who have that beautiful specific costume,¹⁷ said, “But how are we supposed to come to Pristina with these costumes?” “It is okay, we said, they are your costumes and they are attractive,” and one day when we went to Sevdije’s, we saw three-four women arriving, dressed like people from Has, they were coming from the bus “trak- trak,” {describes unusual walk}, you know, there we saw that they took the courage, and thought for themselves, “Why do we have to be dependent from someone to take someone else, and to beg someone to send us to the doctor, when we can go ourselves?” So women started to be independent, you know, not the girls, we mostly had worked with women. They began to take the children, send them to the doctor in Prizren, go and buy things in Prizren. We were not against their costumes, which are very heavy because they have a board on the back and have ruffles, but we told them “Why you don’t put on dresses? You don’t lose your costumes because they are very beautiful but try to put on dresses.” Then they started to buy dresses ... their costumes are very beautiful because they are traditional costumes but “Save those costumes for weddings, events, and visits, but for work it is more practical to put on dresses.” Women started buying dresses (laughs) in Prizren, time after time, you know, the mentality began to change.

Because their husbands were at work in bakeries, women could not decide themselves to send girls to school because it was necessary to ask their husbands, and they often said “We do not dare because of our husbands.” We began to work with women, “You should decide, you are the mother, you have to decide for their destiny,” and they started slowly to be convinced that they decided for their children. The schools started to fill with girls. There were not many schools but thanks to Flaka Surroi’s projects, she helped in the constructions of two-three schools, I mean she found the donors. The schools were open, we also had eight libraries in the schools of Has. Has started to change, those girls started to recover, to be educated. There were not high schools and again with our initiative, the initiative of *Motrat Qiriazhi*, two high schools opened.

And the joy of those girls, of those women on the day when the high school *Ramë Mana*¹⁸ was opened, a nursing school! In the first year twenty girls were admitted to that school. Today those twenty girls are midwives, some of them also continued their studies in the school of medicine, you know, it is not a long period, but however through that period especially girls and women recovered, started to think about their lives, their future. Unfortunately, in the 1960s and 1970s they used

¹⁷ Has women traditional costume is made of a short white shirt and a white linen full –length dress. Long white briefs serve as underwear, the traditional *pështjellak* (apron in front and back) in the back has a built-in wooden plank. The *jelek* (vest) is enriched with beads, mostly red.

¹⁸ Ramë Manaj, LDK leader and deputy Prime Minister in 2007.

to sell girls in Has,¹⁹ they sold them for money, for twenty thousand euros, for the more beautiful girls the price was thirty thousand euros. Slowly we convinced them, the families, that girls are not for sale, girls are not animals, they are not cows, they should choose their destiny on their own. Slowly that mentality started to fade, they began to be convinced, those men who were abroad. When they got back we worked also with men a lot, especially Igo worked a lot with men.

For example, men and women gathered separately at weddings, and they invited us, Igo and me and all the activists to every wedding. Igo went to one wedding and took the wife of a man by the hand and begun the dance {lifts her hand as if to lead a dance}. When the dance began her husband also stood up, I mean the husband of this woman and continued to dance, and then the women started one by one to stand up and get into the dance (smiles). Then the wedding celebration began, with men and women together, because men and women were usually separated at weddings, you know, the initiative of the activists and the women who work for change was needed. You know, they have to be led by someone to do something good, we started with education, with meeting women to make them go out in the city by themselves, to go to the doctor by themselves, to go by themselves, to be interested.

When the time of giving birth arrived, they did it with a midwife or asked a neighbor to help them, and there were risks associated to births, for example there could have been complications, but there was no doctor and the women could die. Midwives from *Nëna Tereza* and from the health centers checked on pregnant women and assisted them during birth. Slowly Has started to take a new look, beautiful schools were built, a new health center was built, the cultural center was built, many libraries, and the roads begun to be built because the roads were made of stones then and you could fall and break your neck on them.

