

## INTERVIEW WITH ADEM MIKULLOVCI

Pristina | Date: May 16, 2018

Duration: 74 minutes

Present:

1. Adem Mikullovc (Speaker)
2. Aurela Kadriu (Interviewer)
3. Donjetë Berisha (Camera)

*Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:*

*() – emotional communication*

*{}* – the speaker explains something using gestures.

*Other transcription conventions:*

*[ ]* - addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

*Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.*

## Part One

**Aurela Kadriu:** Mr. Mikullovc, can you tell us a little about your early childhood memories? About the family and place you grew up in, what do you remember from your childhood?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Oh, this question is an endless ocean. I remember a lot, I think I remember a bit too much. I was born in Vushtrri and we moved, my parents moved to Mitrovica. So I finished my elementary and high school in Mitrovica and my memories are related more to Mitrovica than Vushtrri. I was born in a middle-class family, as we used to call it. I was born in the same room as my grandfather, my father was born in the same room as well (smiles). But, I didn't manage to have my son born in that room, he was born here, in Pristina.

I have a lot of memories. I have memories, in my monodrama I told the audience, "I came to this world in a technical poverty, we never knew what the telephone was, we didn't have telephones nor cars. It was the time when there was only one telephone in the whole neighborhood. And I am leaving this world in a technical mess, with all the machines, internet, hell that I don't know whether my beginning was better than my ending."

This is how I went through the path of my life. I went through the path of my life and came to its end and when I stop and stare at the path I went through, I see a path with many holes, many obstacles, mud, hail, rain. There were sporadic flowers that bloomed in my life, very weak ones that were torn apart by the easiest rain. For me, my life was...I am not complaining, I am trying to speak the truth, it was full of slaps. Human's life has always more slaps than kisses.

When I was leading the constitutive sessions of the parliament, in the beginning I interpreted a significant poem of Azem Shkreli.<sup>1</sup> {Interprets} "I stop and look myself in the mirror, directly in the eyes and I don't know whether I want to kiss or spit on my face." What am I supposed to continue with now?

**Aurela Kadriu:** In what kind of family were you born?

**Adem Mikullovc:** I told you in the beginning...

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<sup>1</sup> Azem Shkreli (1938-1997), Albanian poet and writer.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What composition did your family have?

**Adem Mikullovc:** I was born in an urban middle-class family. There was my father, mother, four of my brothers, I was the fifth, and my sister. We were many children but we managed somehow. We grew up and all of us got educated, some of us are deceased, some are still alive.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What did your parents work? Did they work?

**Adem Mikullovc:** My parents were farmers. My ancestors in Vushtrri planted a garden, I mean, gardeners would be a more accurate answer because they planted the goods, watermelon, peppers, tomatoes, and potatoes, and everything else. This is the kind of family I grew up in, and I got it from my family, I have a small garden at home where I try to... Even though I have no idea because I never engaged in that work, but I try to go back to my hobby, to the hobby of my ancestors, I plant tomatoes, potatoes and so on, and so on.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did they make a living out of that, did they sell the goods, did they trade them?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Yes, they made a living out of that, a very good one. Better than now. They were in a very good condition. They worked the whole summer and harvested the goods in the fall. There were winter products such as cabbage and we had a very comfortable and good life.

**Aurela Kadriu:** When did you move to Mitrovica?

**Adem Mikullovc:** We moved in '54. I am not sure whether it was in '53 or '54 but I only finished the first grade of the elementary school in Vushtrri and then from the second grade on, I went to school in Mitrovica.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How was Mitrovica, what kind of city was it at that time? How do you remember it?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Mitrovica, what to say. After all, it was a more homogenous city, just like Vushtrri and every other city in Kosovo. Every family is related to the other, children go to school and engage in sports and so on. Life there had harmony, it was nice. It is different now, people are always on the run, especially the youth, they run after employment, advancement, education, and so on. For us it was very good, there were fewer students at school. I remember when I finished the *matura*<sup>2</sup> of the gymnasium<sup>3</sup> in Mitrovica, we were only 23 students. Now there are forty or fifty students in one classroom.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Which neighborhood in Mitrovica did you live in?

**Adem Mikullovc:** I lived in the so called Bosniaks' Neighborhood, beyond the bridge of Mitrovica. There was the mosque which is torn down now, I lived near the mosque.

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<sup>2</sup> *Maturë* or *Maturë e Madhe*, a set of examinations given to students after the eighth year of elementary school (High school graduation).

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

**Aurela Kadriu:** In the northern part of Mitrovica?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Yes, in the northern part. The mosque was on the other side of the bridge, right after you cross it, and our house was there.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Until when did you live in Mitrovica?

**Adem Mikullovc:** I lived in Mitrovica until '63, '64 when I went to study in the Academy in Belgrade. I lived in Mitrovica until I finished high school.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where did you finish the elementary school?

**Adem Mikullovc:** In Mitrovica.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Which school was it?

**Adem Mikullovc:** It was *Muharrem Bekteshi*.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What do you remember from the elementary school?

**Adem Mikullovc:** What I remember...I remember that at some point, my brother became the school director and I thought I earned a kind of, how to say, easy time, I could skip classes easier, but it didn't turn out like that. Slaps and beatings with rulers followed. We had discipline at school at that time. The situation changed. I remember many friends from the elementary school, most of them are deceased now, only three or four of us have remained and we meet sometimes. Others are all gone, they are all gone.

**Aurela Kadriu:** High school...

**Adem Mikullovc:** I also finished high school in Mitrovica. At that time, the gymnasium was called Silviera Tomazini. All my professors from the gymnasium went to Pristina and became university professors once the University of Pristina was opened. Latif Berisha, Latif Mulaku, Ahmet Maloku, Musa Gashi, Shenasi Koronica taught me. They were all famous professors.

Back then we had different relations with our professors from nowadays' children. Today I see teachers smoking with their students, back then there was a huge distance between us and professors. It even happened to me recently in Pristina, my mathematics professor passed away two years ago, but each time I saw him, I took my hands out of pockets. The respect I had for him during gymnasium has remained the same.

My relation Shenasi Koronica, my mathematics teacher is interesting. In the third year of gymnasium he caught me not knowing the multiplication table. I swear that still to this day I don't know the multiplication table. If somebody asks me today, "Here is some money, seven times eight, here eight times six." I don't know which one I should take, which one is more.

And professor Shenasi told me at that time, "If it wasn't for other subjects, I would sincerely ask you to quit school, not everyone is supposed to finish school. We need workers, craftsmen. Because you are not destined for mathematics."

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were you good at other subjects?

**Adem Mikullovc:** I had all fives<sup>4</sup> in other courses, all of them. But they always, since first year until I graduated from the gymnasium, they gave me a sad pass, a two or a three in maths, so that I wouldn't fail the year, because it didn't make sense failing when I had ten-twelve fives and only a one in mathematics. I remember when my maths teacher once told me, I guess we are spending too much time talking about my mathematics teacher...

