

## INTERVIEW WITH JAKUP QESHMEXHIU

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Duration: 74 minutes

### Present:

1. Jakup Qeshmexhiu (Speaker)
2. Aurela Kadriu (Interviewer)
3. Donjeta Berisha (Camera)
4. Besarta Breznica (Camera)

*Symbols in transcription, nonverbal communication:*

*() - emotional communication*

*{ } - the interlocutor explains some gestures.*

*Other rules of transcription:*

*[] - addition to the text to help understand*

*Footnotes are add-ons that provide information about places, names or expressions.*

## Part One

**Aurela Kadriu:** I would like you to start by presenting yourself...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes...

**Aurela Kadriu:** And tell us something about your early childhood. So, what do you remember from your family? The place where you grew up? How do you remember your childhood?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Should I start?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I am Jakup Qeshmexhiu. I was born on March 11, 1950 in Pristina. I finished elementary school at Vuk Karadžić, now Elena Gjika. I finished the second part of elementary school in Branislav Nušić, now Gjergj Fishta I think. I started with my craft in 1964. I worked as a tailor until 1974. In '74 I was hired by the Lottery of Kosovo. I worked there for about 12-13 years. I still work as a tailor to this day.

But in the meantime I also worked at Dodona Theater. When the violent measures<sup>1</sup> started at Dodona Theater and we were fired. We were fired. I was unemployed, so I started making bags even though it wasn't my profession. I started from then and I never stopped. I work as a tailor and a bag repairman.

From my family, my father was born... We came here from 1878, from, as we used to say, from Serbia, from Tavorlan. We moved to Drenica for a while, then he came to Pristina as a young man. I know that we've been in Pristina for about 40 years. I had a mother and father, my grandmother was old. We were four brothers and three sisters. Like this. Since the day my father came to Pristina as an 18 or 16 year old we have lived in the neighborhood at that park, at the Kacallar bakery, we've been there since day one.

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<sup>1</sup> By 1991, Slobodan Milošević's legislation made Serbian the official language of Kosovo and removed all Albanians from public service, Albanians were excluded from schools as well.

I remember Pristina very well because I used to work in a *Çarshi*,<sup>2</sup> that even the *Çarshi* of Sarajevo or Skopje's Bit Bazaar was not as good as our *Çarshi*. But, unfortunately, at the time, the occupier ruled and they were making us take it down bit by bit and lose the aesthetics of our city, and they achieved their goal. But mostly our people achieved that goal. I've worked in this craft since I was 14 years old.

I finished the former 28 Nëntori High School, at economics high school. These streets were paved with cobblestone, paved with cobblestone you know what it means, they were paved with stones. Our street was all muddy, and then it was paved with stones. Then from being stone-paved it started, no, it was paved with stones again, and then it was paved with concrete. Now, it is concrete, but it seems like it's still paved with stones, the same. The city was... now, it's a fact that it's been built, but back then it used to look way, way, way much more beautiful than now. But, to be honest, even the people were better than today, there was no hatred for one another.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What about your family? What was life like in your home? How do you remember it?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** It was very good. I got married when I was 18 years old. I had an older brother, even my older sister was married, my older brother was married so I had to get married when I was 18 years old. I had four children, three boys and a daughter. Until 1994, in '94 my wife died and I remarried. It was a good life. My father was the head of the water supply company of Pristina, he was also the founder. My older brother also worked for 50 years at the water supply company of Pristina.

I worked at the water supply until... until '68-'69, then I started working as a tailor. I also had an older sister, she was married in Prizren, my younger sister was married in Pristina, and my two younger brothers are here. They all went to Elena Gjika. Since 1939 there have always been students from our family in Elena Gjika. Always, always. And as I said, one after one we inherited...

All these buildings in this neighborhood here were built with unburnt bricks. It was a pleasure to go out. Now they built some new buildings. I like the ancient method more, that's why I'm not happy with the new constructions.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I'm interested to know, did your father tell in which year was the water supply company founded, and what kind of enterprise was it? Did your father tell you any stories?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** It was, in the beginning it was an enterprise under the management of the Assembly, then in 1940 or 1950 it separated. First their workshop was here, I don't know if you know, here in front of the Grand Mosque. I remember it well because I used to go there as a child. On the other side, right under that was the *hamam*,<sup>3</sup> and on the other side there were the workers of the water supply company.

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<sup>2</sup> Literally a small market. Today they are usually in an old part of town.

<sup>3</sup> A hammam or Turkish bath is a type of steam bath or a place of public bathing associated with the Islamic world.

After that... I don't know for how many years they worked there, but then they moved here to the Pristina Television, where the bus station used to be, behind that. I'm not sure up to what point they were there. Then they moved behind the market, there's a craftsmen's building. Where the river used to be. Then they moved to where it currently is. My father worked for 47 years and 7 months at the water supply company of Pristina, without taking a single sick day.

He had three weeks of sick leave when he got sick and died. My brother worked there for 50 years, from nine years old, he was born in 1942, from age nine until he was 50. Now it's kind of inherited, my father, my brother, me, my younger brothers, my brother's sons, we all worked there. Not my sons.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Is this the reason why your last name is Qeshmexhiu?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** The reason for that is that my father had a friend, he was a citizen of Pristina, he was one of the founders, his name was Ramiz. At that time there were many Turks in Pristina, so his last name was Qeshmexhiu, and in 1937 he went to Turkey and he wanted my father to inherit his last name, so since then our last name has been Qeshmexhiu.