Once we went with Igo, she had a Renault...5, I think it was red, and while we were driving on the stones, “*danga, danga*,” {imitates the sound made by the car} our car was stuck and then we were tied with a rope to a tractor and went from village to village with the tractor in front of us (laughs) and we behind with the Renault 5. The roads were bad and then we started to think about the roads too, but we made the roads also with actions. We made some actions, we went there, at the time Kaqusha Jashari²⁰ was the director of the enterprise for the road constructions. With Kaqusha and many other engineers and donors, many donors from Has who worked abroad contributed a lot, and if earlier we went from village to village in an hour...now we go from village to village in ten minutes, because the roads have been paved. The whole of Has is now paved. When we go sometimes, when they invite us for any celebration, we are so pleased that you can tour Has in two hours, at that time it took us two hours (laughs) to go from village to

¹⁹ This is a reference to “brideprice,” a payment made by the groom to the bride’s family, usually part of an arranged marriage by the parents. It is a traditional custom, fading in contemporary times, but still present in some communities, from the Mediterranean area to Africa, South East Asia and rural China.

²⁰ Leading Kosovo politician from 1986 through 1988, in 1988 President of the League of Communist of Kosovo, was dismissed by Milošević for not accepting the illegally imposed constitutional amendment revoking Kosovo’s autonomy. From 1991 through 2006 Jashari was President of the Social Democratic Party of Kosovo.

village.

The activity of *Motrat Qiriazhi* was concentrated in Has, because there we had major problems with education, women's training and women's independence and there was no road, there was no school. I think that in few years Has took a new look. I am not saying that other regions don't have problems with education, we went to the regions of Kamenica and Shala of Bajgora, everywhere, but however the whole activity of *Motrat Qiriazhi* was in Has. Now, when a new school was built they put up a plaque {shows it with her hands}, "Igballe, Safete Rogova" there in the school. It was very beautiful, it was very touching because we did a lot for Has and that was evidence that the change or all this works and activities that we had done took a nice and good direction.

Today we can say that we distributed many scholarships from donors, many women who had no trade became hairdressers, seamstresses. You know, now they earn a living with a sewing machine. Many women opened a hairdresser shop, you know, also women are independent because they can work and educate their children. The main beauty of all this is, when I go to the university and ask them "Where are you from?" "From Has" "From where?" "Has", wow wow wow, Hasijan, a lot of Hasijan students, very beautiful, very (smiles). I went one day to buy bread in the bakery near the theatre Dodona, I was very happy because bakeries are usually Hasijan, and I asked the shopgirl, "Do you work with your uncle?", she said "I work with my uncle and I am a student." I told her, "I am so glad", she said "Yes you are glad, but I am here thanks to your work, I come here as a student thanks to you" and I said "Oooh," I took the bread (laughs) and hugged the bread and then I said, "Oh God, is it possible that from our work we see such an outcome."

I mean, we saw that these girls who did not go to school, went to high school and they succeeded in becoming students and many completed their studies in medicine, economics, a lot of different fields, I think that we did it, but not just us, all the activists, I mention Marta, Dile, Merita, Xheva, a lot, and a lot of Hasijan women who worked day and night with us because we alone couldn't had done what we did without them.

Motrat Qiriazhi has also given a big help to Krusha e Vogël²¹ during the war, not only Safete and Igo but Marta and Dile. When the war started and the paramilitaries killed a hundred and forty men in Krusha e Vogël and only women and children were left, Dila, Marta, Merita and also Marta's brothers went with a truck, passed the Drini river and sent them to Albania, rescuing children and women. When the war was over, we created the center *Motrat Qiriazhi* in Krusha e Vogël, and we worked with those women who were traumatized by the war, had lost husbands and children. We worked with those women, you know, although we were not experts, we were not psychologists, but nevertheless we helped them with our experience. We were not psychologists or doctors, but we were close to those women. We had to be close

²¹ The massacre of Krusha e Vogel of March 26, 1999 is documented in many news reports but also in the

Human Rights Watch report, *Under Orders* (2001). All the men of the village were killed, many of their bodies never to be found.

to those women not, for example, to go to the doctor or...we needed to be close. We spend a lot of time with those women, we stayed near to them, cried with them, laughed with them, until they recovered a little, and until they got used [to the routine], you know, because it was very difficult for them. There were families that lost a husband, a son, a nephew, two-three members of the family, five-six members, it wasn't easy for them but those activists of *Motrat Qiriazhi* stood continuously by those women. When they came to protest in Pristina, for thirteen days we slept on the stairs of the theater, also Igo and I, and many activists, and Sevdije and other women of *Qendra* stayed there. We drank water, we drank coffee together, we slept with those women, I think we helped them in their rehabilitation because they needed human contact, not medications, not drugs, but human contact.