**Aurela Kadriu:** That's fine.

**Adem Mikullovc:** He stopped me and said, "Minus one." I don't remember now whether he said, "Minus one," or "One minus." I said, "Anyway!" He said, "You don't understand what I mean. You have to study, study, study in order to get a one so that I can fail your year and then you have to study a lot to be able to get a two and pass the class." I was that bad in mathematics.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of city was Mitrovica. Was it an industrial one?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Mitrovica was and still is an industrial city. At that time, we used to call it the Manchester of Kosovo. Imagine that Trepça<sup>5</sup> alone had twenty thousand, twenty-two thousand employees at that time. That is, twenty thousand families were provided salaries, good salaries, good living, economical sustainability. There weren't only people from Mitrovica there, but from all around Kosovo.

Then there was the factory of accumulators, there was a factory of mechanics, you know, they worked with cars, I honestly don't remember its name right now. And then there was the wood industry. Mitrovica was an industrial city, the wealthiest city of Kosovo.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were there many people from different cities of Kosovo there?

**Adem Mikullovc:** There were many of them. There were many people from other places living in Mitrovica because they were working for Trepça, the factory of accumulators, the factory of wood, and they came from all over Kosovo. Mitrovica is known for having had many people from Gjakova living there, it is interesting that there was a high number of families from Gjakova living there exactly because of better employment opportunities. They came to Mitrovica back then and their descendants are still traditionally living in Mitrovica.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did they ever tell you why your family decided to move to Mitrovica from Vushtrri.

**Adem Mikullovc:** Of course they told me. My late father moved to Mitrovica because of everything, counting the fact that had a lot of children and he thought that we would all engage in craftwork and start earning our own bread. But it didn't turn out that way, we all finished universities, we all followed the path of education, his plans didn't come true. This was one of the reasons. The other

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<sup>4</sup> Grade A on an A-F scale (Five-0)

<sup>5</sup> Trepça, a large industrial and mining complex in Mitrovica, one of the largest in former Yugoslavia. It was acquired by a British company in the 1930s and nationalized by socialist Yugoslavia after the war.

reason was that two or three of his friends, I am not exactly sure, moved to Mitrovica from Vushtrri and he went together with them. We were all together in Mitrovica.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of directions did you and your siblings take, I mean, what did you study?

**Adem Mikullovc:** My siblings mainly dealt with exact sciences, electrical engineering, engineering, my oldest brother was an Albanologist, they all studied mathematics and such. Different directions from mine.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How come that you came to study something so different...

**Adem Mikullovc:** I don't know, I don't know. When I finished *matura*, there was a big discussion in my family about what I was supposed to study and there were many proposals coming my way. From, what do I know, physics, mathematics, astronomy, literature to geography, and I don't know what. My father said, "A lawyer, he should become a lawyer because he is very talkative and he will mess with the whole world." While my deceased mother said, "Doctor. He should become a doctor because he is very unhealthy and maybe he will find a remedy for himself." Even the shoeshiner of the neighborhood, and I am very sure about this, got involved in the discussion about what I was supposed to study.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What did he say?

**Adem Mikullovc:** "Professor! You should become a professor. There is nothing better than becoming a professor, you will live well for as long as you live." I went to the admission exam in Belgrade, because we didn't have a university here, I went to Medical School and I failed the admission exam. But at the same time, I had filed my papers in the Academy for Theater and Film, I went there and I was accepted.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Which one did you like better?

**Adem Mikullovc:** I liked arts, of course. I went there just to please my father. When I told my father that I wanted to become an actor, he told me something that I will always remember, "Alright my son, but I wanted for you to be able to go to the theater together with your wife in the future. Now, other men will come with their wives to see you playing in a theater play." And I never forgot this. Among the actors, I am maybe one who played many of the roles in theater plays, but there was no role I played without remembering the words of my father.

And my father came, we were playing the *Waiting for Godot*, the author of the book received the Nobel Prize for Literature that year. We played the theater play and it is ranked as one of the best theater shows. Shani Pallaska and I were in the main roles, but we were dressed like very poor people. Really poor, with torn clothes, unshaved and so on. My father came to see the play and after it he told me, "They could at least buy you some clothes to wear, what did you do?" You know? He didn't understand...

I can say that I have inherited my sense of humor from my father while my sense of drama, because I also played in many TV drama and theater plays, I don't know if you got to watch all of them or not, but I inherited that sense from my mother. My mother raised us telling us painful stories, dramatic ones, various legends. And I got that from her, the emotional experience of painful events, difficult ones.

And when I returned to the theater of Pristina after my studies, I thought that I was going to play drama for the rest of my life and I hated comedy, I still do. But I don't know who pushed me into the waters of comedy, and now I am stuck. Then there were TV shows, comedy was needed, so I got stuck. When I started making TV drama myself, to make TV shows, that is when I returned to drama, to my lifetime love, drama is what it is.

Even though I am still fighting with my colleagues and critics, because I mean, my drama, my TV movies and theater plays such as *Zogjtë e luftës* [The War Birds] and others, are full of emotions and people constantly cried watching them and found them pathetic. I feel sorry that they still cannot make the difference between the pathetic and the emotional. Pathetic is speaking with a fake voice, Reshat Arbana, the actor from Tirana does that, he is pathetic when he interprets, {interprets} "I swear to earth and sky." That is pathetic.

Or I remember when I heard him interpreting the poem, {interprets} "Mother mourn the brother, they killed him with three bullets..." This is pathetic. But if you say it with full of pain, {interprets} "Mother mourn the brother, they killed him with three bullets, they killed him, mocked him, called him a traitor..." That is emotion but, I have an impression that our critics, our journalists don't know how to draw the red line between the pathetic and the emotional.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of stories did your mother tell you?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Stories, there was a story about a girl, Duda, who was in love with a Bosnian man and her parents didn't let her marry him and she went to the hill, there is a hill nearby river Ibri, it is called Dudinkash which is the Serbian for *Guri i Dudës* [Duda's Rock] and she climbed to that rock, then committed suicide by jumping from it. This is one of the stories that my mother told me.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Was there a cultural life in Mitrovica. I am trying to explore what pushed you to study acting. Was there any kind of cultural life in Mitrovica?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Yes, there was. Look, for some time there was the professional theater in Mitrovica. And to be honest, I was passionate for sports, I would die for soccer, I still love it very much. I didn't watch a theater play until the second or third year in gymnasium, I didn't watch any theater play at all...I knew that the theater existed but I wasn't interested on it at all. And one night, this is an interesting story, I was passing by the so called House of Culture one night, and I saw people waiting in line for the play and I went inside to see the play *Vraga* [The Scar] of Josef Plešić, a Bosnian writer, was being played. Muharrem Qena<sup>6</sup> was in the main role, then there were Melihate [Qena], Leze [Qena], Xhevat [Qena], Abdurrahman Shala, Istref Begolli.

The room was full, I sat on a corner and it was the first theater play I was seeing. I was so touched by it that I cried during all the show like a little puppy. And then there came the show *Shpirtrat* [The Souls]. I went to see the play *Shpirtrat*. And there was another play, Leze was in the main role, this...Ah, I have to stop now because my brain stopped...it was Anne Frank.

