

Director's Notes

**"THE THREE OF US"** is a touching drama that explores the intricate web of relationships between three generations of women: Soni, her daughter Ema, and her mother-in-law Leta. Set in a rapidly changing Tirana, the film aims to capture the tension between tradition and modernity that defines much of today’s Albanian society.

This story is deeply personal to me. I was raised in a large traditional family, within a patriarchal society transitioning from one of the harshest communist regimes in the world toward democracy. The economic crisis that accompanied this systemic change brought with it a crisis of identity and family. In my family, men were considered the most important members, they spoke first and always made the decisions. Traditionally, men were chosen for jobs, inheritance, and ownership. Despite the political shift, this remained unchanged.

At first it was my mother and grandmother; then later, my mother-in-law and my daughter. Family stories, especially those involving women caught in political and social turmoil, are what interest me the most. My mother retired the same year Albania’s political system changed, just like my mother-in-law. My older sister lost her job at that time and never re-entered the workforce, she "self-retired" at only 30 years old. Like her, over the years, a generation of unemployed women emerged, who ended up cooking lunches at home and accompanying their children to school.

Such is the case with **Soni (35)**, who stands at the center of our story. She is moving from a patriarchal family tradition toward a new reality she must build herself, one in which she and her daughter will have better opportunities in life. Soni is unemployed and lives with **Ema (16)**, her daughter born in the “new era” of democracy and hope, and **Leta (67)**, her mother-in-law, born and raised firmly within the previous system. They live in today’s chaotic Tirana, which resembles more a massive construction site than a city, a place where the past and the vision for a modern future coexist in strange dynamics, creating deep class divisions and where ordinary people, especially women, struggle to find their place.

**"THE THREE OF US"** is a character-driven film, where the story unfolds chronologically, almost in real time. Soni is confronted with events and truths she had never known before, accompanied by paradoxes and absurdities rooted in her culture, tradition, and upbringing. This enriches the film with notes of authentic grotesque, placing it within the genre of black comedy, filled with moments of bitter and dark humor.

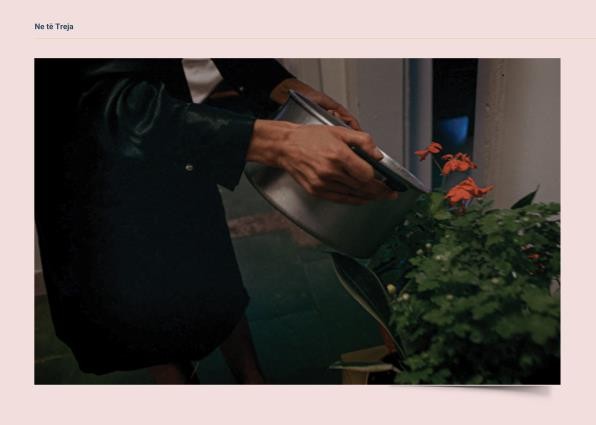
Visually, we aim to create a strong contrast between the claustrophobic interior spaces of the shared family dwelling and the garden gallery on Soni's balcony. This juxtaposition serves as a powerful metaphor for the inner life and world of the characters, their aspirations for growth and struggle for personal identity, within the constraints of family obligations.

The film's rhythm will reflect the gradual revelation of secrets and tensions within the family, building toward a powerful climax that challenges the characters' relationships and forces them to confront difficult truths. Through this narrative structure, we aim to create a resonant emotional experience that will linger with the audience long after the film's end.

The main themes we aim to explore include:

* The evolving role of women in Albanian family and society
* The impact of economic hardships on family dynamics
* The struggle for personal identity to the point where they themselves transform into stone.
* The power of resilience and the human capacity for change.
* The delicate balance between honoring tradition and embracing progress.