**Aurela Kadriu:** So it's not related to the fact that your father worked for the water supply company?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No, they both worked for the water supply company, so he gave him the last name since he was also working there, now it's Qeshmexhiu. There's only one family with the Qeshmexhiu last name in Kosovo. I once met a man on the border of Macedonia, he was Macedonian, he said, "We're cousins." I said, "Why?" He said, "My last name is Qeshmexhiev." That's why, I know there was a Turkish family in Bulgaria with the last name Qeshmexhiu. It depends, in Albanian it's Qeshmexhiu, in Macedonian it's Qeshmexhiev, while in Turkish it's Qeshmexhi.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was your last name before Qeshmexhiu?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Aliu. It was Aliu.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How do you remember your mother? Life in the house?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** My mother... I had a small, good, happy mother. My father was a little more frowned, while we had better conversations and we were closer to our mother. It was good, she was from Kraikova but they moved to Hani i Dilit. They've also been here for about a hundred years. My mother was alive until 1992, in '93 she died.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you live alone with your family? I mean, just you and your parents?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Until 1974 we all lived together. Except the sisters who got married. But we all lived together until 1974. In '74 I moved out, my oldest and youngest brother still lived at home. In the meantime the oldest brother also moved out, the youngest ones stayed there and so on.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was it... how do you remember that neighborhood? Since you lived there your whole life.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I told you about the neighborhood. Until 1956, we were three Albanian families in that neighborhood, all of them were, now they called them Roma, before we called them *maxhup*,<sup>4</sup> all were *maxhup*. In 1957, 6 or 7, a family from Tuxhevc moved in next to us. I started socializing with them then the circle of Albanians started widening. I feel bad saying it, but one has to. After the Albanians moved in, disharmony started to reign in that neighborhood. Disharmony. Why? They would build and expand their yards and narrow the road to others.

Imagine, today, on that road only a car can pass, if there are two cars at the same time, you have to find a place to park to free the road. We played with *maxhup*, nine of us, and nine of them would play football. Now you cannot even play with four because there is no space on that road. It got so narrow. It is a disaster what has become of it, but then, we didn't have the power. Because here, this system of ours in Pristina and in Kosovo, it was always like, at first we had the Turks, then the Serbs, then we got used to them. The Turks were allowed to speak Turkish, we dealt with ourselves, but Albanians were still suppressed. When ours took power, then it was catastrophic. Don't ask!

**Aurela Kadriu:** When did the Roma leave the neighborhood?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** The Roma people started leaving in 1957.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Why?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** They were not under pressure, I am telling you we got along with the Roma, we had in that time better than with some Albanians that recently moved here. It's a pity, because I speak as if... this feels as if I am speaking about my nation against my will, but the reality is such. I don't know if we're cursed, or we've cursed ourselves, I think no one cursed us, we cursed ourselves for that reason. I said, the Roma started to leave, the Albanians came...

**Aurela Kadriu:** What do you think was the reason?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I think for economic reasons, there was no pressure. They left for economic reasons. Some went to Banja Luka, some went to Croatia, some went to Slovenia, and some to Italy. But none of them left because of the pressure. They were pressured to leave after the war. The other side of the street left because of the pressure. I am a witness because I stayed here even during the bombing, I know.

I can't deny what I saw. From the pressure... I had to help three Roma families, they helped a neighbor of mine, so I had to help them. But they left, they left from the pressure. Before the war there was no... none of the Roma in Europe had better conditions than them. They had very good conditions.

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<sup>4</sup> *Maxhup*, a derogatory term for Roma people.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you remember when people started moving, so in the late '50s, beginning of the '60, when people started moving to Turkey? I know people from that neighborhood migrated.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes, in 1956 I was six years old. My [paternal] uncle's daughter and her whole family moved to Turkey. They got documents for us after they went there, as they used to call them *visika*,<sup>5</sup> they brought them for us. Luckily, now I don't know, I think it's unfortunate because if I had gone there I would have had a better life than here in my own country.

My older brother and sister insisted and didn't want to move. Because probably if we had gone there we would be assimilated, just like the others. As far as assimilation is considered I am glad we stayed, I don't know what to say about the rest. I saw them moving there. A few families from our neighborhood moved. My uncle's daughter and so many others moved. Some left because of the pressure, because back then they used to ask for guns. The husband of my uncle's daughter didn't have a choice, because every night he had to go present himself to the police station so he left.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you have any pressure during the gun action?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No. No, because they had interest from my father for water supply, that's why they didn't pressure us. To be honest they saw his wisdom, his work, his family... there wasn't pressure. I am talking about my family, the city had interest from him, so they didn't bother us.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How do you remember elementary school? In which year did you go?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Elementary school... in 1957 I started first grade in Vuk Karadžić now called Elena Gjika elementary school. Until fifth grade, then Gjergj Fishta elementary school was built, I think that's how it's called, the one near Taukbashçe?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** We went there. I finished eight years of elementary school there. Not eight years...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Half of the eight years.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I finished... I went there in fifth grade, sixth and seventh. In the seventh grade my math teacher failed me and in eighth grade he told me, "You're staying here in vain, you won't pass my course." He was short, he didn't like me and... then my [maternal] uncle was a teacher in Malisheva and I went there and passed the exam. I finished eighth grade with my peers. I went to high school here...