**Donjeta Berisha:** Just continue, just continue where you left it, at the Anne Frank play.

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<sup>6</sup> Muharrem Qena (1930-2006) was a renowned playwright, director, and singer based in Pristina.

**Adem Mikullovc**i: Yes, alright. Then there came the Anne Frank play with Leze Qena in the main role and I was impressed, I went crazy about the theater. I was so hooked by it that I decided to come to Pristina from Mitrovica just to see Anne Frank once again. It is interesting that when I saw the *Vraga* play, the first theater play, I was impressed by the drama conflict, how they fought with each other, killed each other, threatened each other, held grudges...And I couldn't wait for the end of the play to see what would happen with them once it was over.

And I was so surprised when I saw Muharrem and Istref chatting normally. Abdurrahman and Xhevat chatting with them as well and I couldn't quite make sense of what is a play and what is the private life. This is what impressed me mostly, understanding that what I had seen in the play was artificial, they are friends, they don't really hate each other, they don't fight with each other. Because I was almost expecting them to fight with each other even after the play, because during the play it was a mess, I wasn't expecting them to hang out.

This was the sparkle that teased me mostly, and I was determined to become an actor. It was even better that Muharrem Qena, Xhevat Qena were actors from Mitrovica, my late mother had quite a friendship with theirs, they drank coffee with each other and hung out very often, so this is how it turned out that I dedicated myself fully to the theater, I went to the theater.

**Aurela Kadriu**: How did it turn out that you went to Belgrade, how did you decide to go?

**Adem Mikullovc**i: I read the call and was interested, so I went to the admission exam but, I told my father I was applying at the Medical School. I duplicated my papers and filed them in the Academy as well. Look, that kind of thing is lost here even though it exists here as well, the number of students accepted in the Academy is very low. There were eight students in the first year. There is the first cycle of exams, the admission exam and then thirty students were accepted. They tried one week with the professors, then we had to take another exam and only eight of us were accepted, the most talented ones.

I wanted to say here, I also told the audience in my own play that Bekim Fehmiu<sup>7</sup> helped me very much to prepare for the admission exam in the Academy. Bekim Fehmiu was part of the Yugoslav theater at that time and he was famous, he had become a good actor, a distinguished one and he found out that among other students, there was an Albanian taking the admission exam in the Academy.

He came to look for me and we went for coffee, he started interrogating me, "Why do you want to become an actor?" I said, "I don't know." Bekim said, "Very good, because I don't know why I became an actor either." But when I told him what I was working on with the professor for the second exam, for the second admission program, he said, "They won't accept you. They want emotion, if they don't see your emotion, they don't care for anything else." I had the word of Mark Antony, Julius Cesar, Hamlet, and a text Russian Literature. He said, "They won't accept you." Bekim said, "Interpret something, find something painful, touching, emotional and interpret it in front of the professors in the admission exam."

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<sup>7</sup> Bekim Fehmiu (1936-2010) was a theater and film actor born in Kosovo and the first Eastern European actor to work in Hollywood during the Cold war.

And since my name, Adem, starts with A, I was the first one to take the exam. I interpreted the text of Hamlet, To Live or Not to Live. The word of Mark Anthony and the one of the Russian. They said, “Alright.” I said, “Can I also say some lines, a poem in Albanian.” They said, “Alright, we would like to listen.” There were fifteen-sixteen professors and I was on the stage. I slowly went closer to them and kneeled on the floor, I tried to interpret the lines about Luigj Gurakuqi<sup>8</sup> as softly as possible, “Mother mourn the brother.” But I interpreted it as if I was coming to let a mother know that her son was killed.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Can you...

**Adem Mikullovc:** I started like that. “Mother mourn the brother for they killed him with three bullets. They killed him, they mocked him, they called him a traitor. For he loved you when nobody else did; For he cried for you when everyone was laughing; for he dressed you when they undressed you. Mother, he is a fallen soldier...” And a professor shouted from the hall, “I don’t know what you said because we don’t speak Albanian, but you are in!” And this was, I mean, everything else went to waste, it was the advice of Bekim to play with something more emotional, with a text, that made me get accepted into the Academy.

**Aurela Kadriu:** In which year were you in the Academy?

**Adem Mikullovc:** This was in ’64. There was another big surprise that happened to me while I was in the Academy. A professor was teaching the old Greek Language and Literature, the Hellenistic, not Greeks. He came to the classroom and for my surprise, I will never forget this, the professor asked, “I have heard that there is an Albanian here.” I said, “That’s me professor!” He said, “Come interpret a poem of Fan Noli.<sup>9</sup>” He turned to me and said, “Do you know who Fan Noli is?” I said, “I do, but how do you know?” He explained it to the other students, “Fan Noli is an orthodox priest, the best translator of Shakespeare in all the world languages, he adapted it the best because of the ‘th’ and ‘dh’ diphthongs, he re-sang the lines of Shakespeare.”

And he told me, “Interpret the poem which has music in itself, the one that speaks about war and you can hear the war trumpets, *rramabam, rramabam*, {onomatopoeic},” he was performing it with his hand {moves his hand}...I didn’t know which one that poem was. I started *Anës Lumenjve* [By The Riverside], it wasn’t it, *Plak Topall dhe Ashik* [Crippled and Lover Old Man], no, *Shën Pjetri mbi Mangall* [Saint Peter on Mangall,” it wasn’t that either. I didn’t know, I didn’t know. He said, “Drop it because you don’t seem to know.” And he told me, “Bekim didn’t know either.” He was speaking about Bekim Fehmiu. I went out of the classroom, maybe this story is a bit too long? [Addresses the interviewer]

**Aurela Kadriu:** No, no. Go on.

**Adem Mikullovc:** I went out of the classroom and met Gjelosh Gjokaj,<sup>10</sup> the painter, because I was staying illegally in his room at the students’ dormitory. He was in the fifth year, but we met by

<sup>8</sup> Luigj Gurakuqi (1879-19925) was an Albanian writer and politician. He was an important figure of the Albanian National Awakening and was honoured with the People's Hero of Albania medal.

<sup>9</sup> Fan Noli (Theofan Stilian Noli, 1882-1965) was the founder of the Orthodox Church of Albania and Prime Minister of Albania for a brief period in 1924. He was also a writer and a scholar and died while in exile in the United States.

<sup>10</sup> Gjelosh Gjokaj (1933-2016) was an Albanian painter and graphic artist. He was born in the village of Miles in Tuzi, Yugoslavia. After receiving his fine art degree from the Art Academy in Belgrade in 1963 he started teaching in Pristina, Kosovo until 1969.

accident and I stayed in his room illegally until I got accepted into the students' dormitory. He was waiting for me and Gjelosh said, "Let's go to the bridge, a restaurant for students was opened." I said, "Where?" He said, "At the bridge." [Claps his hands as a mark that he got reminded of something] At the bridge! {Interprets} "At the bridge, at the bridge, men run..." I said, "Wait," I returned *vrrr* {onomatopoeic}, I climbed the stairs to the third year. I was like a rabbit, I was in a good shape.

