

INTERVIEW WITH MARTA PREKPALAJ

Has, Prizren | Date: June 5, 2013
Kohëzgjatja: 105 minuta

Present:

1. Marta Prekpalaj (Speaker)
2. Anita Prapashtica (Interviewer)
3. Nicole Fransworth (Interviewer)
4. Jung Chao, Donjetë Berisha (Camera)

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.

Anita Prapashtica: Tell me about your childhood.

Marta Prekpalaj: Yes, I would first say that I was born on May 10, 1967. I am the second child. The first child was my big brother, Luz. I was the second child, and then I had and I have two other brothers, which means that I have three brothers. I have been told that when I was born the mentality was such that you should not rejoice for giving birth to girls, but they were very happy about me, especially my father, now deceased, who even then was the one and only person whom I really loved and I was much attached to, the only person in my whole life and I don't have him anymore. We were four children in the village of Breg Drini in Has,¹ born of course when conditions were not that good, but it was very important that there was warmth in the family. My family was comprised of father, mother, brothers and grandma or "loke"² as I used to call her. I was very close to *loke* and I hung out a lot with her, because my mother gave birth to my brother and then another brother after me, and I was attached to her. She was a fine woman, a very capable woman, who had a very difficult life. Naturally, I grew up with her stories, but also with her teaching, because she was the grandmother, *loke*, dad's mother. She was a woman, in those days, who has reared orphans as it was the case after the war, and of course we got a lot from her, especially in education.

But also the other grandmother from my mother's side, she too was *loke*, a very good woman and I loved her, and she loved me and taught me good things, important ones such as helping people. My childhood here in the village was good. We lived near the river and the most beautiful moments of my life as a child, the best games we played during the summer by the river Drini e Bardhe, and of course in those periods we did not have a worry in the world. In those days we mostly played during the summer and of course when we began to grow up we also began to help the family. There was work to be done in the village. We, for example, remember the time when my mother harvested wheat with her hands and we went to her with grandmother and brought her fresh water from the village. Bringing her water and finish the job was sheer happiness, a great feeling.

¹¹ Rural, mountainous, and traditionalist region in the northeast of Kosovo, near the border with Albania.

² Endearing term used to address older women.

Later, gradually, when I turned seven, I began elementary school. That was a little difficult for us because we lived very far from the school. How shall I say, for the first classes we went to another village, Zyme. We had to walk four kilometers each way, about eight kilometers a day to go across the mountain. However, the desire, the will to go to school was very great at that time, not only for me, but also for all the boys and girls of my generation. We learned a lot. That was also a beautiful part of my life: learning. Fate was that I had a teacher in fourth grade that was a very important moment that maybe influenced the fact that later I became a teacher who was my idol. In fact this is my profession. My childhood was not bad but not good either, no, but in general good, but it is important to say that it was [good] because of the love in my family. I had parents and a grandmother, two grandmothers, and I have spent a lot of time with them and also with my two younger brothers. There was love and they watched over me. It was good, my childhood.

Later in my childhood, there were many good and sad moments. Among such moments there was when the teacher passed away. That was for me a very difficult moment, I was in third grade. She died, it was a difficult moment. We had other difficult moments as children, different problems. We were hurt, and we had problems, but I don't remember that they were very big. Because I was the only girl in the house and I was inclined to help a lot my mother with her housework, help mother and of course also father, how shall I say, we were always a little preoccupied with the work to be done in the village, however, I have always, for the whole time, been very interested and passionate about books.

Luckily there, in the school of Zyme, at that time, there was a library and there I began to read books and from them were born the love and desire for school. But I must say about school, because later there was a moment after I finished elementary school, when the mentality of my *rreth*,³ began to pose obstacles to my going to school,

because local girls did not go to school. After completing elementary school, I spent two years in the middle school there in Zyme. There were a lot of problems to continue [school], but later the problem was to continue high school. Relatives said that I should not go to school, that girls had to stay home, be engaged to marry, work on the bride's trousseau, and so on. I was persistent, but also very important, in this story of my life that has to do with school, there was my father's support, my late father, who had left school. It is not that my mother did not want me to go to school, but my mother had a great influence on the relatives and said that one girl should not go alone, also because she did not know what I did, or what happened in school. From that circle of relatives, from my generations, only three girls continued their schooling. Because of that it was difficult at the time to persuade my relatives to let me go to school, but thanks to my persistence and the support of my father, later also of my big brother, even though a bit later, I managed to continue high school.

I would tell two short stories from my childhood life, one which I don't remember but I have been told, it is when my life was at risk. When I was only a three month old baby, and my mother had gone to my father's paternal uncle for a wedding, they left me wrapped in white clothes in the bride's room, and what

³ This is the social circle, includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

happened, when they brought all the bride's dowry clothes, they covered me all over, and it was a very difficult moment, because as the bride came in, she saw that something was wrong, she heard something there. At that time a bride did not have the right to talk because the moment is very sensitive, but she saw that there was really something, that that thing was alive and in danger, she spoke up and so they found a baby and they pulled me out of there and I was almost suffocated and they saved my life, they gave me my life back.

Also, there is a very important moment in second grade, we were kids and at that time, dinar was the currency in circulation. The fivedinar bill was big and *loke*, my late grandmother, told me to get it and buy some stuff at the store there when I went to school. I was going around the table to take the money, and just so that my younger brother wouldn't get it and put it in his mouth, I instead hid it in my mouth. By the time we stood up from the table after eating, I had forgotten about the coin and it got stuck in my throat and it was a big problem until they brought me to the doctor and he pulled it away. How shall I say, I have these two moments in mind when my life was in danger, but here I am...The first time, the bride of the son of my father's paternal uncle saved me. The second time, my paternal uncle's wife saved me from almost guaranteed death. How shall I say, these were difficult moments as a child, but also, a difficult moment was when my father's mother, *loke*, passed away. She was a person I truly loved and I was very attached to her, very. That was a difficult moment. This is all I had to share about moments of my childhood that were important.

Anita Prapashtica: Tell us about your professional career.

Marta Prekpalaj: My biggest desire as a child, I have told you, was to be a teacher, but once I finished the first two years of high school in Zyme so as to continue in the city of Prizren, I had difficulties convincing them to enroll me. At that time in our region there was a great need for nurses. In some way I decided, because I also had a friend there, to go to nursing school, as I was an excellent student and I fulfilled the criteria. I finished then the nursing school in Prizren, and from the first year of the school I began helping people, because people here traveled for kilometers just for an injection. As soon as I finished the practice of the first year, I engaged fully and from there I started to work with people of my *rreth*, to help as much as I was able to – to give first aid, injections, or medicines to women or children, as needed.