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<sup>5</sup> A type of permit or visa to leave the country.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of school was Elena Gjika?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Elena Gjika was good when it comes to the quality of the students that came out. As far as I remember Elena Gjika had the best quality of students. It was an old school, then the second floor was built because the population increased and we didn't fit. We used to have three shifts back then, like now.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I wanted to know, earlier you mentioned *Çarshi*, and you made a comparison with Skopje and Sarajevo's *Çarshi*. I want to know, do you remember it? Do you have a photographic memory of what Pristina's *Çarshi* looked like?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I remember because I worked there, I started my craft there.

**Aurela Kadriu:** As a tailor?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** As a tailor.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where? Was it...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** A neighbor of ours and his family, his name was Master Fadil. I started with him. Where the Government is now... from the Theater and on... there was the big post office. Maybe you know that the bombing destroyed that. From the Theater to the big post office on the right side was *Çarshi*, with the wooden windows and how do I know, it was all in cobblestone. There were all kinds of crafts. Now there are none.

It was all covered with tiles. They all had stands. The stands of the shops were over a meter and a half, they would expose their produce there, what would they do.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where was Master Fadili's shop?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Now, where the European Union is now, on that street, because between our old shops the new building of the Social Security Office was built, now I think it's the Ministry. In front of the Assembly...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Ah, where was the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes, that's where we go to register for our pension.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes, that one.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** It was there. We were on the opposite side of that, in the middle, behind that, where the European Union is, on the other side. Then there was the street where the bank is, now it's only half of it, from the bank you would get to the post office and then to the National Theater.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Which bank?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** ProCredit Bank.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Was *Çarshi* that big?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** *Çarshi* was from... where the government is, the government building, this whole part was... even the memorial. This memorial here, Brotherhood and Unity, there were shops here, craftsmen, this street here from the mosque and the museum where the memorial is. Because it wasn't on the sides, but it was straight from there. The road was straight. There were craftsmen there, it was filled with craftsmen.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did they demolish the craftsmen's shops to build the memorial?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes. They built the memorial and then the Assembly building got demolished...

**Aurela Kadriu:** What year was the Assembly built? Isn't it...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** In '61 I think. As far as I know. And a lot of shops were demolished. Shops were demolished, the post office was the main one. Some were left, but they renovated them, some were torn down and others were built. This part on UÇK Street, on the left side was all... because that part was behind this, there was a small handball stadium... it was filled with craftsmen. But, as I said, they tore them down, they built new shops, they haven't been torn down yet.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you remember up to where you walked around the city? That was considered part of the city.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** This is how I remember Pristina. The UÇK Street, there's a gas station at the end, that was the end of the city. On the other side, Arberia, Dragodan, there was nothing there, just vineyards, fields, nothing. The old hospital was where the Health Ministry is. That was the end of Pristina, out of Pristina. We had some land in Dragodan where the apartments are built now.

On the other side, on the way to Podujeva, I remember the bridge at the mosque, there was nothing beyond that, there were some graves, then later the Miami coffee shop was built. On this side, beyond our neighborhood, at the memorial of President Rugova<sup>6</sup> there was nothing, as a child I played football there, then that old memorial was built.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Which year?

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<sup>6</sup> Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006) a writer and journalist, founder and leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, and President of Kosovo during the war and after until his death.



**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I don't know.

**Aurela Kadriu:** You don't remember.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I don't remember. From *Tre Sheshirat* [Three Hats] as it's called, where the Rectorate was, at the Rectorate there were Army Barracks, up *Bregu i Diellit* [Sunny Hill] up to where the police station was in the Muhaxheri neighborhood. On that side uphill, it was all a hill. On the side of *Bregu i Diellit* there was nothing, no homes, nothing. There was the Muhaxheri neighborhood on this side, while on *Fushe Kosova's* side, where *Kurrizi* is now, there used to be the best garden which all of Kosovo got supplies from.

And they started to build, they built the textile factory, the agricultural school, the economic school. They gradually started to... this city... we knew very well that we shouldn't expect anything from Serbians, but they always saw it from the point of view that we need food, so they destroyed our land. Kosovo had one of the most fertile lands in the former Yugoslavia besides Vojvodina. So they gradually started to destroy our fertile land by constructing more buildings but they did not get to do what they wanted, but our so-called liberators did it. They covered the land in concrete, now we have to depend on other people for food.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Mister Qeshmexhiu, I'm interested to know about those gardens that were in Lakrishta...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes. They say that's why it's called Lakrishta.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes. Was it state property? Were they gardens used to export? What were they?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** They were private property. Private property. That was the river, Reka Prishtina and then there was Vellushja. Back then it passed through there, there was no sewage in those rivers. They were used to water the gardens of Pristina. Citizens worked, they had their own gardens. As I said, all the vegetables... we didn't import back then, we got everything in Kosovo.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Didn't people rent those for...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No, no. They were private property. Private land. But half of the people who owned them moved to Turkey. Actually most of them did. They went to Turkey because they considered themselves more civilized.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you have cattle at home?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Excuse me?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you have cattle?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** We had a cow until my father died. We never let it out. Next to my house is the park, only a wall separates it from my house. We never let it out, we always bought grass from the park and we fed it. We did that during summer and winter until my mother got sick. Then when we got married, our wives didn't want to take care of it so my brother sold it.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What about the city park, was it always a park?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No, it used to be a graveyard. But then it was turned into a park. To tell you the truth one of my brothers is buried there, near the house wall.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How did it get turned into a park?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** The state took the graveyard to Dragodan, they flattened it and...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did they unbury the people?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I don't know, I don't think so, I think they just filled it and... I don't think they unburied people because when I built the house in '94, '93, I found human remains. When I built the wall I found human remains. Even today, there's a part where there is no soil and you can see the bones. Even NATO thought they were people buried after the war. I told them, "No, no, they're here before that."