I went to the classroom, to his office, and told my professor, "Professor, I remember the poem!" "Which one is that?" I said, {Interprets} "At the bridge, at the bridge, men run..." "Enough, enough! You will come to interpret it in class tomorrow." Then I interpreted that poem many times after that one. He knew and loved Noli.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Can you interpret it for us?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Not right now. To be honest, I don't even remember the text right now, I have forgotten. And this way, a kind of friendship with him took shape. In the end of the first year when I came home, I went by the seaside with my friends and the professor came to Kosovo and was interested to find me. He found my house in Mitrovica and stayed with my father, they went out for lunch and talked, talked, talked...So, when school continued in September, he told me, "If you become only half like your father, you will be fine." He had been impressed by my father. I don't know what kind of conversations they had, I can't even imagine. My father didn't even finish the elementary school, and he wasn't good in Serbia either, but they found a common language and the professor constantly mentioned that lunch, the time he spent with my parents in Mitrovica.

## Part Two

**Aurela Kadriu:** Can you tell me, given the fact that you went to Belgrade as an Albanian in '64, how were you treated as an Albanian in the School of Arts, that's a more specific setting?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Look, the Serbian nationalism and chauvinism existed even before, but I had a good time, there was no different treatment except by one professor. One professor told me, "When you get the diploma, there will be 'The Theater Academy of Belgrade,' printed on it. I don't care what language you will use in other plays, you have to know Serbian very well." I can say that this was the only moment, a kind of threatening of that sort. Otherwise, there was absolutely no differentiation.

And look, you are young and don't know, the further from Kosovo, Serbs don't care about Kosovo. Belgrade doesn't care, they really don't. My friends don't care, God forbid! They are not loaded like those who are closer to us. There is a saying in Serbia, "*Što južnije, to tužnije*" The closer to the south, the more painful. You know, the difference is very big.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were there any other Albanians studying in your generation?

**Adem Mikullovc**i: There were no Albanians in my generation. Faruk Begolli<sup>11</sup> and Enver Petrovci<sup>12</sup> came after.

**Aurela Kadriu**: Was there...Everyone I speak with always speak about a kind of solidarity between Albanians, new students who went there to study were welcomed...

**Adem Mikullovc**i: There was solidarity, there was solidarity...

**Aurela Kadriu**: Among students...

**Adem Mikullovc**i: Among Albanian students. There was also an association, I don't remember its name, an association of Albanian students but I wasn't part of it because I didn't have time because I was taking interpretation classes in the morning and then in the afternoon I was taking directing classes. Then we had, we played in many theater plays because Bekim was helping me engage in theaters in order to get a per-diem. I played small roles here and there, one sentence here, one there, one statist here, one there. And I didn't have much time to deal with that. But, the association existed there and they had their own program. They criticized me a lot for not becoming part of it but, I really didn't have time so I remained out of it.

**Aurela Kadriu**: What kind of theaters were those small ones in which you were engaged? Can you tell us a little?

**Adem Mikullovc**i: There was the so called Yugoslav Drama Theater, there was the Atelier 212, the Belgrade People's Theater. Here's a nice story where I was present, but I didn't experience it. There was this play, Richard The Third of Shakespeare, a friend of mine, a colleague of mine had two roles. His first role was just passing by the stage, and his third act had text as part of it. He came to the first act and the director shouted at him, "Idiot, maniac, how can you walk like that on stage? Get out!" And he expelled him.

The rehearsal continues and then he comes with the third act on his role that contains text and he does it very good, he plays it very good. The professor says, "Where is the idiot of the first act who didn't know how to walk on stage?" Somebody said, "Professor, this is the same idiot, the same idiot from the first act." It was a nice story, a lot was spoken about it in Belgrade at the time.

What is interesting from that time, even though it is not related to me at all, is the time when *Mbledhësit e Puplave* [Feathers' Collectors] movie was being shot, the movie of Bekim Fehmiu. It became a very hot topic in Belgrade at that time because they were against an Albanian playing that lead role, because it was exactly in the Yugoslav Theater, Bata Živojinović<sup>13</sup> was opposing it. There was the very famous singer and very good actor, Olivera Katarina...They didn't want Bekim Fehmiu to

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<sup>11</sup> Faruk Begolli (1944-2007) was a prominent Kosovo Albanian actor and director in former Yugoslavia. He attended high school in Pristina and graduated from the Academy of Film in Belgrade. Begolli acted in more than 60 films.

<sup>12</sup>Enver Petrovci (1954-) is a Kosovar actor, writer, and director. He went to high school in Prishtina and completed acting school in Belgrade. He played as Hamlet, Macbeth, Julius Cesar, and other famous Shakespearean characters. He is one of the founders of the Dodona Theatre and the Acting School in Prishtina.

<sup>13</sup> Velimir "Bata" Živojinović (1933-2016) was a Serbian actor and politician. He acted in more than 340 films and TV series and is regarded one of the best actors in former Yugoslavia.

have the main role. The director was very insistent that Bekim played that role. But, there is a scene where Bekim slaps the actor, Olivera Katarina, I don't know if you remember?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes, yes, yes, yes...

**Adem Mikullovc:** Eh. She stopped the shooting after that scene and said, "He hit me for real." And she sued Bekim and kept accusing him for days in a row, newspapers wrote that he had really slapped her. Bekimi only responded once to that, I will never forget it, "It's true, I slapped you with all the strength I had, but in the role of Bora, within the role, because I have no idea who you are in your private life." And her mouth was shot, because you either play a role or you don't. You either play it with a full heart, soul and emotion, or don't do it at all.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were you close to Bekim?

**Adem Mikullovc:** I was very close to him. I hung out with him a lot. He helped me very much. While we were working for the theater, for two-three years before he died, he came and we hung out in front of the theater every summer, we talked and walked together. People came wanting to take photographs with Bekim but he never allowed that, he didn't want to be photographed. It happened one day that a couple together with their children knew me because of the TV shows and the man came closer to me, I was alone with Bekim, he told me, "*Baca*<sup>14</sup> Adem, can we take a photograph? We are from Switzerland and we love you very much..." He started praising my movies and so on.

I wanted to make a point to Bekim that we should take photographs with our fans, I said, "Yes, of course! Why not?" I took the photograph, one pose, another one, and then I hugged his children. And the man put his hands on the pocket, took ten euros from the pocket and said, "Here, take it!" I was like, "Put them back in the pocket! May nobody see you!" Bekimi was two meters away looking at us. He said, "Take them, take them because you artists have no money." I said, "Take that money away, don't.." When his wife took it in her hand and said, "Take them, uncle Adem, because we also paid ten euros to take photographs with the monkey in the beach." (Smiles)

I went closer to Bekim and he said, "Will you ever ask me to take photographs again?" I Said, "Never." And I never asked him to take photographs with fans again.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did he ever speak to you about the occasion with Olivera Katarina?