How shall I say, from the year 1986 when I started until I finished school, I was helping people little by little. As soon as I finished nursing school, my desire, my dream was to become a teacher...I decided and registered at the pedagogical school Gjakova to become a teacher, with a major in biologychemistry. During 198819891990, I finished school, so I graduated as I knew that the Has region had a great need for professionals, for everything, not only nurses, but also teachers. So I was immediately given the opportunity to get employed, right after graduation in 1990, as a teacher in the school of Kushnin in Has. But during the years of 19891990 it was the time when in Kosovo the movement started, the demonstrations to resist Milošević oppression started. But 1989 was very important for me, when a

branch of the association *Motrat Qiriazit*⁴ for the Eradication of Illiteracy opened in the village of Rumaje in Has. At that time, this association was organized all over Kosovo and I was graduating when they invited me to represent my village, Breg Drini, in that huge gathering that was held in Rumaje of Has, at the time a great number of people came together. This was the first activity and they appointed me to take care of my village, although the number of girls in it was very low. However, the duties were countless and in that big gathering of the *Motrat Qiriazit* association, a great number of activists from all over Kosovo were present. Safete Rogova was there, and later we continued working together, but that was the first encounter. Since I faced many difficulties in finishing school and throughout my schooling and I had noticed that many girls had difficulties too, I had promised to myself that once I finished school I would help somehow. However, I didn't know where to start from, but with the arrival of this association, one of the first established in Kosovo, and one of the first working on such issues, I felt really good and I was given the opportunity to be involved first hand in the activities. So at that time, with all of the activists of Has, of the villages of Has, we started a major campaign for the eradication of illiteracy. How shall I say, we found and registered all those women and girls who didn't know how to read and write, although there were not many of them, but, anyways, this was the first activity that we organized, and so I started to get more involved. Meanwhile, as I said, I was employed as a teacher and I participated in the numerous activities in the region of Has. Along with *Motrat Qiriazit*, at that time was operating also the Women's Forum, with which we organized an activity where we all helped and I was part of it. I covered the health and education sector, because at that time, the independent education system in Kosovo was established and schools worked independently with our own programs, and so the first organized events in the region of Has began to happen. Until 1994 we worked in different activities, including first aid courses.

By the end of 1994, beside my work as teacher of course, I began to work a lot as an activist because the association *Motrat Qiriazit* was reorganized. And with this reorganization and also with the return of Igballe Rogova from Albania, we refocused the work in the region of Has. I was connected a little with Safete, with the organizing committee of the village from the beginning. And we started many activities, one after the other. At first with *Motrat Qiriazit* we started the first meetings with women. They were informal. We gathered women and discussed issues with them and always together we heard women's needs and requests. The first problem raised in the meetings was the lack of schooling for girls. We began many activities. We didn't only work with women, slowly we included men too, to convince them to send their daughters to school. We didn't work just to send the girls to school, we began also to work with them. In 1995, we started many courses here in Has. We started with the sewing course; there were training courses for the people that the association brought together; Igo was one of the activists, always side by side with us, Rachel too. We had English courses with her, when at that time, here in this region and maybe in Kosovo, there was none. Then we established computer courses. Also, we supported and started initiatives to open high schools. The first action and project plan ever made in Has was the opening of the high school in Gjonaj, where we as an association

⁴ NGO founded by Igballe and Safete Rugova in the 1990s to promote women's and girls' education. It was named after the sisters Qiriazit, who founded the first school for girls in Korça (Albania) in 1892

had our center there, the women's center *Motrat Qiriaz* of Gjonaj. We started with the community, with activists working together and succeeded not only in opening the high school through the Ministry of Education, but people collected the funds for the building. Knowing that the majority of Hasians work as bakers and they work outside of Kosovo, we activists all together organized a big campaign to build the school in Gjonaj, which was something impossible during the 1990s, to open a school in that situation. And because the region is big, we discussed with the activists the opening of a new school in Romajë, a parallel high school, in the field of nursing. This was a big project in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the association *Motrat Qiriaz* and the community. Meanwhile we worked together again and succeeded in realizing another project with the association *Nënë Tereza*.⁵ But the technical organization and the means were brought by us as *Motrat Qiriaz*, naturally with the help of the people. The initiative was ours. When I say this, it is understood that we were a big group, we were not alone, a group of girls working together in *Motrat Qiriaz*.

Meanwhile, it is important that in 1995, along with other activities we were doing, it is an event, an important moment for me...when for the first time in the region of Has and maybe the municipality of Prizren, I applied for a significant job position such as school principal, and I got it. The idea and support came from my colleagues and friends from the association, from Safete. She was persistent, Igballe, everybody, [said] "You can be a principal." At first, I thought it to be impossible. I was wondering, "How can I be a principal?" Of course it was a heavy responsibility, but it was a strong message for the community and the *rreth*, that a woman too could lead a school. I was the only one in the region, even in Prizren at the beginning, but later there were two colleagues. This was a challenge too, it was a difficult time in my life, because around six hundred students and thirty workers were under my responsibility, I mean, it was a school with no financial support, no budget, and the villagers tried to help. We know what education means in Kosovo. During our many activities with the association, because of the courses and the organizations, the girls started to go to school in Gjonaj. In Romajë, the number started raising, and the association cooperated greatly with all the associations outside Kosovo, with the women's movement of exYugoslavia, Women In Black,⁶ many others, and the Center of Women in Novi Sad. Of course *Motrat Qiriaz* gained support, we did much more projects. We also started opening libraries, and it was an important moment for our community, the initiative of the association when we opened libraries in the region of Has.

It was not easy, but together we managed to equip some libraries, in Gjonaj, Kushnin, Mazrek of Has, it is these libraries that we established before the war even in Romajë of Has, in Luginë, which later were burned. All of our work was directly concerned with education, teaching and the emancipation in general of this rural region. The first results were obvious right away. Our successes within the community were measurable. The number one priority was the development of girls' education, which before had

⁵ The selfhelp organization named after Mother Theresa that during the 1990s, at the height of Milošević's repression, supported the parallel society of Albanians, expelled from all state institutions and services.