I think that we did a lot also for the women of Krushë e Vogël as *Motrat Qiriazhi*...*Motrat Qiriazhi*, oh what a great name! When Igo went to meet the nephew of the Qiriazhi in Tirana, Skender Dako - now he is dead, he was ninety and something years old - he said "You gave your association the name *Motrat Qiriazhi*, but you honored that name very much." And today when I remember that great man I think that we really have honored that name, I'm sorry...We worked with lot of emotions, I said it about art too, if you don't love that profession, if you don't work in the activities with love and I think that the association that worked mostly with love is *Motrat Qiriazhi*. We never profited from it, if we ever received an honorarium, we distributed it among women and girls, or we gave it to any student who needed it to buy something, or as a gift for someone's birthday. I consider that we haven't materially benefited from *Motrat Qiriazhi* and I'm proud of it, I'm proud of our activities and that we honored the name of those first teachers and the name of the Qiriazhi's nephew Skender Dakos who left us the *amanet*,²² "You will honor the name of the Qiriazhi sisters," (smiles) I think we honored that name.

When the war started, we were with the women of Drenica in Shipol, the women of Prekaz and the children of Prekaz in the camps of Macedonia, well they all lived in houses, we lived in the camps with women from all over Kosovo, and not just with women of...

Mimoza Paçuku: During the war of Kosovo, or the conflict in Macedonia...?!

Safete Rogova: No, no, the war of Kosovo, you know, with the women of Drenica in Shipol. We had a school there for six months, we did theater, we sang, we organized concerts, [competitions] for who recited better. Life pushes you to do everything even though I say we did not have...maybe we needed a psychologist, we became psychologists ourselves, we took out the anger and the grief of children. Then the children along with the women in the camps of Macedonia started to calm down, then the women wanted to take photos, "Come on, let's take a photo," in that sadness they had that in mind too.

Mimoza Paçuku: Can you tell us something about the activities of your organization *Motrat Qiriazhi* during the war?

Safete Rogova: The war changed our program. We had been working for the education of girls, for

²² *Amanet* is literally the last will, but in the Albanian oral tradition it has a sacred value.

opening schools, libraries, now the times were different and we had to help people, especially women and children. Since the war started in Drenica,²³ many women and children were relocated in Shipol, Mitrovica, and since we had our branch of *Motrat Qiriazi* also in Mitrovica, where Sanija Voca was active, we went there, met with those women who were relocated in Shipol and we decided to be with them until they moved from there. But that lasted almost six months and we stayed there for six months, with the women and children of Drenica, in Shipol.

Seeing that the war was continuing and the children were left without school, we started to take pencils and notebooks so that children would not forget how to write or read, especially those in first grade. We became teachers and doctors and actresses, what did we not become there in Shipol! Igo and Sanija worked with women, while I worked a lot with children, maybe because I love children a lot and I wanted to work with them. Those children were very cute and charming, we started with a program, "Come on, who can recite better?" I remember that time of my childhood in school, "Who recites better, who writes better." We bought them books, notebooks, and I began different programs, while Igo together with Sanija worked with women because women played a big part, bore a big burden - whether their husbands were dead, or they had left their husbands behind in the war, you know, those women were alone, they were thinking about their husbands left in the war and those who weren't living anymore. We placed them in houses, fortunately at that time every Albanian family opened their doors to Drenica and other war areas, so people opened the new houses, with new furniture and placed women there.

Once we also provided food, hygienic things, you know, through donors. Sanija found some donors in Mitrovica who provided food and other things. For six months we spent more time in Mitrovica than in Pristina to be near those women and children. However, the war was getting closer and closer every day and spread all over Kosovo and many people began to leave Kosovo and went to Macedonia, Albania, wherever they could go (coughs). Our family went to Macedonia with our children and women.

But Igo stayed at the border to help children and women. I was a bit more tired, I had seen a lot of things, I was crushed. I went to Skopje after three days, Igo had alerted all media, foreign, international media, "Here a big war is happening, people are isolated in Bllace"²⁴ and they don't allow them to pass the Macedonian border, people are hungry for bread."