**Adem Mikullovc:** No, no, no. Those were higher issues, they were part of the movie set, I went to the Academy and I had no contact with him at all. But, I followed him with full attention. We are interesting, when Bekim passed, when he committed suicide, there were several TV shows about him, they would invite people who didn't work with Bekim, who didn't know him but only watched his movies. They praised him without ever having even had coffee with him. We are interesting people.

The same thing happened... Nobody invited me and I never had the chance to speak publicly about my collaborations with Bekim, how much I used to hang out with him and how I knew him. The same thing happened when Shani Pallaska passed. There was this TV show, it was broadcasted from KTV, Alban Morina, Fatos Berisha and I don't know who else was invited...Shani Pallaska passed, they

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<sup>14</sup> *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.

spoke about him and all they said was, “I saw *baca* Shani in that TV show, I saw him in this theater play, I hung out with *baca* Shani, he was an actor...” But none of them worked with Shani!

Leze, Xhevat when he was still alive and I were the ones who actually worked with Shani. I played some theater plays, he was my direct partner and for days and nights I spent seven to eight hours a day with Shani Pallaska. I even know how Shani Pallaska breathed. He invited guests to go there and say, “I have seen, *baca* Shani was good.” We don’t know how to value people. We have to know how to make an assessment before inviting someone to talk about something, who knew him, who collaborated with him. His close collaborator should speak about him, how he saw him.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Until when did you stay in Belgrade?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Yes, from ’64 to ’66.

**Aurela Kadriu:** When did you return to Kosovo, what...

**Adem Mikullovc:** I had the scholarship, do you know what it is?

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes, yes.

**Adem Mikullovc:** I received a pretty high scholarship from the theater, it was equal to the salary of a beginning actor. I returned to the theater and got employed right away. In the first year, a full year passed and I was not given any role and I started losing my self-confidence, would anybody ever give me a role or not? Until my professor from Belgrade who knew me from the Academy came and gave me a good role. Then I waited for the critiques to come out for a week, because they praised me for my role, all my colleagues...I was waiting to see what the critics would say about me but no critique come out. *Rilindja*<sup>15</sup> wrote about it after over a week, they were praising and criticizing the play and in the end, “The roles were played by this and that...” And in the very end, the very last sentence, “And, Adem Mikullovc.” Nobody started off their theater career worse than I did.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was your role in this play?

**Adem Mikullovc:** It was the *Po shkoj për gjah* [I Am Going Hunting] theater play, of Georges Feydeau, a French comedy writer, that text of his was very famous. I played Leze’s nephew who was a hooligan. It was a really good role, maybe I wasn’t all that bad, I cannot say that I was good, that is disputable. But, that is how the first play went.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How did the theater work at that time?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Eh, how the theater worked at that time, unfortunately...Look, you are young and don’t know this but there were several festivals around Yugoslavia. At that time where we...especially during the time when Azem Shkreli was the director, we were maybe the best theater in Yugoslavia. We had plays delivered in festivals in Ljubljana, Zagreb. There was a great discipline in the theater.

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<sup>15</sup> *Rilindja*, the first newspaper in Albanian language in Yugoslavia, initially printed in 1945 as a weekly newspaper.

There was the drama festival organized in Novi Sad at the time and only five theater plays from all over Yugoslavia were qualified for that festival. Sarajevo couldn't make it to that festival, neither could Zagreb, but we did and Muharrem received an award for directing, Melihate received another one for her role because we had great discipline. It was clear to us that we had to be at the dressing room one hour and a half before the play and we had to be dressed one hour and a half before the play.

Because I see young actors, I saw them when I was playing my stand up comedy, they came running, undressing half their way through the corridor to wear the costume and go on the stage. That could never happen to us, there was no way it could happen to us.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did the theater have any resident actors?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Of course there were, there were forty actors, 35-40 actors. We delivered plays every night, every night except Mondays. And there was a period for example, when I played four main roles in four different plays and I delivered plays four times a week. There was no room to engage in films or anywhere else because of the repertoire. And we stood behind the maxim that no matter what happens, the play has to be delivered. And it happened, I wasn't in the theater at that time, but before I came to the theater, the daughter of Masar Kadiu, our valuable actor, passed, he buried his daughter and came to play his role in the evening.

There was no way a play would be cancelled. We were on rehearsals for the *Hamleti në farmerka* [Hamlet Wearing Jeans] play, a modern play with Çun Lajçi<sup>16</sup> when we received the news, Azem told him that his mother in Rugova had passed. Çun started crying and so did we, we stopped with the rehearsals and Çun went to his mother's funeral. The director told us, "Come to rehearsals tonight after lunch, without Çun, we can still rehearse, improvise, repeat the text until Çun comes back from his mother's funeral in Rugova."

And we just started the rehearsals at around 7PM when Çun came in. It had rained and he was wet, he was sad, he seemed even smaller than he was, "What happened, Çun?" He said, "We buried my mother, I went home, it was empty, my mother's clothes and stuff. I couldn't stay home anymore, that is why I decided to come to rehearsals." And he came to rehearsals. We were that committed at that time. And Çun made us cry again for his love, his commitment. This is what my theater was like.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was the audience of the theater at that time?

**Adem Mikullovc:** The audience was such that it was a surprise if a play wasn't sold out. We had plays that weren't sold out and we only played them five-six times and then removed them from the repertoire. The room was always full and there were five hundred seats. Now there are three hundred, but back then there were five hundred seats and the room was always full. So, there were cases when a play was sold out one month before because people could see the schedule and it was sold for the whole month. Let's say there were five plays for one month and they were all sold out. There were no tickets left, no tickets left.

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<sup>16</sup> Çun Lajçi, or Çun Alia Lajçi, (1946) is an Albanian musician, author, theater and film actor, drama teacher, lahuta player, and activist. He is famous for reciting *The Highland Lute*. Lajçi has played over 200 roles and has been in 30 movies.

We didn't have today's televisions and coffee shops, we didn't have the kind of parties you have today. The theater was an event in itself. I know that people sewed clothes for a theater play premiere. They bought new clothes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you ever experience any provocation or intervention during a play, given the political situation of that time?

**Adem Mikullovc:** No, there weren't. We did have provocations, I have to mention the *Halili e Hajria* [Halil and Hajrie] play, this was in...I don't remember the year, when your national renaissance started, when we started raising up and the actors could play in the theater. It was a scene where the *Pasha* was played by Shani Pallaska, Ragip Hoxha and Malogami and they sentenced Xhevdet Lila, Shaban Gashi and Isa Qosja, the director to death, to slaughter. And look, since the text was like, when Shaban Gashi was saying, "Because we can't give the Albanian *besa*<sup>17</sup> to a foreigner," you could sit and smoke, because the applauses lasted that long.