⁶ Belgradebased women's movement that on 9th October 1991 began a public nonviolent protest against the war, the Serbian regime's policy, nationalism, militarism and all forms of hatred, discrimination and violence.

been impossible, unattainable. It was difficult to work here in our region, because Has was at the border, and from time to time we had problems. I had difficulties with the police, I was interrogated many times by the inspectorate of that time about our activities. In 1976,⁷ I intended to represent KosovoAlbania. I was part of a conference of the

Balkans region, on behalf of *Motrat Qiriaz*, but this also had repercussions, because we were not supposed to go to Albania. Then, I had problems, because I was the school principal and I was questioned about the curriculum. Also, in the framework of the activities organized by the association, we invited colleagues from abroad, from America, the United Kingdom, and various European countries, but even that, the fact that they would come, was a problem. We had our activities for education. We had nothing to do with politics, but we faced obstacles. The regime wanted to put everything under control, wanted to direct what was going on. Of course, there was a huge organization of these activities. We even organized competitions here in Has. We also had our newspaper *Të Jesh Grua* [To be a woman], later, the community had the newspaper *Etja* [Thirst], how shall I say, the activists were engaged in all spheres, and because of this we were considered an obstacle by the regime, "Because you are doing all these activities and reaching all these goals, fulfilling all these tasks!" (Smiles).

It is very interesting that, during the first activities that we started with women in the region of Has, we did not have many difficulties with men. The Hasian men agreed. Perhaps in the beginning there looked at our activity suspiciously, I am not saying that there was not that. However, we have been constantly on the move and have worked with the community, for example, we held activities more often in schools. We worked with school principals, teachers, village leaders. And they welcomed everyone, especially the activists. People were excited and ready for change, for as long as someone took the initiative to get organized. I remember every time we had to move from place to place, we walked. For every activity that took place, we travelled together as activists with whatever we could: horse carriages, tractors etc. I remember a moment when together with Safete we went to the farthest village of Has, Guruzhup, with a tractor, and she would ask, "Are we there yet?" I would tell her, "Just a little bit more." Meanwhile, we had a long drive ahead, but it was a real pleasure when you got there and were welcomed by a huge crowd of women.

Those moments were really...we went through different periods, and when people saw us around, because we did not go only to women's meetings, we went to weddings for example, and other informal gatherings, and in any other event that took place there. We were always with them. However, when we were with them, we did not go there to tell them, we came here to teach you. No, "We are with you and we have come only to listen to what you have to say, and we will support you!" Safete and Igballë were highly experienced activists who always knew the way, they found the key. Maybe other activists said that in many other places there were problems with men, we did not have any, we did not have problems going to meetings, or attending courses. Many times we had so many requests we could not satisfy them all, because the region of Has is large. Has has many villages, it is a very large area.

However, it is very important to remember our travel to different places. As activists, no matter how we

⁷ This happened in 1996.

travelled, whether by tractor or bus, we worked. If we met a father or a woman on the bus, we talked with them all the time, we discussed the question of emancipation, and there was a case when we persuaded a father there on the bus. We worked to persuade a father about the importance of school. We had a case in Gjonaj of Has, when together with Safete and Igballë we stayed for days with this family to persuade some brother. He said "Yes" but next day said "No" to sending his sister to school. I remember very well, our stay there for a few days, our friendship with the family, also Igo and Safete, the success after some days, that also this was a very specific case. That girl, that sister, had seven brothers. They did not let her go to school and we stayed there to discuss, to give other examples, to show that going to school is good. For example, we were a group of activists who had finished school and were an example, and it was a very important moment when at the end, after some days, we managed to convince them. Even those many whom we did not convince greeted us well, however we had difficulties in our work.

There have been cases when parents came by themselves with their daughters. They had heard that we worked "so that girls go to school." I remember a case, in Kushin. I was in school, of course working, when this father comes with his daughter, he says, "Principal, here is my daughter." The girl's name was Barie. "Here is Barie, do what you wish with her, send her to school, do as you wish. She is yours!" And I froze. It was a moment...(smiles) how did we say before, he had not agreed and then he did after some time, it was really a very emotional moment. The girl continued her schooling and today she works as a nurse. There are numerous cases, many emotions that we have experienced, very emotional cases. It was really important that we focused on something, we kept doing it and in the end we did it. We never quit, say, even quit once. I'm telling you that there have also been cases when people approached us by themselves, they asked [for support].

I also remember that a very important moment was the first meeting of *Motrat Qiriazit* which took place in Romajë. We established the branch, the organization back in 1989. Sometime during the 90s, that was a really touching moment, when a woman forgave the blood of her husband, because we had the movement of the forgiveness of blood,⁸ and of course we too helped as much as we could. However, when the Committee of Reconciliation visited that woman, she didn't accept to forgive the blood, but she did that day in the meeting of *Motrat Qiriazit*, which was a large meeting. She forgave the blood, it was a historical moment when she forgave her husband's blood during a demonstration of women of the association *Motrat Qiriazit* in Romajë. It is a case...then, along with these activities I mentioned regarding health courses, the education about personal needs and health, women doctors from all around also came to help. We started helping and teaching women about first aid, which later, during the war, was good to know. However, even to learn well how to administer first aid, we needed means, so we improvised and came together with the community, some villages had small clinics and hid the equipment stored there. Besides the *Nënë Tereza* clinic here at Breg Drini, we also had some other secret places that helped in some specific cases, also because it was very dangerous because of the

⁸ In 1990 a mass movement for the forgiveness of blood feuds (*pajtimi i gjakut*), was launched among the Albanian population of Kosovo. It was initiated by a group of students, former political prisoners, who approached folklore scholar Anton Çetta and others seniors figures in academia to lead the process. The movement reconciled thousands of cases, and it became a movement for national unity.

regime. It was very dangerous for us, because when I was interrogated, how shall I say, they asked me about these things. Why? I was lucky that I was spared because it was risky for me and the activity.

I remember a lot of history...there was the opening of two schools. I absolutely need to go back once again to all those people, the men and women of Gjonaj, when we opened the high school, the Gymnasium. There was the minister Xhevat Ahmeti, who gave us much help, because it was not easy to open schools, and there was the majority of the people of Has. They had welcomed the event. Later there was also the opening of our center with our activities which was the main center in Gjonaj, the women's center of *Motrat Qiriazhi*. There was a room there where we held meetings, courses, the library. But we didn't ignore the cultural life, and there was a cultural life that we offered the community. We were lucky that we had Safete Rogova, the artist. Back then, beside all the other activities she did, she also realized a radio drama for the association. Later we published a book by a writer from Has, Margit Markaj. We supported her, and her book with the story about a girl's difficulties to go to school, where she at last did go. Later, Ms. Safete and other artists made it as a play and recorded it in a cassette, we used it in our activities and loaned it to women who used it with other women. It was motivational for young girls to hear that radio play. They were encouraged to continue school. It was an important project that helped us a lot, it was simple but important, especially because we didn't have a proper television at that time. We had a lot of activities with the school. We helped and collaborated with the schools, included the folklore of Has, our traditional clothes, we did special programs on school's day, teacher's day, and all the activities we could develop. We also had sports activities, here in Has, the most popular sport was and still is volleyball. It is a sport played by many girls, boys too, but mainly girls. Seeing that there was interest, with a small organization, no teeshirt, nothing. We organized girls tournaments in the context of Has, which was something miraculous. The support of parents who came to see their daughters play volleyballs was very important.