I went with them all over the park. They were scared that there would be mines, I would say, "Come with me because I know this neighborhood..." I went out into the city even during the bombings, I didn't stay home.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How long did you...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Look, I was training with my neighbor for two years and a half. Then after two years I started working for someone. Then in 1974 I started working. In '74 I was hired by the Lottery of Kosovo.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What did the Lottery of Kosovo do back then?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** The Lottery of Kosovo was the best moneymaker. The Lottery of Kosovo was the same as Trepça for Yugoslavia. But, unfortunately some people came and destroyed it...

**Aurela Kadriu:** What did you do there?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I was the representative of the Lottery.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where did they have their offices?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** The offices were in front of the Rectorate. In three-four places. First they were in the Muhaxheri neighborhood, then in front of the Rectorate, from there they went to *Kurrizi* [The so-called the Spine neighborhood].

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was it like to have an office there?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Excuse me?

**Aurela Kadriu:** You were...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No... I worked in the kiosk. I worked as a representative in the kiosk. First my kiosk was at... in front of the old post office which was bombed. From there I moved in front of ProCredit Bank, the one near the Municipality, but someone hit it with a car and from there I moved near the City Mosque here. There were three other kiosks there. We stayed there until the end.

**Aurela Kadriu:** When did they remove them?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** The kiosks?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Kiosks, you mean from the lottery?

**Aurela Kadriu:** In general, but also those of the lottery.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** In general they were removed after the war, after the war. I don't know what kind of country is this that doesn't even have a single kiosk... now they put some kiosks, I don't even know. Back then newspapers and cigarettes were sold at kiosks... now they have food and drinks. You don't know if it's a shop or a kiosk.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What were those years you worked in the kiosk like? How do you remember them?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I... as the best. Those were the best of my career. I was respected by... by the citizens of Pristina. Not only the respect, but thanks to me they went to the Municipal Assembly, it was called the Provincial Assembly then, the Provincial Committee. Thanks to me they went and did what they had to do. I had contact with a lot of people. People used to play the sport's lottery and I tried to help them... and I had... but I have the same popularity with the profession I have now.

But now I am popular because I'm the only one in Pristina. I am the only person who repairs bags in Pristina. No one repairs bags in Pristina. Now you can get mad at me and say, "I'll take it to another repair shop," but you have no choice but to come back (laughs).

**Aurela Kadriu:** And then when...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I left the lottery. I was forced to leave by some people to whom I refused to bow down. Enver Petrovci called to repair around five costumes for a show by Teki Dervishi, *Kufiri me atdhe* [Border to Homeland]. And I went to talk to him. Enver asked me, “Jakup, do you want to work?” I said, “Work what?” He said, “As a costume designer?” I said, “Yes, I am unemployed...” actually, from then I had a shop, the ex old pensioners’ coffee shop...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where was this?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** In front of the European Union, it’s where you pay the electricity bills. I don’t know if you know that street. That’s where my shop was. A...

**Aurela Kadriu:** You opened your own shop?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No, I got it from the Association of Pensioners. Then the violent measures happened where I was fired from that job by an Albanian, I am going to say his name because he really hurt me, I forgot his name. Mustaf Rezniqui. He was with the Serbians during the violent measures. He fired me with... two families got income from that shop. He gave it to his sons.

Then Enver Petrovci called me and I went to repair those costumes and started working...

**Aurela Kadriu:** You went to Dodona in ‘92?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes, in Dodona. I was in Dodona from ‘92 to ‘97.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I have a question because I am confused. You stopped working for the Lottery in ‘74?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No, I stopped working there in ‘85. I started working there in ‘74. From ‘85 then I... I had my own shop in ‘88-‘89. I worked there for four years then the violent measures started, then I went to Dodona in ‘92. I worked there until ‘97. Then Enver Petrovci, Teki Dervishi, a woman from Gjakova and I were fired due to violent measures.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was Dodona doing at that time? It was the only institution that...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** The only institution, it was the only institution ruled by Albanians. But unfortunately we had some people who... Faruk Begolli said, “I will give you an institution where you can hold associative meetings, all kinds of meetings, but you can’t tell anyone where.” Unfortunately a colleague of yours, a journalist, I am saying a colleague of yours because I don’t know who it was. He told them, “The meetings will be held at Dodona Theater.”