It even happened once, I don't know where, I guess it was in Mitrovica, a person came up on the stage and was directing the audience when to applause. In the end, Shani, Ragip, and Mala were afraid to go out because they were afraid that somebody would really attack them, because the let's call it this way, national feeling, was so intense.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of city was Pristina when you returned from Belgrade and decided to live here...

**Adem Mikullovc:** Pristina was a city that, God forbid what they have done to it, they have cursed it. I am not from Pristina, but there were two rivers flowing through the city, there were shops, old shops, old pastry shops, *terzi*,<sup>18</sup> watchmakers, different craftsmen. It was a town, it was exactly a half-oriental town with many pastry shops but with very few coffee shops. People were mainly passionate about sports, cultural life. This is how we were.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Which was the first neighborhood in which you lived in Pristina?

**Adem Mikullovc:** I don't know how it is called, near the triangle<sup>19</sup> {points towards the window}, near the monument close to the municipality, I was renting there, my first landlady was a Serb. I rented for two years, I changed houses until...Because back then the assembly would give apartments and since I became famous as an actor, people started valuing me as an actor, I don't know if I was to be valued really, but my turn came that they gave me an apartment. I got my own apartment.

Then I sold the same apartment that I got from the theater and built a house in Bërnice. I added some more money and built my house in Bërnice. This is something that cannot happen to the youth now, who will give you a three-bedroom apartment today? Nobody! But they gave it to me back then.

<sup>17</sup> In Albanian customary law, *besa* is the word of honor, faith, trust, protection, truce, etc. It is a key instrument for regulating individual and collective behavior at times of conflict, and is connected to the sacredness of hospitality, or the unconditioned extension of protection to guests.

<sup>18</sup> Turk. *terzi*, tailor.

<sup>19</sup> Refers to the The Brotherhood and Unity monument which was inaugurated in 1961, while Josip Broz Tito was the leader of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The monument has three sky-high pillars, which join together at the peak, each pillar symbolising a member of the brotherhood of Yugoslavia within Kosovo - Albanians, Serbs, and Montenegrins.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Was this a period when you were also politically engaged or am I mistaken?

**Adem Mikullovc:** No, you are not mistaken. Look, when you say politically engaged, there is one thing I would like to explain, I don't think I deal with politics because I am not a politician. I am a member of the parliament. A member of the parliament elected by the people who trusted me with their votes to be their representative. I don't know how to govern or other things. I am only engaged in the parliament, I give my contribution there as much as I can.

I also belong to the generation of the parliament that announced the constitutional declaration and the constitution of Kaçanik.<sup>20</sup> This is also an interesting story in itself. I was so overworked with plays and we were also shooting a movie at the same time, in fact it was a TV drama, and I didn't even know that I was on the voting list, that I was being voted as a member of the parliament. I was elected but I never went to meetings. I didn't attend the first two-three meetings until they came from the parliament and told me, "Come, because you are a member of the parliament." "What am I?" "One of the members of the parliament." "And what am I supposed to do there?" "To speak about theater, culture and arts..." So, I went to meetings from that point on.

Given the communist system, the names of the elected were known in advance and they all had two candidates. It was me and another one for the same position, for the position of the member of the parliament for culture, it was only the two of us. And now in the parliament they are telling me that I had around six hundred thousand votes, so many votes, I beat the other candidate (smiles), and they elected me. I didn't even know that I was elected a member of the parliament.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How was this part of your life? This detachment from art?

**Adem Mikullovc:** To be honest, it wasn't good. As I told you, in the '90s I engaged as a member of the parliament with the goal to open another theater, the muppet theater, and later we opened the Dodona theater. You know? I wanted to cultivate culture. But there were demonstrations, murders, detentions. It all went to hell, I realized that there was no room for culture nor theater and so I got involved in the flow of events of that time, in collaboration with professors who told us what to do, they helped us, Gazmend Zajmi and the others.

**Aurela Kadriu:** In the meantime, did you continue being part of the theater?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Absolutely! Because look, there is a difference. My mandate lasted for one year and I didn't get a cent from the parliament. We weren't paid. We were paid from the places where we were working. We didn't get any *per-diem* nor anything from the parliament. Now the salary in the parliament is very good but this is how it was back then.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How was the theater in the '90s? Was it closed?

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<sup>20</sup> The Constitution of Kaçanik 1990, was written to give Albanians freedom, fairness and wellbeing within Yugoslavia and stipulated that the people were the ones who select their wellbeing and futures. The head of the meeting on 7 September 1990 was Iljaz Ramajli.

**Adem Mikullovc**i: No...The theater was closed later. I don't know in which year, in fact, the theater was never closed, it continued working but then there were the violent measures. There came the Serbian director, he enforced the repertoire and a whole different regime. But in the '90s I still played in my theater plays, there were even cases, two-three times the plays were cancelled because I was busy in the parliament, with meetings in the parliament.

**Aurela Kadriu**: What did you do when the theater was closed?

**Adem Mikullovc**i: I never went back to the theater. Because those of us who declared the Kaçanik constitution in Kaçanik, who were members of the parliament, we fled Kosovo. We went to Slovenia, first we went to Croatia then to Slovenia so that the parliament could continue taking decisions. And thanks to decisions of the parliament, of the July 2 as we call it, Kosovo continued living until UÇK<sup>21</sup> showed up, until the war broke...

**Aurela Kadriu**: What were these decisions?

**Adem Mikullovc**i: The constitution...Free elections, the referendum for independence, decisions to maintain the health and education system in private houses.<sup>22</sup> These were all things that had to be managed, and they were all managed by the parliament of July 2. We did everything from Slovenia. The temporary government in exile with Bujar Bukoshi as its prime minister was elected and so on. We worked.

**Aurela Kadriu**: Did you experience any kind of persecution because of your engagement?

**Adem Mikullovc**i: I was persecuted because I came from Slovenia to visit my son and my wife. Mainly my son. And on my way back, the police caught me and sent me to prison. I stayed in prison in Valeva for a few days, eight days and seven nights and then they released me, because as I told you in the beginning, the further they are from Kosovo, the less Serbs care about Kosovo. The judge and prosecutor were surprised by the demand of Serbs from Kosovo to arrest me because of my words in the parliament when in fact a member of the parliament is entitled to immunity.

They even told me, when they released me they told me, "We have kept you for too long." We agreed for them to call me again, they called twice but I never went again, everything went to hell and I didn't go again.

**Aurela Kadriu**: Why didn't you return to the theater?

**Adem Mikullovc**i: I didn't want to, I started working, I started making movies for television with video cassettes, TV dramas and shows, I made five-six TV shows. I didn't want to return to the theater anymore. I have to be honest, as long as Zarić was a director, as long as Serbs were there, he called me, they invited me to become part of the theater when I was released but I said, "I will never come as long as you are the director..." And I didn't want to go. I didn't want to go. After the war I got old and...

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<sup>21</sup> Alb. UÇK - *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*, Kosovo Liberation Army.

<sup>22</sup> By 1991, after Slobodan Milošević's legislation making Serbian the official language of Kosovo and the removal of all Albanians from public service, Albanians were excluded from schools as well. The reaction of Albanians was to create a parallel system of education hosted mostly by private homes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** In what projects did you work at that time? What TV shows, which ones? Maybe it would be good...