Along with the numerous activities that we organized as *Motrat Qiriazhi* here in Has, we cooperated with other organizations that were being established in other cities in Kosovo. The most important thing is that we, as an organization, had a very good regional cooperation. *Motrat Qiriazhi* established a good reputation among the organizations in the countries of exYugoslavia, they regularly attended meetings and cooperated. Of course, we cooperated on project ideas because we saw the war in Bosnia and its consequences, and *Motrat Qiriazhi* and we, as activists, spoke up as we could against what was done, what happened in Bosnia. Then, in 1995, 1996, 1997 until the eve of the great war here in Kosovo, we were always in touch with the women organizations in the exYugoslavian region, in this case with their headquarters in Belgrade. I took part in many conferences held in Novi Sad, Ternshovac. There were various meetings of regional and international women, with Women in Black, and different women from different places in exYugoslavia, not only from Serbia, but all from exYugoslavia, such as Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia. We had a good cooperation and besides that, it was a good experience for me, because I had the chance to meet various activists from all over the world who worked for women's rights, there were powerful feminists whom I had the honor and the pleasure to meet, naturally I had the chance to meet and know them and that was empowering and motivating for my future work. Whenever I came back from those different meetings and conferences, when I came back here, I felt the will and desire to work even more, because there were many models of powerful women who had made changes in their countries, just like we could, and my friends and I could bring forth change

here in Kosovo, concretely here in the region of Has, because it was not easy to make changes, how shall I say, to make life

better, as life was pretty hard here in Has.

This region, as I said earlier, was reliant mainly on immigration. Men migrated and women stayed home. Women took care of the household and were obliged to do the work in the fields as well, because there was no man in the house, they had to rear children, cook and work in the fields. How shall I say, the life of women was pretty hard here in Has, besides that, at the time, there were no roads and there was no water. This was one of the Has women's problems, to get water with a wooden bucket. We carried water, I did it myself from when I was a child until later. We carried water to live and to clean. They were difficult moments, difficult living conditions, but women managed to survive. There were very beautiful stories, also published in our newspapers *Te Jesh Grua* and *Etja*. We were engaged also into writing in the newspaper. It was not easy to be a woman here in Has in those periods, at that time, however, women here have been really very strong, very powerful. Such was also my mother, who reared us at that time, but also harvested, did the very hard work in the fields, and beside that, she had to wear the beautiful traditional clothes, which were not easy to wear while working, let alone to wear it all the time.

However, if we compared the life of women now and then, we would see huge differences, there are very great differences. I must say, we divide them in periods, how shall I say, the period of '90'99 was the period when the changes started, but the men from Has were abroad. They saw the changes, and later they supported us in making changes, they supported the education and so on. Then, another period arrived, the war period. Has bordered with Albania, and we know that the movement of the Kosovo Liberation Army operated here, so it was more difficult to continue our activity. By the end of 1998, the end of 1998/1999, we had less activities as an organization. As we saw that women and men from other regions began to mobilize, we focused on a *lagje*⁹ of Prizren called Arbana, exDushanova. We started our activities with women who had relocated from other regions, when in 1998 the fightings had begun. It was an important part of the activities of *Motrat Qiriazi* in the years '98'99, shortly before the great war, what we did in Arbana, this neighborhood of Prizren. And there we stayed with women, we trained them in first aid courses. We also organized help for women to assist those displaced families that relocated to less dangerous areas. This was also a pretty difficult period, especially for the activists who came, Igballë, Safete, who found it hard to come to Has, also many other activists who came to help us, because there were police checkpoints. The borders were closed and there were many controls. There was [a checkpoint] later also at the entrance of Prizren, you know how difficult it was to pass through, especially when bringing books and other materials. It was very difficult. The most difficult moment was when *Motrat Qiriazi* found a way to supply the center of *Nënë Tereza* here in Breg Drini, and while traveling with the minivan full of supplies, a

contingent held us in Arbana and there were problems, the nurse...and we hardly passed through.

⁹ *Lagje* in this context means just neighborhood, but more specifically, in the traditional tribal organization of northern rural Albanians, it refers to a group of families sharing a common ancestor. From now on, it will be translated as neighborhood.

Fortunately, that day we did not have medicines which we used to bring for the wounded, but we had other supplies, this was the hardest time for free movement here in the region. Our activists also worked in Mitrovica, let's not forget that. It was important, our group with our activist, Sanije Voca, who was there in '98. She started her activities there with many difficulties, we also visited her from time to time, but there were those times which were very difficult. So, we are close to when the great war begins, just before that and all our activities, the connection with people, and those drugs and medicines that we had here in *Nënë Tereza*, and some small work in that period was useful.

Perhaps we continue with that moment, that period, the war situation, it is a very important moment. Significant. The Has region is a borderland, so a great number of police forces circulated there, hoping to catch our army as they crossed, so we were in great danger. The war in Kosovo started with the NATO bombings, the greatest war started, which was welcomed here because we thought it will pass quickly, we wouldn't have problems. But unfortunately, in the third day of the bombings the troubles and various massacres began, and what happened in Krusha e Vogel¹⁰ is a very important

event. It was a Friday morning when we woke up and from here, from this area of the village, we saw across the Drini there {shows the river}, where the river Drini is, and across there is Krusha e Vogel, in the morning, we saw houses burning. But we didn't know what was going on there, what was happening to the village, and sometime around noon, twelve o'clock, we saw a group of people who had started to walk from the village and go towards the Drini there {shows the river}. And we from our position were observing carefully, there was my brother with binoculars, the device to see closer, and we saw those women, those people, that crowd of women and children and they all had gone there {shows the river}, they had gathered before the Drini. The side of the village burned, we did not know what to do, we couldn't communicate directly and finally I said to my brother that those women and children had absolutely no place to go, we must go and pick them up. Since the Drini was very large, and the level had risen, it was hard to cross it with no bridge, so with my brother we decided to get the tractor, we still own it, it is bigger, taller, we started to go towards the Drini and to cross it and see what was going on there. It was a very difficult moment when I went across with the tractor, when I saw all those women and children crying, screaming, upset, terrified, they did not know where their husbands were, and it was hard. But in that moment I felt a strength I don't know where it came from to help those people, and this is how I loaded the women and children in the trailer of the tractor, my brother escorted them to the river and the daughter of my paternal uncle with the others stayed on this side, took them into houses and sheltered them. We had to cross the Drini a few more times with the tractor because they were many, some 300-400 people, women and children, so many. It was a very tough moment for us too, they were yelling and crying, they didn't know what had happened to them and what was going on with their people, and within a period of time we managed to bring them all here {shows the house}, into our homes in the village to shelter them. Later we understood that all those men who were detained, 120 men, were massacred in Krusha e Vogel, they were murdered, and we stayed four nights and five days with those women and children in