All the people came, who were more... [Edita Tahiri](#) stayed there a lot. The next day the violent measures began. I told Enver, “Professor, do something...” he said, “No Jakup, I don’t bow down to

anyone. Now..” He said, “I will call Belgrade.” Let’s see if they dare stay here. But I won’t kneel to anyone. Especially not them.”

Then we got out of there. After I left there... because I worked as a costume designer...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Can we talk about the theater a little more?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Huh?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Can we talk about the theatre a little more?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Maybe, you probably remember, a few of the shows you designed the costumes.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** We made the costumes for *Ditë Vere* [Summer Day] by [Melihate Qena](#), *Kufiri me Atdhe* [The Border with the Homeland] by Teki Dervishi, and I don’t what was a show called where Veton Osmani and Sunaj Raça played. I even worked with a colleague of yours, Samka Ferri. I don’t know if you know her. I had a small problem with her. After... she called me for *Kufiri me Atdhe* and she gave me a picture of the costumes that had to be made.

In the meantime she had a problem with Enver and he called me on the phone. He said, “Jakup, take the pictures and come here.” When I went there he said, “Give me the pictures, you can deal with Enver.” I said, “Take it easy Samka, what happened?” He said, “Nothing.” I went to him, “Professor...” He said, “Don’t deal with her, she is crazy.” Then I asked, I said... to Teki Dervishi, I said, “Professor tell me what I should do about the show.” He said, “Master Japu, do this, there are five prisoners, make some pajamas with laces {shows with his hands}, and make two costumes and hats for the guardians. These...” he said, “Nothing else.”

I said, “I can sew clothes just by asking the customers, this will be easy.” I made them. Then she made some trouble, she wanted to write that she was the costume designer, Semka Ferri, “But Samka...” I said, “You left. How should we write that when you left?” I said, “I don’t want to advertise that in the show.” People came from Belgrade so I could tailor clothes from them when I had my shop.

Then the violent measures were taken. Faruk paid rent at the Dodona Theater even during the violent measures. He invested his own money. He was paid by a movie in Slovenia 80 thousand marks, Faruk Begolli invested 40 thousand marks in the theater. We asked him “Why?” He said, “If this theater closes down the Faculty of Art, the Acting Branch will die down, I barely made it, I don’t want it to die down.” And it survived, it survived until liberation.

There were good shows, mostly comedy because the people didn’t have any other institution so they would have fun there, relieving the stress. We had a lot of... There was a show that broke all the

records, *Profesor, Jom Talent se jo Mahi* [Professor, No Joke, I am a Talent]. That broke all the records, none of the shows compared to it.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did the actors travel?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** They did. We had actors from Mitrovica, Suhareka, Gjilan, from everywhere. I... I was there for the first generation of Faruk, one of them is Veton Osmani, he also works in television. Then there's Sunaj Raqaj, he is from the golden generation of our actors, then they started to come from all over Kosovo.

## Part Two

**Aurela Kadriu:** As a costume designer did you get to go to other cities?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No, I didn't. Because mostly, only the show *Profesor, jom talent se jo mahi*, this... and puppet shows. I would sew what was needed for the puppets or the actors, I would do it at home, I didn't need to go there. Also there wasn't enough space, they only had one van. And to tell you the truth I started to engage my sons because I wanted to quit.

**Aurela Kadriu:** To do what?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** One of them was a costume designer, the other one worked in the theater's cafeteria.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do your sons work with you?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Here?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No. At the moment they're all abroad. Only one of my daughters from my second marriage is here, four of my children from my first marriage live abroad. One of them lives in Italy, my daughter is in Germany, my second son is in Switzerland, and my youngest son is in London.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Now you work alone, right?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I am alone. My second son was a tailor, he doesn't repair bags but he is a tailor. But he quit because he went abroad. I work alone here. I will not give up as long as God gives me health, when He stops, I will stop.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How long have you been in this location?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I've worked as a bag repairman in this shop for four years, actually four and a half years. I worked in front of Elena Gjika elementary school for two years, and I worked in that bag factory for 15 years. Behind the theater, when I left the theater I started working with bags. I worked for 15 years as head of production, also as a bag repairman.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of factory was this?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** It was called Eni.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Was it private?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Was it in Pristina?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** It was in Pristina. First it was in *Bregu i Diellit*, from there we moved near the Dodona Theater...

**Aurela Kadriu:** What were those years like?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Excuse me?

**Aurela Kadriu:** What were those years like?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** They were good, but not very good for me because I was head of production and... I actually talked to her earlier, employees never like their boss (laughs). They hated me a little because I was more strict, I wanted them to have some discipline at work. If a person isn't disciplined or educated, be it on the job, or while conversing, or anything, there's nothing from that person. I wanted discipline at work, and I achieved that. Actually when I quit I told my boss, "I achieved my goal. Our work is clean, if you can keep it like that, do it, if you can't, I won't be here anymore." He continued with it until now, around six or seven years, now he closed it.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Can you tell me about high school?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** First of all, where was the building?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I went to Ahmet Gashi High School, back then it was called the 28 November Technical School. That was my high school. The old building here.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes, where the archive is today?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Archive? Yes, the archive. Now it's the Municipal Archive. That was my high school. I was the last generation in 1967 as a student of crafts. We were the last generation.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What do you remember? Do you have any memories from high school?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I have a lot of memories. Back then we spoke... most of the subjects were in Serbian, so in '65, '66, '67. The high school back then was in Serbian. To complete the internship... we did our practice in Subotica for a month. We always had problems, even in Subotica. We fought with some Serbians, and five of us were expelled.

