

## Cinematography and Society

### In Conversation with Kujtim Çashku

By Gentiana Ramadani

Which of the powerful creations has left the deepest impact on our memories and consciousness from our early childhood onwards? Who has influenced us the most as we've grown - literature, art, or cinema? These questions, if still asked, are not simple to answer. But it's hard to deny that films, the moving image, has been a monumental force for transformation in our society. The powerful messages that are still vividly etched in our memories often come from the small screen, primarily the screen that keeps shrinking today, into the handheld devices we all carry around, be it an Apple or Android. I've always thought that a writer has hundreds of pages at their disposal to express themselves. In contrast, a filmmaker, director, or producer has only a few minutes, perhaps up to 120, but still, a limited time to convey what they have in their mind. How do they do it? Especially today, with the significant changes, where characters are no longer the people, but ideas are.

With these thoughts in mind, I embarked on a journey to meet an intriguing figure in Albanian art and cinema, the advocate for human rights through film, director Kujtim Çashku. He's a cultural cosmopolitan stretched across two eras - one half under the censorship of the communist regime with the shield of socialist realism and the other in freedom. Professor Çashku founded the first [film school](#) in Albania (2004) and in 2006 he created the international Human Rights [Film Festival](#).

The focus of the conversation was on a very important matter: the relationship between cinema and society today, seen through a broader lens, and to understand how this industry speaks in/to our times. So, the conversation moved in three directions: culture, competition/economics, and technology. What is competitiveness, and what is it today in itself? What has changed in the past 10 to 15 years? Innovations and technology, were some of the questions.

In the trajectory of the cinema's transformations and identity, according to Professor Çashku, the culture of image, seen from a broader perspective that delves into concerns, is assuming dimensions that are completely reshaping what are known as the three key moments in human relations: information, formation, and communication. Regarding this matter, he raises significant questions. Firstly, and most importantly, there's the management of a unique kind of wealth deeply intertwined with culture of image, with cinematography. Çashku asserts, "We have images that have created a wealth of their own over a century, and it's still a question as to how this will be managed. In the sense of whether they will be part of the dimension and dynamics that image culture currently has, or will the image remain an ephemeral, extraordinary product that doesn't provide an opportunity for reflection?" So, according to Prof. Çashku, the rapid bombardment with this type of culture of image may not leave much room for the development of reflective culture and is less likely to foster a culture of vision. Because, as he explains, "extraordinary events don't give

you much time to have a clear and grand vision of the future. And when we talk about the future, we focus on children and young people, which, whether we like it or not, we can say that, in terms of the potentially beneficial or harmful way it can unfold, it comes largely uncalculated."

So, the way we deal with images is a matter deeply connected to reflection, both philosophically and artistically, as well as societally and historically. In them, we find a body of information that we choose to elaborate on. We must be able to turn these reflections into processes of shaping and adaptation.

The second major point, according to the professor, delves into another dimension, which is the dark room, the magic in which cinematography was created. The magic of this cinematography, he says, "remains almost like in the rituals of antiquity, as a necessity that humans wanted to preserve contact with theatre, and then, regardless of antiquity, introduced theatre into the dark room, where we still have it. However, in this case, what will happen to cinematography? Will people continue to enter the dark room to watch a film, or will we follow the way that time offers today, where we can watch all cinematic productions at home?" These, according to director Çashku, are dilemmas that, connected to the dynamics of the development of the three elements mentioned above and the circle of professionals, cannot yet outline the industry today.

In these dilemmas or questions, the desire and hope to see cinema as a reflection of oneself, Professor Çashku emphasizes, "cinematography is an art that, in all likelihood, will become somewhat like classical opera, which remains in a somewhat elitist and less mass form, and many things that have been and have dominated in other times have become part of an elitist form. Art always remains an elitist emancipation, which later reflects different egos with all social values."

Returning to the economic aspect of shaping cinema and competitiveness within the industry, if European cinema today is culturally trying to define itself in relation to the individual and diversity, Europe has economically formulated clear policies when it comes to films produced or circulated within the [EU territory](#). In a borderless and regulated market, costs are lower. According to Professor Çashku, Europe has taken active policies "by preserving the formats of co-productions, which secure a wider market but also break down barriers to see culture not as a local phenomenon and product, but as a culture that knows no boundaries. However, there is a gap that remains open because, wanting to reduce costs and create opportunities in the creation of a product that is also cultural and diverse, the industry raises taxes as it wishes, fills theatres as it wishes, supplies the market as it pleases, but has nothing to do with what concerns a good part of experts in this field today. Here I speak and am concerned about that dark side that is still not illuminated enough to understand where we can dive much deeper. And this has been abandoned precisely for this reason because competition has been perceived completely differently. The very simple question I ask every European is, "what is the image of Europe today?", and If I pose this question to someone and ask them to formulate the answer in three words, no one would be able to tell or give me a clear definition to me. This is because, still, in the minds of this society which rightly claims to know the world, the society is focused on economic profiles, the competitiveness of territories, and other things of this nature, but we forget that what opposes all this is this other map of European culture, and European culture has a

completely different semiotics to understand and read what we can say is the image of European culture. Therefore, even the term competitiveness does not stand according to him because competition is not related to the young or the old in the market. "There is no age for the artist, there is no age for talent, there is no age for creativity or brilliance."

Today, competition is about who can break the revenue and profit records, but the real challenge lies in what people desire to consider the great achievement: how minds were opened, how deeper thinking emerged to understand that there is no other form of communication for humans except what art can bring, and no other form of communication whatsoever." His contemplation on technology is related to the concern that arises not from its inevitable development but from its use and the way, amid this rapid development, film is capable of delving into the same depth of human mind and spirit. This is the challenge today.

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