¹⁰ 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.

our homes. I had to give them medicines to calm them down because they were very traumatized, we had two wounded, who when crossing to the houses of the village had been hit by some pieces of grenade thrown at them...we gave them sedatives, we healed those wounds. We practically provided the food because there were lots of people, the village took it upon itself, others arrived, it was not easy, people were afraid, and frankly, it was me who took the initiative because it was risky to bring all those people here because the army could come here, and we had no defense, but the mountain was close, we couldn't just leave them there because the police had told them to go to the Drini, and didn't allow them to go to Prizren or Gjakova and it was and is a very heavy situation, and difficult for me personally. Emotionally, it was a very difficult moment, and also for the family, to see all those women weep, those children pleading their loved ones, it was hard to calm them down, but we succeeded with a good organization, we treated them for the four nights and five days they stayed in the village. We sheltered them all and after five days they [Serbian army] gave us the order to leave the village, to go to Albania. And along with those women and children we took the road to the border with Albania.

As a child, I had many childish moments, I remember when we used to wake up early in the morning to get ready for school, and of course while we were doing that, mother quickly prepared some food, cooked tiny cakes, they were made from dough, she made them from bread dough, baked them fast and of course she put a piece of cheese inside, and so we were ready to go to school. It is very important to mention that the road leading to school was a mountain road, and we walked together, all the friends, we reviewed our lessons, we walked all that road with great will, we used the time to learn new poems or we sang, or reviewed the lessons, imagine walking four kilometers until we saw the school! Then there are other beautiful moments as children when we celebrated the holidays, they were special days to us, we got new clothes, and had different and better food than usual. The village had and still has its own beauty even though the conditions were very hard, there were good moments. As a child, besides attending school, I used to take care of the cattle, I remember guarding the sheep, we owned sheep and it was a special joy to take the sheep and a tiny bag that my mother had prepared with freshly baked bread and cheese, and go to our beautiful meadows and fields and corral the sheep. We had beautiful moments while we guarded the sheep and played games, we didn't have dolls or television, and other devices, so we kept improvising different games and enjoyed a nice day.

Nicole Farnsworth: Have you ever had any problems when you were little, or did you cause any?

Marta Prekpalaj: No, I didn't have any quarrels, I wasn't a problematic child, no, I can't remember any problem, maybe if we ask my mother, no, I can't remember .

But I would like to remember in particular some good memories about my grandmother *loke*, this is how I called my father's mother, she was a typical woman from Has who had had some rough years, but she was really a smart woman, she taught me everything, starting from basic things to checking our homework, even though she wasn't really good at reading and writing because she taught herself, she was an autodidact, she learned to cook, to sew clothes because back then we used to sew them, we couldn't buy new ones. She had a special way of sewing and tailoring clothes. Also, she always told stories they had experienced, she advised and educated me, but the overall great lesson I had from her was that she was a great humanitarian, she helped people. When people from the village needed anything, she was always the one saying that we should help each other, so she was a very dear and

smart person to me. Even though she didn't go to school, she had taught herself to write and read, she was an autodidact, and loved school, and it pains me because she died while I was in elementary school, and if she had been there to see me, it would have been amazing because I know she loved school.

Leaving Kosovo was something that regarded the whole population. And I, together with my people from my village and the people from Krusha e Vogel and this crowd, as we were sent to Albania, we passed a part of Prizren at the border and Vermica, then Kukes and I spent there, in Kukes, one night. It was a very difficult moment there, there was a large number of people with tractors, with different things, it was really very difficult. Even though maybe there we felt a little bit safer, it was difficult because many people who were there look for their loved ones, had been separated from them, there were all sorts of scenes. [this passages is repeated below].

Like the majority of the population of Kosova that was forcibly expelled, we too had to leave, almost the entire region of Has was emptied in one day. We, together with the women and children of Krusha e Vogel with the tractors with which we arrived, were told to leave our homes. Naturally those moments too were not easy and we passed a part of Vermica to Prizren and we arrived in Kukes and there was a scene there, a very difficult moment, it was difficult because there were families that had been separated and people looked for each other, there was a large number of people who did not know what to do.

However, the organization created there [in the refugee camps] began to spread us everywhere in Albania. We were fortunate to go to Durres, because we had relatives in Croatia and maybe it would not have been possible, we didn't know how long the war would last, but those people who gave us a lift with their vehicle took us to a very comfortable place as we had lots of kids, because my family at that moment, my brothers had all small kids and with my paternal uncle we had around ten, ranging from five six month to six seven eight year olds, we also had old people. So it was a problem but luckily we were sent to a camp near a church in Durres, a place where we were sheltered.

In the beginning, the camp where I went the first day had a few residents and immediately there my paternal uncle's daughter and I, both activists, couldn't stay with our hands folded and got involved immediately in the center where they registered refugees and where people worked, so we got in touch with some activists of German associations. There was a league of German churches, ASB, which worked there with Caritas, and I introduced myself as an activist who worked on this and that. They welcomed us and immediately we began to work with the newcomers, we took the people from where they came to the cities where they were sheltered. We began to expand the camp where we worked through Caritas and the church, they brought more tents and the camp grew, and naturally I saw it necessary to work there directly in the camp. It was a very difficult moment to work with women, I had to run all day up and down, and in the evening they were still waiting for me, every evening we were doing activities, because their trauma was hard to overcome.

I have to mention one specific case that is a story very...a woman from Drenica, Shkurte Gashi, who had arrived pregnant with two children and her husband had been killed on the road to Gjakova, he had been stopped, and she managed to come to the camp with the tide of refugees. That woman was not...she didn't speak for two weeks, Caritas had arranged many psychologists but none of them

managed to make her talk. I too, though I don't know the work of psychologists, visited her slowly at least three times a day, I brought her food and talked to the children, and didn't ask any question because I saw that she had a way to tell me not to ask question, just stayed with her. After two weeks, that woman started talking to me, only to me, and the other psychologists who worked there said, "What did you do, what is your power?" Naturally, I was devoted to her and stayed close to her, how I worked with them? I hugged them, but did not ask questions to avoid provocations. So, it was this feeling, a power that, how shall I say, connected me with my work with women, and my experience that lasted for years. I succeeded, how shall I say, in activating that woman, in calming her and rehabilitating her, because she wanted...later she had thought of aborting her child, of not living anymore because she couldn't imagine life without her husband and those small children.