Most of them did not even have bread and by the activity of Macedonian activists, they began to receive bread. Igo there showed so much courage. We started our way to Macedonia, women, children and families, while Igo stayed at the border area. She appealed to all international media, "Here a big war is

²³ This reference is to the beginning of the open conflict between Serbian security forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army, in March 1998, in the rural region of Drenica, 35 kilometers north of the capital.

²⁴ Bllace is the border crossing between Kosovo and Macedonia where thousands of refugees were stuck for a few days on March 1999, at the beginning of the NATO intervention, unable to either moved into Macedonia or reenter Kosovo.

happening, a terrible war, people are dying at the border. The Macedonians don't allow them to pass." She proved herself there as a very brave heroine, because she was not even afraid of the police, of anything. She wanted to inform public opinion that those people should cross the border to be rescued. Fortunately after one week, because we could have stayed there longer, they opened the border, and people started to cross in high numbers. They had established many camps, fortunately many families in Macedonia accepted us, my family for example was at Reçica in Tetova.

We, activists not just from *Motrat Qiriaz*, but of Sevdije's *Qendra, Aureola*, many non governmental organizations, did not stay home. We went to the camps and worked there for three months, in that heat, the temperature was 40°C. We were with those women, we helped them as we could, in fact *Kvinna till Kvinna* of Sweden helped us a lot, because the activists themselves came, as Sherstin and Rachel, and many other activists who came from Sweden, to be together with us, to help us handle all those activities. The camps were big, the camp of Cegrana had forty thousand people, and all the camps had too many refugees.

We worked in those camps, not with the grief that came with tears, but those people began to smile, and very slowly to recover. Luckily, we had many donors. We were with those women, with those children, to share that pain, they had left behind their houses burning, people killed, and were in the camps. Many families didn't know where their family members were. We worked with those women a lot, we worked with those girls, we worked with children also. We started to think...about how to do that, because every day we received bad news, that this or that had been killed, the house was burned, and to make those women laugh we hired an actor, a comedian, and we dressed him up with a costume, and in the middle of the camp we organized a comic show. Many times they criticized us, "We didn't come here to laugh, it is war now" but we said to them, "Should we die here because many are dying there, let's make those people laugh," and we started to sing, to laugh, some hairdressers begun to arrange women's hair, to give them haircuts. Those camps were activated, but not with the sorrow that came with tears, those people started to laugh and recover.

Our luck is that many donors supported us, they came in person, also many activist women came from Europe, from America, and helped us because we were crushed too, because we too, as activists, were tired and sad, and we too needed someone to talk to us, someone to make us laugh. It was those other international women who helped us as activists. For three months we toured all the camps in Macedonia, every day we were with men, with children, we did not have anything to give them, maybe we gave a pen to someone, a book, some cotton to the women in need of hygienic pads, things like that, but it was important to be close to them, that was important. It is always important during wars that people stay close, "You don't need bread when you are hungry, you forget that you have to eat, you need a warm word from a human being," that was our motto.

To be with women, we moved from camp to camp {moves her hands}, and those women remembered our faces (smiles) and said "Igo came, Safete came, Sevdije came..." However, we got tired, because when we went to a camp, for example, a family realized that their boy had been killed, and there was pain there, we were needed there to comfort them, by saying "God gave you health, God's will you have

others,” but we took their pain inside, the pain of those women, inside, when the work was done and we were suppose to sleep, we wanted to explode.

We had a big jeep, and in the jeep all the activists began to sing, we sung loudly, we wanted to have some relief because we were filled with pain, sorrow, sadness, we were filled and we needed to yell, to sing until we got home. Often somebody who saw us on the road said, “These are not okay, what happened to them,” but that was our need for relief because we were refugees too. But we, as refugees, had to help the other refugees who were in the camp.

During the three months in the camps I think that we did a great job, all activists, not just *Motrat Qiriaz*, but all activists. Our only duty was to visit those families, to be with those people, to be with those children. There were a lot of children who had lost their mother, father, or maybe the whole family, those children needed people too, they needed someone to talk to them, they needed to be close to them. I think that we tried to fulfill that duty in the camps, to be close to them and three months maybe weren't much, but however it seemed that the war lasted a long time, then luckily the peace agreement was made and we returned to Kosovo.