**Adem Mikullovc:** My TV shows are...I don't know. Maybe *Mahmutovitët dhe Rexhepovitët* [The Mahmuti and the Rexhepi families] is the most famous one, then there is *Mahalla jonë* [Our Neighborhood], then *Katundarë e Sheherli* [Peasants and City People], then *Burri me tri gra* [The Man With Three Wives]. Then *Zogjtë e Luftës* [The War Birds] which was broadcasted in RTK, twenty episodes for war orphans. Then *Rrëfimi nga gjyqi* [Confessions From Court] which was broadcasted in RTV 21. These were my TV shows. I also played in many television movies, over twenty television movies. I have three-four TV dramas that were broadcasted in RTK, after the war. This is how I worked.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of satire, what kind of comedy was it, especially the one used at *Mahmutovitët dhe Rexhepovitët*? That one is very famous, it is...

**Adem Mikullovc:** Yes...

**Aurela Kadriu:** It is maybe part of the collective memory.

**Adem Mikullovc:** Yes, you are right. That's true!

**Aurela Kadriu:** What kind of satire was that?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Through people's comedy we tried to tackle, how to say, the negative sides of our nation. For example, not to have good relations with the neighbor, neglecting each other, this kind of conflicts, marriages. I was focused in those elements that are still present in our society. You can see that by looking closely in the parliament, the antagonism between political parties, I am so surprised and sometimes I say, "When I see you now, I realize that I wasn't that far, I wasn't that wrong at *Mahmutovitët dhe Rexhepovitët*." (Smiles). Because we really are like that.

**Aurela Kadriu:** In which year was *Mahmutovitët dhe Rexhepovitët* shot?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Ah dear girl, years and numbers, once numbers are mentioned, I am useless. I swear to God I don't know the year.

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

**Adem Mikullovc:** I fled to Montenegro. I was in Ulcinj. There was a Montenegrin living one floor below my apartment, he was an UDB<sup>23</sup> commander, and I told him two-three months in advance before things got worse, I told him, "Dragan, no matter what happens, either you save me and I save you." And the Montenegrin gave me his word that we would do it like that, if things got worse for Serbs and Montenegrins I would help him. And I don't know where he is, whether he still lives or not, he was an UDB commander, but he drove my wife, my son and I through Mitrovica and Rashkë to Montenegro, Ulcinj.

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<sup>23</sup> Serb. *UDB, Uprava državne bezbednosti*, State Security Administration.

We exchanged phone numbers but he never called again. Because he said, “I won’t return either, I will desert the army, the police...” I don’t know whether he was killed or what happened to him I tried to give him two thousand Deutsche Marks of that time, back then we were using that currency, but he didn’t accept it, there was no way he would accept it. The same person helped the late Masar Stavileci to flee, the father of Blerand Stavileci. And when the police took Blerand, because he was older than my son...I don’t know how old Blerand was, he was around twelve-thirteen-fifteen...The Montenegrin helped Masar’s son, he took him home from the police station.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How was making movies before the war? How were the movies made before the war, how was it?

**Adem Mikullovc:** I don’t know what to say. Before the war, all the movies were made by companies from Belgrade and Zagreb. They are more skillful than we are, they work better and maybe even pay better, to be honest. We are slowly learning, there are new movie makers of your age, I see them making their way and I am happy, for example that Agim Sopi’s movie *Agnus Dei* received one hundred awards from different festivals. They are slowly getting on their feet but we are still far, we are still far.

Three men from Switzerland who had watched my TV shows and movies came two years ago to me and said, “*Baca Adem*, we have decided to give you the money to make a movie about Adem Jashari.” I had such a hard time explaining those men that we are still not capable of making a movie of Adem Jashari. We have no capacities. We cannot make such a movie even if we come together with Albania. It is extremely expensive, the police costume, the technical part from Serbia, the scenography...The role is the smallest issue, because we can find somebody to play it.

And as one of them told me, there is a legend, I don’t know whether this is true or not, but he told me that Albanians had spoken to Mel Gibson and he was very interested to come here and make that movie. Only Hollywood can make such a movie, we can’t. I am speaking about making a good movie, because as for a bad one...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Have you ever worked in directing?

**Adem Mikullovc:** I was the director of everything I spoke about until now, the TV shows that I mentioned. These are all directed by me. The TV dramas as well. I also directed seven or eight theater shows in the theater. Directing was my second love (smiles). Because I told you that when I was in the Academy, I took interpretation classes before noon and directing after noon. And I always had the dilemma whether I made a mistake for choosing interpretation instead of directing.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Earlier you mentioned the opening of the television, were you anyway related to it? Did you ever work there or something?

We collaborated, we collaborated with the television after it was opened in Albanian and the first TV shows started. It was an event at that time, the TV show directed by Muharrem Qena *Qesh e Ngjesh*, it was a comedy played once a week, everybody was excitedly waiting for Saturday to watch *Qesh e Ngjesh*. Then after *Qesh e Ngjesh*, there came the *Pa pengesa* [Without Obstacles] TV show. Then there were other TV dramas, I can say that I believe I played in the first TV drama produced in Pristina, it was

named *Skerco* and was directed by Muharrem Qena. *Skerco* was a comedy drama that was first titled *Miu në xhep* [Mouse in the Pocket] but then they changed its name into *Skerco*.

We worked a lot at that time. I belong to the generation of the actors of that time, together with Dibran, Çun and others, Kumri Hoxha, Drita Krasniqi and some others, it happened that we had rehearsals before noon, afternoon, and then we had a play in the evening, and spent the whole night shooting in the television. And then there were the radio shows *Humoreska*, *Ora Gazmore*, *Radio Drama*, we couldn't manage to do everything. When Kosovafilm started engaging us, that's when we were absolutely lost.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What did you do at Kosovafilm?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Kosova Film made some very good movies. Kosovafilm made *Era dhe Lisi* [The Wind And The Tree], for example, and many other movies. *Proka*, no, *Proka*, is new, it was made later. But we made movies with Kosovafilm.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How did you find home when you returned after the war...

**Adem Mikullovc:** It was alright when I returned after the war. There is an interesting story here as well, because I wanted to take a book, I had left it near the television and I had left two thousand Deutsche Marks on it and when they came to kick us out, I asked them to take the book, he said, "Take your wife, your son and get on the car right now." We left to Montenegro, I said, "Can I take the book?" "No, leave the book." He didn't let me take the book and we went by the sea, we went to Montenegro. One of my neighbors who was living one floor below me broke into my apartment, he wanted to occupy it so when I returned, the door was broken but we went inside and I went to the book, it was still near the television and the two thousand Deutsche Marks were still there, he didn't know how to find them, he didn't know how to catch them. When something is yours, nothing can take it from you.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What did you continue doing after the war? How did you restart? How did you find yourself?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Like that, we started making movies for video cassettes. I started making comedy, I made more comedy movies, I also played music, I worked for the others because I didn't have my own money until one day somebody knocked on my door, and this is an interesting story. Somebody knocked on my door *dum, dum, dum* and I was eating breakfast with my wife, our son was little at that time so he was at school. I opened the door, there was a boy in front of it. I said, "Why are you knocking? What do you want?" He said, "I want food." I said, "What?" He said, "Food!" We were used to beggars coming to beg for money or clothes, but he only asked for food.