During our twomonthstay as refugees, I was active in that camp, helping people and reconnecting them to their families. I went to Tirana once a week, through the press we could find people, I helped as I could. From the moment that the war started here, when I brought the women and children of Krusha e Vogel, until the moment when I returned I don't think I've had more than fourfive hours of sleep per night. How shall I say, it was a fulltime activity, all night and day nonstop, with a will I don't know where it came from, but I had the desire to help as many people as possible, to be close to them, to those women and children who were traumatized.

Immediately after we returned from Albania as refugees, naturally the association of *Motrat Qiriaz* met the activists who had been scattered all over the place. Safete and Igballë had been in Macedonia, Sanije a little bit in Montenegro and of course in Albania and we reunited and naturally started working immediately and that work was naturally very intense. We had many activities as an association of that region where we had been before, Has, but also in all other parts. I made a request that they approved to continue to work with the women of Krusha e Vogel, because before the war we had not worked with them, only during the war we did. We expanded our activities even to Krusha e Vogel. It was a period of emergency, when the association had a lot of work and a lot of projects. We had planned many projects, in the first place to help these women. It was not easy, maybe not because of lack of funds, but because they were many, very sad, very traumatized women. It was difficult for anyone to work, to want to work, because they came from other villages, however it was very difficult. Since I had been very close to them even during the war, we immediately opened the women's center in Krusha e Vogel and started our activities for the rehabilitation of women, also providing aid through other organizations we collaborated with. We even brought numerous donors there, I cannot even count them, they did not know where to begin from.

Naturally, women's activities began. Firstly, we visited them at homes, because they didn't want to go out, they couldn't come to terms with the fact that they had lost their loved ones. Then, gradually, with the center, we began activities for each age group, for girls and women, but also older women whom we did not want to leave aside. For instance, we engaged the older women with handmade craftworks, which among other activities we managed to sell abroad. This served as a way to forget their sorrow, to spend time while also earning a little something. We started with the first projects, different forprofit courses, with the women of Krusha, widows who did not have a husband. One group asked for tailoring courses, which all of them completed and they continue to work today and earn something and support

their families. We also brought sewing machines and other various materials. Sometimes, we also organized collective work at the center. For example, we sewed pajamas, uniforms and curtains for the hospital, together with Kinderberg and other associations with which we cooperated. Then, a group of women and young girls requested informatics courses, I mean, they began with computers, and English courses. We also organized a culinary course in Krusha and in some other villages of Has, where women wanted to learn better, and in detail, how to cook.

But one of the biggest and most important projects for Krusha, that in the beginning people did not believe we could do it, was the driving course for women, how shall I say, the right to drive cars. When we first applied for the project, at first donors believed that it was a luxury or something, but we convinced them by proving that those women here needed to drive both tractors and cars. They need to do this to meet their family needs. So, about fifty women of Krusha e Vogel and Krusha e Madhe¹¹ got their driver license. Even today they use them. In Krusha, we had to think about implementing projects that were sustainable for women and would last to support their families. Later, we also provided scholarships for the children of Krusha. Through various donors,

Motrat Qiriazi provided scholarships so that children wouldn't quit school. At the center, we organized different cultural activities and there we began gradually with children because women sometimes backed off. We then organized different programs, activities, we brought different actors. We also organized different healthrelated courses and had doctors coming, who performed checkups. For about threefour years *Motrat Qiriazi*, in cooperation with other local donors, provided women with a doctor once a week. Women were provided with free checkups, and there was a great number of activities, we gave huge support to the women for as long as the association existed. But, besides the work, the activities and the projects, in the period immediately after the war we had to face another problem with the women of Krusha e Vogel. We organized protests, the protests of Krusha e Vogel's women about their missing relatives are wellknown, from Prizren to Pristina. Even today, it is not known where their remains are. It was not easy to organize these protests, to provide them with transportation buses, to take them to Pristina, to face them in Prizren. But of course, thanks to the good internal organization of the association and the profound commitment of Igballë, together, we succeeded to satisfy the women's request to be with them even during the protests, and among all the things they needed there was the feeling that they were not alone and that someone supported them to go on with life. We tried with all our means to be as present as possible and give them financial and emotional support. Although nowadays we don't have activities, I am still in touch with them, so I do all I can not to be disconnected from them. We also organized exchange visits with other women from all over Kosovo. We visited Prekaz, Drenica, Reçak, so that the women could talk to each other, cry over their sorrow and their common problems. These activities were very much welcomed by them and were important for them, and although for us it was a bit overwhelming, fatiguing, and engaging, we never felt tired.

Then there was a project that does not exist anymore, it worked only for three years; it was our initiative,

¹¹ More than ninety men were killed in the massacre of Krusha e Madhe on March 27, 1999. This massacre is documented in the Human Rights Watch report, *Under Orders*, 2001.

for women to secure a factory job from the Germans, who came up with the funding. We offered that possibility, but later there were some problems and it could not continue. It worked just for three years, with our possibilities, then we secure some farming jobs thanks a cooperation with the UNHCR [United Nations High Commission for Refugees]. Even today there are still different activities of other associations that benefited many women at that time, many projects in Krusha e Vogel.

After the war, not just Krusha e Vogel, Has too, remained marginalized. We had cases in Luginishtë too, we have women and young orphans there too. In Luginishtë, also in many other villages, we reopened the libraries that were burnt during the war. And we reopened them in Gjonaj, Luginishtë, Romajë, but most importantly we reopened a center for children together with the association in Luginishtë and together with ASB from Germany. There was a center for children, supplied with all the equipment needed for the orphans to spend the day there with two instructors who were trained by the association *Motrat Qiriazit*. It was a beautiful period, during which the center continued working with little money, something like a preschool or kindergarten that was never there before, and we developed many good activities for children. How shall I say, we tried to support all age groups, to help them.