The Swedish women begged us, the activists, “Come to Sweden and rest a little,” we said to them “No because we have returned to Kosovo, we will return to work now.” We came back, I think that it was such a painful period, but also a period when we did something, we acted and we were very human, we gave so much, we gave love, energy. We gave everything so that those women would feel better. It is normal that we could not achieve all that, however we shared that great pain for the loss of all those people, or because their houses had been burned.

Maybe it was a short period of the war, of our activities during the war, but we did a lot also in other centers where there was war. Igo was very brave (smiles), while she was taking drugs from village to village and the police stopped her, she said, “I am going there to work with children and women.” She always hid the drugs, because drugs were prohibited, I think that she was very brave in this action. I was more sensitive, a little more scared, she never cared, she went to the most difficult war areas to provide drugs. I remember her with Flaka Surroi and few other brave women like (smiles) Sevdije, Flora, I should mention them, all those activists that did something during the war, there are many of them who did a lot. She went to war areas where she was in danger many times, she went to translate for the journalists of *Newsweek*.

A few times she was in danger of being killed but the great God saved her. So, she was brave, I'm not very brave in war (smiles) but she [her daughter Iliriana] and Igo {raises her voice and stretches her arms} “Oh my God, yes the great God saved them.” I'm telling you, Iliriana was in danger of being killed three times, because she went with *Newsweek* to war areas where there was fighting. The paramilitaries broke one of the *Newsweek's* jeep tires, and they had to stop.

They could have killed them, together with the journalists, but the great God saved them. Igo was in the war, *ku ku*,²⁵ (sighs) she is very brave, if the paramilitaries stopped her and told her “*Gdje ideš*?”²⁶ she did

²⁵ Colloquial, to express sad disbelief

not answered "*Idem*,"²⁷ {lowers her voice} but, "*Idem amo*"²⁸ {raises her voice} in a louder voice, ah! She was not afraid to say, "I am going here" {lowers her voice}. She shouted louder than they did and they said, "She is not ok." (laughs). She is very brave, very..... We sisters have different characters, if I saw paramilitaries I would die standing {shrugs}, but Iliriana was like Igo, she was very brave. God, don't let war ever happen anywhere. War is the most terrible thing. Life is full of turmoil {moves her hands}, there are good and bad things, but war is horror. When we saw those women from Drenica, one told us, "They killed my son in front of my feet and I took the other one to safety," she didn't stay with that son whom they killed, but took the

other one to save him {acts as if she is taking something}. She was a miracle...she wanted to save a life, they killed her son, and when they told us such stories we were speechless. Especially the women of Drenica, they all saw their men there, they saw them murdered. And she took a child, {acts as if she is taking her son} to save her child, she climbed a hill to go to the other side to be safe and arrive where she was.... God please don't try us again, the war is very bad.

On the 12th of June the Presidency awarded thirty decorations, medals, and titles to personalities of the wartime, or in the field of arts, culture. Among them I was also nominated, as activist but also for my forty years in the theater. I prepared a very good speech because the other nominees were Sadete Mekuli, a gynecologist; Drita Begraca, the first Albanian teacher; Nekibe Kelmendi, a lawyer; and Melihate Ajeti (smiles), actress, and I wanted to say, "The teacher Drita Begraca has taught us the first letters; when our children were born, we gave birth with Sadete Mekuli; Nekibe Kelmendi taught us about law; while I learned the first steps in scene from Milihate Ajeti" (smiles). I had organized the text beautifully like a poem, and when we went to take those medals, the President said, "Welcome," {puts her hands in front} I wanted to read the text..."Welcome," and "Good day," {puts her hands in front} but the text, {puts her hands above her breast}, the text, I carry the text with me now (laughs). Maybe on some other occasion for sure I will read it, we had very little time, the agenda of the President was very short. I was sad that I could not say those beautiful words for all the women who have done so much for Kosovo, for all women in different fields, but I was not allowed, the agenda was very short (laughs).

Mimoza Paçuku: Can you tell us which were your dreams, and whether any of them were realized?

Safete Rogova: Like every young person I had dreams, dreams about career, family, or anything else are always born in one's youth. I was prepared as a child, and as a young woman I always dreamed to be an actress, and I thought I will be a great actress like Meryl Streep (smiles)...but I am a small actress from Kosovo. I tried during my youth, through education, to realize that dream, maybe I had too many obstacles, and I had to do many sacrifices to realize it. However, I succeeded in getting into the theater, becoming an actress, and playing for several years.