**Aurela Kadriu:** From the school?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** From the course, from the practice we were doing. But luckily we decided to stick together, we said that they either have to expel us all or... then the director asked for me, I spoke Serbian. He asked for me and he promised me, he swore on his children that we would pass the exam in August, but we had to leave. We beat up four, actually five Serbians, they had to go to the hospital. So we came back.

When we came back we had trouble with the school secretary, Elmi Muçolli. We didn't want to accept us back. For some time, for around two months we had discussions with him and he finally accepted us back. As I said, we were the last generation.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you go out in the *Çarshi* when you were young?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Excuse me?

**Aurela Kadriu:** When you were young did you go out in the *Çarshi*?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes, yes regularly. We went out to *Çarshi*. We went out but we were educated. I notice it now, because Sami Frashëri gymnasium<sup>7</sup> is here. If you come here around nine thirty it's so crowded. But they don't behave, or maybe I just don't like how they behave. It's not that I don't like it, but it's not good behavior. We were educated. We didn't yell for no reason, we didn't curse. We were very, very... we knew how to respect our teachers.

My teacher from Elena Gjika told me, "Master, I miss going out with my husband without having kids around calling my name." While when we saw our teachers we would hide so they wouldn't see us. Because they would say, "Why did you go out and you didn't stay home to do homework?" Or something like this. But as I said, we were educated. We respected our teachers. Today, there's no respect towards teachers. I have said to my daughter's teacher, "You can hit here, I give you permission. Hit her and then call me and I'll show her when she comes home."

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<sup>7</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.



That's why we were so educated back then in school. While today they insult and hit teachers. That's just unacceptable. We had a tradition. We had a tradition from our great grandfathers, it wasn't the way it is right now. Who is to blame? The parents. My son was in this gymnasium, the teachers had 38 students in a classroom. The teacher, the attorney, Rukiqi's sister. She was a very quiet teacher. There was only one student out of 38 who was very troublesome. His parents would tell her, "I don't want you to bother my son."

Then we had problems with him. I said, "Sir, if you don't want your child to be bothered, pay for a private teacher and keep him at home, I won't allow him to make problems for all our children." We had, as I said, we were afraid of our parents and teachers. But not because they hit us, teachers are like second parents. Now it's not like that, now...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where did you go out in *Çarshi* ?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** We had... the *Çarshi* was where the theater is. The shopping mall wasn't there yet. There used to be shops in that part. Now the shopping mall is the Tax Administration, the government building. There were all shops there. We used to go where Cinema ABC is now, in Qafa, that's where we went. Cinema ABC was in front of the Provincial Committee, we used to call it Cinema Vllaznimi.

We used to go to the cinema. From three o'clock Cinema Vllaznimi started working, then from four Cinema Rinia started working, we used to go there.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you go to both of them or...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** We went to both of them when they were screening good movies. From three to five we would go there, then from six to eight we would go to Kino Rinia. Because we didn't have any other places for young people, like Boro Ramiz or so on. No, those were all we had.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of movies would they screen? Do you have any memories of the cinema?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I had the best memories, but they were the wrong ones. What can we do? In 1974 was the Albanian Movie Week, we had so much fun, there were so many people... all of the movie timetables were filled with people. Those were good movies. Then we had, back then we mostly watched western movies. Back then it was... so then in '74 started the movie week in Kosovo.

We had a concert in the Stadium of Pristina with singers... I remember that because I was around 20 years old, with Albanian singers. There was Fitnete Rexha, this... I forgot the names.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Which year?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** '70 I think. The stadium would be filled...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Why was that concert held?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** An Albanian singers' concert. So many people set their shirts, jackets and umbrellas on fire, they would hold them up. But, we were wrong doing that.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Why?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Why? Because we love them and favor them and they ignore us. To this day they ignore us. If we did a survey, 30 percent of them don't love us, but if you asked us, 70 percent would want to unite with them. As I said, it was one of the best concerts of my life. I had so much fun. It continued until 10:00 pm, back then we never stayed out that late. It continued until 10, 10:30 pm, even though it was supposed to end at 8:00 pm. I don't remember having that much fun ever again.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you know who organized it?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No, no. It was organized because our roads opened, and Serbians started getting weaker. They were getting weaker, we were breathing better. So the Albanian Movie Week also started that year, a lot of things happened, some professors would come to teach at universities and so on.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where were you during the war?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I have been at home since day one.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Why did you decide to stay home?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I wanted to be a patriot but I was wrong.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was Pristina like at that time?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** It was horrible. I would go to the city... it wasn't because I was very brave or very smart, but that was God's plan. I didn't have any pressure. I can't say that I had any pressure. They would come and check neighborhood by neighborhood. They also came to my house. My brothers... one of my brothers, the oldest, was evicted with his family of 17 people, so the rest of us were here. We were 52 people when they went in to evict us.

But fortunately they didn't bother us, but in the meantime my nephew said, "Uncle, we will go." "Go." So they went, and we closed the doors and never had any pressure... they came...