The motif of death that accompanies the narrative will highlight the close relationships between the characters and their emotional depth, within a storytelling framework that reveals to the audience a society that cares more for the dead than for the living; a suffocating, ongoing hypocrisy that takes your breath away. This lack of air, both internal and external, is the result of an absurd cycle that never ends. A process that forces the main character to repeatedly return to square one, caught in a relentless Sisyphean effort that leads nowhere. Much like the struggle of every woman in our country, who, like Sisyphus, pushes the boulder of countless responsibilities imposed upon herself until, eventually, she becomes the boulder.



As a director, I feel a deep responsibility to follow closely, with patience and meticulous attention, every movement and every change in the faces of my characters. This visual approach, based on long takes where editing barely exists, reflects the very essence of our story - women who flow like water in this society, invisible but essential, silent but always present. Through long sequence shots, where the camera patiently follows Soni's daily routine—the small ceremonies of caring for others, moments of solitude in her garden—we create a space where time stops, making it possible to see what usually remains invisible: the struggle for inner life within the family, resistance and truth that flows silently through her existence. Her quiet life unfolds in a noisy and bustling city, in constant transformation that demolishes houses and erects skyscrapers. This tableau of change and chaos we will try to see through Soni's eyes. The camera will be restless. It will convey the sensitivity, dynamics, intensity and rhythm that this city carries, as much as it will convey the calm and inner rhythm of Soni when she finds refuge in her garden.

This approach allows raw emotions and authentic interpretations to take the leading role. We believe this style will enhance the story's intimacy, drawing viewers into the complex dynamics of this family's life.

The noise and chaos of the city contrasts with the calm and poetry that characterizes Soni, the character who leads the story in the film. She cares so much for the people around her and for the flowers she grows in her garden, without noise or fanfare, while her life unfolds against the backdrop of urban transformation.

Whether she's tending to her balcony-garden, or when she remembers her uncle in light and gentle movements captured in full frames, we will draw both the solitude of the "flower" in the film, Soni, as well as her resilience and fighting spirit. This will allow the audience to breathe with the rhythm of the film's main character.

THE THREE OF US is an urban poetry with a naturalistic mise-en-scène. Every element of the film will be as close to reality as possible. The light will be almost natural. As in the works of the Dardenne brothers, Ken Loach or the authors of the new Romanian wave, I will try to seek this high sense of realism in telling the story, but I will also go deeper into what is called "sensory realism," like Asghar Farhadi, because truth comes more complete through sensitivity... The scene of washing the uncle is the typical example of the feeling and sensitivity I speak of, where the camera's movement and its distance, light, composition, will combine together to create a heightened perception of the nuances of white and textures,

thus realizing a sensory experience that will bring the audience closer to the image of death that permeates the room, conveyed through curtains, sheets, towels, connecting the deceased uncle and Soni...

Acting in a minimalist and lifelike style will be one of the film's strongest components, as in this film we are not dealing with extraordinary visual emphasis or conventional art film techniques— the extraordinary will be found precisely within ordinary things. My goal is to transform the ordinary into art, into aesthetics.

The scenography will be naturalistic, inspired by reality, built on the great contrasts that Tirana offers today: between the cold, ruthless urban development and the old warm neighborhoods full of life, carried over from the communist era. These neighborhoods—like the worldview of the middle generation—find themselves at the crossroads between tradition where time has stopped and rushing modernity. Wide establishing shots will capture this contrast, visually reflecting Soni's dilemma and emotional state as she confronts the truths and decisions she must make to abandon once and for all the life she has chosen until now—a life in service of others.

Soni's garden is her leitmotif, oasis, poetry, color, light, chemistry and everything else that is missing from her life.

The bicycle, as the identifying means of movement, is the symbol of change, of emerging from stasis, from the emotional isolation in which Soni is immersed.

Costume design will go authoritatively toward naturalism, having a light floral motif, which will transform throughout the story, from a cold and melancholic motif to a warm and energetic motif. Even though dark gray colors will dominate at the beginning of the film, every challenge that Soni faces will add colors to her life through the people that this long day full of surprises will bring before her...

The film's music is the sound of the city, the noise of the bicycle, the sound of silence, like a pizzicato in a distant sound.