Now, it is more important to mention one activity and one action which were important for Has. Earlier, when I was talking, I mentioned that all the roads in Has were unpaved, they were dusty, too difficult to pass. There were very few means of transport, only one bus in all Has. We went there with tractors, cars, walking, and people were connected, the residents, independently from the village, we too were involved personally, especially in that small organization council to realize the biggest project, to pave the road to Has. This road that connected Has with the municipalities of Prizren and Gjakova, was something like 36 km, and the Government of Kosovo had no budget, did not have a budget at all. Of course UNMIK [United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo] was present too, but we lobbied for some months the municipalities of Prizren and Pristina, the Minister of Transportation, together of course with Pristina, where we went and obtained the support of Safete Rogova, who was with us in the delegation, some activists from Has and I, who tried to find ways to pave the road as soon as possible, because there was the problem of people who had started to relocate. There were no living conditions, houses in many villages were burnt, no roads, no water, so we took the initiative together with the villagers, to find resources to start the project. There was a possibility through the Ministry of Transport to secure some funding, so that the road could be asphalted. Thus together with four other activists from Has, we went together to Croatia. We got organized together with all the people working in bakeries and collected 600,000 euro. It was something impossible. Even the donors could not believe that there would be such good will, that people could organize such project and of course collect the funds that we took to the bank. These funds we donated to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Transportation and within a very short time they began to pave the road, the road that completely changed today's life in Has. For its residents, today this region is totally different. We do not have to talk about schooling, the problem with education is solved. Women and men go to school normally, to high schools, university, etc. It is truly a big change, a distinct pleasure when I see these things, all the commitment that we cannot describe. I am together with my friends, I have never been alone.

A really important moment was one during 2006, when we were honored with an award from the Peace Foundation in Geneva, which awards women who have contributed to change in rural places. I have

been lucky to have been among the women from Europe, only three of us, I was the third, the other two from Italy and France. For me that occasion was really important, something that it is difficult to describe. It was very emotional when I understood that naturally the Network, the Women's Network, nominated me, proposed me, as an activist who contributed and brought change. The award presentation was held in Pristina, on an occasion where people from Has were numerous, many from Pristina too, all the representatives, all of my friends, and all of my colleagues and it was a moment when all my work and my involvement were recognized. Although when we worked and during our work as activists, we never thought whether we would be awarded or not, we have done humanitarian work, have volunteered in all fields, helped people. So, to help women, we helped families. In Has we have brought change in all aspects of our society.

Anita Prapashtica: What is your greatest achievement?

Marta Prekpalaj: Our greatest achievement has been the increase of the number of women in schools. This was [our greater achievement], educating the women of Has, today a considerable number. For me, definitely, this has been our biggest success, because I have lived that reality myself earlier, in difficult times, and I fought to get educated. I cannot recall everyone, of course, but in general I consider this to be our biggest success, supporting young women to continue their education, in Has. Girls' schooling has changed the life in this region considerably, the entire region of Has. There have been young women who finished nursing school and that was very important. Today, that generation works and they are all employed in the region's health centers. It is the generation that studied in that school we opened with *Motrat Qiriazë* in Romajë, the nursing school. Women and men studied there, they finished their school there and today they work and operate there. This is an exceptional achievement for me, for my people, for Has. Schooling is progress. Everything is going smoothly. Even the project for the road, that has been something big, has changed the development of this region. Even the support and care of the women of Krusha, for whom I am an important person. Wherever I meet them, wherever I see them, when I meet them, I feel particularly good and happy. All these successes for me have been a great honor and pleasure, I can't think of whether it is destiny to have worked with these two people, two great women, the sisters Safete and Igballe Rogova, who have been my true guides in all this activity that took place. They have been the ones to support me, have provided me with their experience, the commitment to work. Even today I continue with the same goals, because it is important how you operate, but most important with whom you will cooperate. Our association has successfully realized all its goals. I can recall how effective and good the organization we built was, and that gives me happiness, that we had this nice team, that we have been an effective association, that maybe has been a little rare. It is known that good organization and good cooperation succeed. Today, we can see the results, concretely, in Has. That's all.

Anita Prapashtica: Is this far from your expectation of what you planned? How close is it to what you thought it would be?

Marta Prekpalaj: When we started our activity in the 90s, it was not easy at all and we could not even imagine, we knew that it was not going to be easy to attain the liberation of Kosovo, though we thought it would happen faster, but it took a long time. It took almost ten years, in the beginning it was

peaceful resistance, at the end also the armed resistance of the people of the Kosovo Liberation Army, who have contributed, but of course we have helped those people both directly and indirectly. In our region we have secured medicines for our army, we sent them drugs and they took them. Despite this, to tell you the truth, we thought it would turn to be different after liberation, to be better that things actually are now. For example, when I thought how long would it be after the liberation to get to the independence and the organization of the state and the society, it seems a pretty long time. And the establishment of democratic ruling in a society takes time. It is not how we thought it would be. I don't want to say that it was not a success, that we did not get there. However, it was not like we thought of it in the 90s, maybe things have changed not just in Kosovo, but in the world and maybe not everything depends on us alone. It may depend on international factors, that we have here with different organizations, KFOR [NATO Kosovo Force] and UNMIK, and now EULEX [European Union Rule of Law Mission]. These structures maybe have not approached the reality in Kosovo, our society and mentality, as they should have. As activists from time to time, we have opposed these structures. When we did not agree with different activities, we said we did not agree and they should not happen. We spoke up in different fields and different directions. We continue even nowadays, but naturally we must work to empower women and support women's rights, something that we are still doing.

Of course the resistance of women's activists has not stopped and I believe will never stop, it will only maybe get louder. We are witnesses of many activities and organizations that the civil society has raised, in our case the creation of the Women's Network, which includes well organized women's groups which resist according to circumstances, but of course we are planning longterm programs for women. Kosovo women activists are continuously engaged in practically every social issue, and we react every time we think it is necessary. Women have organized and cooperated, for example also with women in decisionmaking. After some time, we began to advocate for the law on equal opportunities, the fight against domestic violence, and in general for the rights of women in Kosovo society, and we still have much work to do. But from time to time resistance will continue according to circumstances, moments, opportunities for the rights and empowerment of women. I believe we are more in number than any time before. It is not small, we are many. We are numerous activists now, we are a great number of organizations that will continue a peaceful resistance for rights. When there has been a need for it, we organized and that has been recognized by public opinion from time to time, in Pristina and other centers of Kosovo, to speak up against injustice, by whomever it has been made, whoever is in government, whether internationals or not, whoever commits injustice against women. We will speak up and will oppose strong resistance according to the moment and the times.

After the war, after we started having our own televisions in Kosovo, how shall I say, because before the war we lacked media, it was a great absence, and fortunately after the war some televisions started work, whether central or local. It was something very important as the public had the opportunity to get many and different information. *Motrat Qiriaz* worked continuously and planned various activities. After the war, a new television was established here in Prizren; it was a local, regional television, covering half of Kosovo, the owner was a man from Has who had returned from abroad to invest in media, it was called Television of Has and later Tv Opinion. I told the association and we discussed with our group, to do some projects with media, because the media are the strongest weapons to communicate with the public. In this case we were more interested in family and women, the female gender, but of course

this program had an impact on the entire family, it was not written only for women. And thus we began to find support for the project, and started airing shows organized by *Motrat Qiriaz* on different themes, where I was honored to host for the entire year.