**Aurela Kadriu:** We were walking about the war.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** They came to our house... the police were walking down the street and said, "Do you have the green card?" They used to give us some green cards so they could know how many family

members we were, to know if we would have guests from villages, and he said... "I didn't take one." "Why?" "I'm not expecting any guests." There was a Serbian hotel at the end of the road here and that's where people took them. He said, "You don't need to go. I'll bring them for you tomorrow. You will fill them out, I'll stamp them and you can go out."

So he did that. I filled them out. Actually we took in around five families that moved from Llap, and then they went to the border. They brought them back from the border and we put them in houses that were empty. So we got them those green cards. And no one bothered us. Then after that someone... because in our neighborhood only 20 percent of people left when Serbians had that *oluje* [Srb. storm]. Then they left by themselves, they were scared.

We didn't leave. I went out in the city, there was nothing, it was horrible. Just like when Serbians go out now, have you noticed how we don't even hear them, no one speaks Serbian. Back then no one spoke Albanian, they all spoke Serbian. It was horrible but no one bothered me. Twice, my daughter was little, she asked me for boiled eggs twice. I went where Hotel Union is, there used to be some shops. There was a shop there where they sold eggs, meat and so on. So I went there, and I bought eggs. When I came to Elena Gjika, from there to the mosque was filled with the army, paramilitary or I don't know.

I didn't dare come back, I was scared they would be suspicious and shoot me. So I went through that road where the Ministry of Diaspora is, back then it was the Municipal Court. Yes, yes, where the Municipal Court used to be, the museum. The Military Court was there, so that's why it was filled with soldiers. Every five meters there were soldiers. I went and bought the eggs, came back, no one bothered me. The Roma were dominant at that time. That's where Pristina's market was, that's where the retirement home was.

The market was up there. You could buy whatever you wanted there. Sugar, drinks, salt, peppers, they had everything because Serbs would empty Albanians stores and they would employ Roma, they wouldn't pay them but they would give them goods. Then they would sell them, cigarettes and everything. Every citizen of Pristina bought things there. As I said, when the Serbians started to withdraw... Actually the first Roma to leave there, left because of me. Because he told me, in Serbian, but I'll say it in Albanian, "I will not speak Albanian here, I will speak Serbian."

And I said to him, "If the day comes, I will get rid of you, know what." And after everyone left, I went out to buy something. I met him on the street, he said, "How are you, neighbor?" I said, "You will not speak Albanian here, only Serbian," I said, "You're safe since I'm busy now." He went and told his father, "I have to leave because Ramadan Qeshmexhiu's son wants to kill me." So they took their stuff and left. After that they started leaving one by one.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you really want to kill him?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Huh?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you really want to kill him?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Listen to what I tell you, at that time you could kill a person like a bird, no one cared. I couldn't have killed him because... I wouldn't have killed him but I would've beat him up. I would beat him very hard. But luckily he left, I don't know anything about him now.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I wanted to ask you...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes?

**Aurela Kadriu:** When we were talking about the war period, you said you could freely kill...

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes, yes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I'm interested to know how you found yourself in the neighborhood after the war.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** In our neighborhood, always, we were, we had some people, I had a troublesome brother, all Roma would be scared of him. But he didn't make any problems. During the bombings I had a problem that an old man was stuck at home, even though his whole family left. He was 85 years old. Then a Roma, a guy, his father worked at the Secretariat of Internal Affairs, so did his mother, and he almost hit that man.

He told me, because I always took care of him, I took care of him during the bombings because he was alone... I took him into my home. He would only go to his house to sleep, because he would eat, shower and everything in my house. So I caught him and he had some kind of transistor, so I told him, "Come here." I grabbed him by his throat and he told his mother. Then they came, as Roma always did, if you beat up one, 500 of them would come with him.

When they came to my house I was out so they made trouble with my brother. So I went to their house. I said, "Listen, if a policeman comes and knocks on my door, I will burn all of you down. I will burn you down." And no one did anything. I said, "If you dare bother that old man again I will kill you." As I said, you could kill people like a... just like birds. Because no one cared, Serbs would be happy if you did.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Mister Qeshmexhiu, do you remember Božur?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I remember Božur. In '68, I was working, and it probably was one of the best hotels in Kosovo, not only Pristina. It was the only one in Pristina. I went there with some friends to drink coffee... I am funny, I like making jokes. "Don't take me there, I will probably smash my head into a mirror." Because there were mirrors all around.

When we went inside, we ordered our coffees and I started making jokes. I said to Sali, "Is this how you drink coffee?" I held the pot like this {shows with his hands} and I drank it. He was drinking the coffee

and spilled it all over the white tablecloth (laughs). Božur was, I said, one the most... I wasn't a fan of big coffee shops but we went there. We went there sometimes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you have any stories like this about the Union [Hotel]?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Excuse me?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Union, do you remember it?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I remember it, but not as a hotel. The second floor was like a hostel, the first floor was a restaurant, one part of it was a restaurant, the other part was a sweets shop. The part you can see from Ibrahim Rugova's memorial was the sweet shop, the other part was a restaurant.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you ever go there?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Yes, yes, we did. It was nice. As I said, back then we had work ethic, not we don't.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was it like for you when the shopping mall opened?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** First the old shopping mall opened...