²⁶ In Serbian, "Where are you going?"

²⁷ In Serbian, "I am going."

²⁸ In Serbian, "I am going there."

I think that as a woman one dreams of having children, and what they are going to look like, and I fortunately have two flowers (smiles): Iliriana and Alba. My dream was not realized just by having them, my dream became greater when they formed their personalities and that is very beautiful, when one sees one's children grow up. Iliriana is in Tirana, in the capital city of Albania, where she is a set designer, a costumes designer, and a singer, she is very realized, and we are very pleased. Now I have forgotten about myself, I delight in her success, and as a woman, because to achieve all this as a woman is not easy in Kosovo, and when a Kosovar goes to Albania it is even more difficult. She overcame all obstacles (smiles), and I realized that my children have gone beyond my dreams, it is very beautiful when your child passes you and you see that she has achieved more.

It is very important for me that all my siblings are alive. I am the fourth, we are all alive, my brother is older, my sister even older, the younger sisters...we are all alive, we are all realized, they all have their profession, brothers and sisters, and have their families. And this is a dream that every family has, it is the desire of all parents because parents give you life, educate you, and want to see you become better than themselves. Our parents have been dead from many years by now, I am very pleased that the dream of my parents, who wanted to educate their children, they came to Pristina to educate us, to have us succeed, is realized, and the dream of my parents is that we are all alive, we are all healthy, we are fine, (smiles) we are realized, and I'm saying that the most intimate dreams of our family were realized.

Also the dream of my career to become an actress, Kosovo is really little, and you are an actress in a narrow setting, that has been a miracle. I don't know whether Bekim²⁹ ever thought that he would become a world known actor, he had some dreams but he thought that he was just an actor of Kosovo and his dream was realized and he achieved to be a world-known actor. But other actors like Istref Begolli, Faruk Begolli, were big for Kosovo. I am not as big as them, but I am realized and very pleased (smiles).

My daughters prepared me a surprise at Shtrojera, I don't know if you know that place, the location where *Rilindja* was. My daughters Iliriana and Alba enlarged some photos of my performances, they enlarged my photos this much {stretches arms to show the size}, to fill all the place, they made a documentary for me, how I grew up...Iliriana made it in Tirana. They called all my friends, my friends from school, my colleagues, all those people, they called journalists. They told me that day "Mom, dress beautifully," I ask them "Why?" They told me "Go please, go to the hairdresser and wear make up," and I went, we have a hairdresser here who did my hair, I wore makeup, I looked good, and asked them, "Where are we going?" they told me "We are going to drink coffee at Shtrojera. Let's go and drink coffee at Shtrojera." When I went inside, when I opened the door all of them were there {shows a line of people with her hands}, Shtrojera was full of friends and photos and I was very surprised (smiles). What is happening to me? I love Meryl Streep so much, and I said, "I am Meryl Streep" (laughs). When I got in there and sat on a sofa, wow, wow {expresses surprise with gestures}, it was really beautiful, it was a dream which I never thought of.

²⁹ Bekim Fehmiu, theatre and film actor born in Kosovo and the first Eastern European actor to work in Hollywood during the Cold War. He died in 2010.

That happened that night. And I felt great that night, I felt taller that night, I felt very proud, it was very beautiful. I will never forget that surprise. All of my friends, loved ones, friends from school, all of them were there. They congratulated me with flowers. Sometimes even if Kosovo is a small place, it has very beautiful surprises, great successes, beautiful things. Maybe you never think, "Could these things happen in Kosovo"? but yes that happened in Kosovo. The television showed it a little, but everything was recorded, from my arrival, that they had arranged in such a way, it was like going to Cannes. It was a dream that I never thought would become true. It was on the day I retired, when I turned sixty. They organized it, my daughters Iliriana and Alba. It was a very beautiful surprise, even if I don't succeed in being known outside of Kosovo and going out to Europe. Aleksander Moisiu was an Albanian actor and he was well known in Europe. He spoke German, he knew Albanian very little, he was a well known actor eighty years ago...but Bekim, I can't speak about Bekim nor Ivan Mula. It is a miracle when our people arrive to shine in this world, and become stars. Alas, we shine here in our small Kosovo (laughs).