It is very important that when you are on television the audience sees you, women in this case, and they were live shows, which is also important. They had the right of expression, of asking, of their opinions and whatever they wanted, we selected the topics. For example, before the war we had to go village to village to organize meetings, and health services, whatever it was. Now, through media, we had the opportunity to communicate with a larger number of women of the region, we delivered live our message regarding their rights, their protection, and many other things, but of course also educational topics with experts advice from different fields, such as doctors and psychologists and so on, all based on the demands of the audience. I believe that we appreciated the media very much, realized projects, but also collaborated and still do of course as the Network, as the association, since they are irreplaceable for our opinion and society. Televisions have a large audience, they are still viewed today despite the development of the internet, there is no house or village that doesn't have one. Yet, television, media, have their role because they communicate directly with the audience and give them the opportunity of a variety of information according to their needs.

Earlier on, saying feminism or feminist was maybe not understandable or even taboo, but now I think that our whole society has understood and accepted the meaning of feminism. How shall I say, I was, I am and will be [a feminist], there is no questioning that, there is nothing wrong with fighting for women's rights. There is nothing negative about this subject, it is the right of every individual to develop her own ideas, their opinion on any field they want to focus on, but this is something very normal and not something "No, this is not ok." Maybe, I said earlier, it may have been misunderstood, but now I believe that it is understood and I am proud, I don't deny it and will continue to be, and work as much as possible of course in the direction of human rights, no matter the gender. But in reality a woman has more need, has still more need for support to her safety in our society and others. I think that we have developed positive change in Kosovo in this direction, there is a strong movement of feminist women who do work, we also have men who are feminist, and I don't think this is an issue anymore, and I believe that Kosovo may be one of the countries that leads in activities directed to the success of feminism. Of course we had the support of our friends outside of Kosovo; there are a lot who helped, supported and gave us the experience to empower and continue this movement.

All the work done by women, let's not even talk about what was done before the 90s until the eve of the war, during and after the war, if we look closely, has not paid off. It has not paid off because, believe me, women worked very hard, we cannot describe the work done during wartime when there was a crisis, where women went where men could not. And now, instead of the government, the society, giving them their deserved positions, women still have to fight to take them. I will give some very concrete examples. Women were fighters in the Kosovo Liberation Army, they were heroines who died in the war and I don't know, but have you seen any monument to commemorate them? And there are very few books written about them, only when women wrote for women. How shall I say, I, as an activist who took part in the war, who never stopped [working], day and night, I am not happy because not much is done as it should, and we still have to fight and have our initiatives. The latest...after the election of the President [Atifete Jahjaga], she started to give awards but that is not enough. As concrete example,

many of my fellow activists and I were repeatedly awarded prizes by internationals, we got awards, Igballe and Safete. Just recently *Motrat Qiriaz* was recognized, because *Motrat Qiriaz* is not only Marta who worked in Has with activists, but *Motrat Qiriaz* worked in the entire Kosovo, and it is impossible for me to talk about

everything we did. There is a great amount of work that has been done. There are a lot of activists who worked individually without an association, different groups. I know that this has not yet come to light, that they have not been recognized, it is not known as it should, it has not been acknowledged as it should.

We had to fight to have women represented in Parliament, we have the 30% quota now, we had to have campaigns for empowerment, you know we have done that with the Network through media, to have greater competition for decisionmaking positions. We never had a woman mayor of Pristina. Why not? When we know that there are women who work hard, we have two female ministers and a president, but unfortunately her role is not great enough to have an impact in Kosovo. The Prime Minister is more powerful than the Parliament, but knowing that Kosovo has had previous activists such as Mother Theresa¹² who won the Nobel Prize, we can say that something has been

done, but not enough. But we always are with those who speak up for women, I mean, women's groups, activists speaking up for this cause at the local level as well as the central, speaking up so we can advance, make decisions and be recognized, how shall I say, for her tireless work at that time, before the war but also now after the war.

Anita Prapashtica: What are the dreams about the future that you think have come through?

Marta Prekpalaj: I have many, but I will focus only on two. One is about having a center for women here in Has, where I would continue my work as a sort of counselor, advising and preparing other activists of Has, this I desired to do there. In truth, there is a huge need for such work, I mean, for giving different training so that the work that is left continues and the work does not stop in particular periods. Another wish I have as a woman from Has, is about establishing a professional school in Has, a sort of high school, because there is a need for one of a higher level than the one we have, because there is the need for it, how shall I say, taking into consideration the reforms in education. However, this does not depend on me and on the association. This depends on the government and we have submitted a request. We need to advocate to have a professional high school here in Has for women, which would continue the future work for the economic development of Has. These are two ideas of mine for the work of the association I have founded, Visionary Woman of the 21st Century. We need to get involved, have a staff that will continue with further activities. How shall I say, this is it. There is also other stuff, but I will stop here.

Anita Prapashtica: What are the other ideas?

Marta Prekpalaj: We'll see. We have plans, how shall I say, to continue with different activities even in

¹² The reference is to the selfhelp organization *Nënë Tereza*, not to Mother Theresa of Calcutta, an Albanian, who was beatified in 2003.

other regions where we have not been, because there are some regions where we think there are only few activities. Here, in the region of Prizren, there are some areas, villages, while I have been more concentrated in rural areas. I mean, there is an area called Ana e Vrrinit here in the surrounding of Prizren, where not much has been done. A little work is also needed in Opoja. Something has began, some colleagues have already started to help a little, as much as they can. Thank you for realizing this (smiles), for choosing me for this project. I wish you success! I thank the Kosovo Women's Network, a lot! Igballe and you, Nicole. Thanks to everybody!

Nicole Farnsworth: May I ask something else? When you were a little girl what were your dreams? What did you want to be?

Marta Prekpalaj: Well, like every kid, I had many dreams. I wanted to be a teacher and I became one, so my dream came true. My goal was to be a teacher and it happened. I think that it came through. My goal was to be this, to become a teacher and I am one. I think it was it.

Anita Prapashtica: And you honey? What do you want to be?

Marta Prekpalaj: During our activities, I also did some acting. I liked acting, but I had no opportunities. As an amateur, during student years, I performed in some dramas.

Anita Prapashtica: Diana [Marta's niece], you? What do you to do when you grow up? Do you want to be a teacher too?

Diana: I don't know.