**Aurela Kadriu:** I am talking about the new one, since it was closer.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** The new one... I was a craftsman back then, so we went there more often since we had to buy everything... it was great then, you could buy whatever you wanted in that building. Now you have to go to different places to buy things, one at *Tre Sheshirat*, the other one in Lakrishte, you can't... you have to go all over Pristina for three or four items.

Back then you had everything at the shopping mall. A few days ago I was at the Tax Administration and I was looking at how it looks like now. For what? But things changed with the new system, back then it was better. As I said, you could buy everything in the shopping mall. Now, you can't find two or three items in the same neighborhood, no way.

**Aurela Kadriu:** You were in your twenties when the Brotherhood and Unity monument was built, right?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** No...

**Aurela Kadriu:** You were younger?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I was younger.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you remember it?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I remember it, but not very well. They surrounded it, and I know that the road was blocked. The road was blocked. They opened the road on the other side. On the one in front of the Municipality were the blacksmiths. Then the main road opened, the one where the monument is, and it is like that to this day.

Where the memorial is, on both sides, there used to be shops of craftsmen. The road was paved in stones, cobblestone, that's what it's called right? I finished high school in Serbian, so I need time to adapt.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How did your life continue after the war? What happened to you?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** After the war we started working in the bag company, we started little by little. My sons, they called me during the bombing, "Dad, take your wife and daughter, go to Macedonia, we will come get you." But I couldn't do it, I had worked for more than 50 years, I didn't want to leave the house, Roma would burn it down. They would take everything in there and then they would burn them. I had worked from '64 and I couldn't leave the house so someone could burn it down.

And I didn't go. But I was wrong, I was wrong. If I had known that the people of our country are like this, I would have never stayed. Never. I swear I would have never stayed.

**Aurela Kadriu:** From which years did you work at the bag factory?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Since '97.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Until when?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Until 2011.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Then you started with the shop?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Then I opened my shop because there wasn't much work there, so I opened my shop.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where did you open it?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** First I opened it here, next to this shop. I stayed here for about two months, but it had bad stairs so I moved in front of Elena Gjika. There I stayed for two years and a half. There the owner wanted to build something, to tear that down and... then I found this one here and I've been here for four and a half years.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Just a second, how did the craft you do transform over the years? So, what is it like? Do you still have customers? How does it work?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Well, look, now everything is going wrong, not just in my profession but in general. Back then we knew when the working season was, and when the not-working season was. Now it's the opposite. When it's working season no one comes, when it's not working season it's full. Back then, when we worked in '97, I don't know if you call them vanity cases?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes, vanity cases.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** We transported vanity cases to Vojvodina with a truck, with a truck, we transported them to Vojvodina. And after the war we stopped that, we started supplying Kosovo. We were suppliers of bags for Kosovo. They would come and get bags there from Prizren, Gjakova, Peja, Ferizaj, Gilan. But gradually, when the Chinese came we were cut out. When they came... we used to make school bags for students, the traders would come and buy them before turning them... because we first make them, then we turn them.

They would come get them and turn them themselves. They just needed them. Back then we would make a Nike bag, it would be 18 or 20 marks. But they didn't ask. When the Chinese came, they would sell school bags for 3-4 marks. Me and my boss did a reassessment, we would even buy the materials for 4 marks, let alone the work.

So we stopped making school bags. But it is dying out, like most of the crafts here, 80 percent of crafts here died out. So this one is headed in the same direction. Here, it's the opposite, in this society craftsmen are not incentivized, they're disincentivized. There were many good craftsmen, if only they were incentivized. Kosovo's craftsmen were in Yugoslavia.

In 1986 there were 54 tailors in Pristina, but now there aren't any actual tailors.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Mister Jakup, do you have anything to add? Anything you would want to share with us?

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** I don't know what to say, I actually saw a TV program on RTK [Radio Television of Kosovo] and I preferred... If I had any power I would suggest that in every family, their children, their sons should follow a craft. Why? Whatever happened, happened, they fired us from our jobs, but the crafts should have remained. Personally, I am not good at commerce.

I would be a very bad trader, I don't know how to sell things, I can't lie... I stuck to this craft from the beginning. Now, people told me to take an apprentice, and I would want to, because God gave this knowledge to spread it to the next generations. But when they come, they say, "Can my son work here and how much will he get paid?" So teach them, "How much will he get paid?" We had to pay to learn the craft. Now they said, "How much will he get paid?" "Well okay sir, how much does your son work to get paid?"

They are dying down and there is no incentive from the government. I am, they call me a pensioner, but no, not even social aid, 75 euros, like people my age. They don't accept my 50 years of work. Only

the 13 years at the Lottery. And now if I took an apprentice... I rarely make bags from scratch. To take one just for the repairs he will be half... he won't be a craftsman. That's why I can't take anyone.

If the government incentivizes us, they tax me. I am 69 years old and they tax me even though they haven't paid for my contribution for 13 years. I am not counting 50 years, just the 13 I have on my documents, they don't pay me for those. What can I say about this country, that it's good? No, not for me, at all. Maybe I am being a little harsh, but I can't do anything about it. I've had it up to here {shows with his hands}.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Thank you for your time Mister Qeshmexhiu.

**Jakup Qeshmexhiu:** Thank you, may God bless you. I hope you don't follow the same steps as the people before you, I hope you get better.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Thank you.