I told my wife, "Lume, please give something to eat to this boy." She made him a sandwich with cheese and salami and I don't know what and gave it to him. I continued having breakfast and my wife told me, "Come, come to the window." When I went to the window, I saw him with another boy sitting near the containers eating the food, they seemed so hungry. They were miserable. I went and talked to them. They told me that their father was killed during the war, their mother got married and now they were living in a basement with their grandmother. "Eh," I said, "Adem Mikullovc is making

comedy and look the drama that is going on out there.” I am sorry, only something else...In fact, their father was in prison, he wasn’t killed but he was in prison and their mother had left them and gotten married so they had remained with their grandmother. Who is taking care of political prisoners? And for three days I wrote the script for the movie *Një pallto për babain tim në burg* [A Coat For My Father in Prison]. I wrote it for three days. Shani Pallaska was in the main role but I had troubles finding the boy. I don’t know if you have watched it or not.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes, I have heard of it.

**Adem Mikullovc:** Eh, the movie was very famous. They were all bringing boys that were raised with chocolate [had good lives], they bleed no matter where you touch them but I wanted a good one. The one who played the role was someone who stayed in front of the theater all the time, “*Baca Adem*, do you want cigarettes, *baca Adem*, do you want cigarettes?” Until my eyes were opened and I said, “Wait, who are you? I took him to the apartment, I asked him to read the text, I saw that he could do it. Then I worked with him for one week in a row until we started shooting. This is the story with him.

This how, these things happen, they happen, a spark should exist, an inspiration to engage people. I was in the bus, I was going from Mitrovica to Peja. At the Peja Bath a young man comes on, pale, skinny, physically looking like me. He sits next to me. I look at him sideways, old pants, patched shoes, wrinkled shirt, like that. I say, “What do you do for work young man?” He said, “I, *baca Adem*,” because he recognized me, “I’m a teacher, I teach. I have a class in Boga.” In Rugova, in the mountains. I said, “You travel every day?” He said, “No, not every day, but every other day, every three days, I have to go because my mother is here. My parents aren’t well, I have to take care of them, so I travel.” And he said, “I was released from prison a month ago. I was in prison for seven years.” “Oh, God!” I said.

Just like for the other boy I wrote the drama for four-five days, the film, the script for the film “*Mësuesi*” [The Teacher]. And I wrote it based on what he told me. That he got out of prison, started working at the school in Boga, but in reality they released him from prison to die in his house because they killed him in prison. He actually was a dead man, murdered. They destroyed his lungs, his heart, everything, and he dies and he dies there.

You know, I want to say, there’s always a spark, that stimulates a person to start something, like an inspiration and then, then it goes. When I was filming the TV show “*Mahalla jonë*” [Our Neighbourhood], while editing something, the editor says to me, “Do you agree with my thesis? My theory. He told me about a theme, a content, and jokingly he asked if I agreed with his thesis. I look at him, awesome. I made three episodes of the TV show “*Mahalla jonë*” with this sentence, with my thesis.

Because I connected the script, Xhevat Xhena and Zenel Tufa, Xhevat would tell Zenel, “Get married, your wife is dead.” In that time, while they’re talking about marriage, a reporter comes and asks them about contagious diseases. She lectures them and in the end she asks, “Do you agree with my theory?” They say, “Of course, we agree, how can we not? If your aunt wants to, we agree.” Then I squeezed this sentence for three episodes, a single sentence, “Do you agree with my theory?” It’s

about inspiration. I think whoever does art should find it somewhere, to hold on to something, an inspiration, a painting can inspire you, a discussion, a story, a look from a person.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How did you decide to get involved in the Assembly?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Eh, my involvement in the assembly is, to tell you the truth I've always had my apartment at the Alliance [Alliance for the Future of Kosovo], and I would go play chess with Ramush [Haradinaj]<sup>24</sup> everyday, I would drink coffee and hang out with him. But I told Ramush to his face that I supported Vetëvendosje, a Vetëvendosje supporter. He would tell me, "What are you doing with those troublemakers from Vranjevc? Have you gone crazy, come to my party, I'll make you a Member of the Parliament ." I didn't want to go.

But when I moved to Bërnice, I had some sort of acquaintance, a shallow friendship with Albin Kurti<sup>25</sup>. Albin came to me insisting, two-three times, for me to be a Member of the Parliament , to run for Member of the Parliament . "Nobody will vote for me..." I used to tell him. "Yes, yes." "Nobody will give me their vote." It turned out that I got 13000 or I don't know how many, I got many [votes], I accepted and I was more active in Vetëvendosje.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What do you engage in today? What is your involvement in the Assembly?

**Adem Mikullovc:** Look, it's interesting, my discussions, my requests, were never shown in the media. I'm involved with some cases that are more vital for Kosova. For example I dealt with, why didn't we sue Serbia until now? For all those murders, for all those missing people, all this economic destruction, a hundred and twenty thousand houses. And we still haven't sued Serbia. While we should file at least ten, fifty lawsuits. And we still haven't filed not even one lawsuit against Serbia. Only Reçak should file a lawsuit, Krusha e Madhe a lawsuit, Prekaz a lawsuit. I presented this.

Nowadays, I've dealt a little more with the Pension Fund and the savings of citizens in Jugo Bank, for Serbia to give them back, because they stole the Pension Fund of Kosovo. And so on, I'm trying where I see it's best, to contribute in commissions, different commitments.

We have a session tomorrow, I have two difficult questions to ask them. Because I want to propose, to propose in the assembly since Serbia is constantly referring to us, in letters, in acts, wherever it is written, Kosova and Metohija, I'm going to propose that we refer to Serbia from now and on as Serbia, Vojvodina, and Sanjak. Vojvodina is the Autonomous Province of Serbia, Sanjak is an annex of Serbia with the majority of non-Serbian population... So we change their name, too. They refer to us as Kosova and Metohija, we refer to them as Serbia, Vojvodina, and Sanjak.

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<sup>24</sup> Ramush Haradinaj (1968), leader of the KLA from the region of Dukagjin, founder of the political party AAK (*Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës*) and was elected twice as Prime Minister. In 2005 he was indicted at the ICTY for war crimes and crimes against humanity and acquitted of all charges. He was retried and again acquitted in 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Albin Kurti (1975) leading activist and former leader of Vetëvendosje!, is Member of the Assembly of Kosovo. In 1997, he was the leader of the student protests against school segregation and the closing of the Albanian language schools.

I don't think the assembly will accept it because it will be scandalous. Imagine if Vlora Çitaku says Serbia, Vojvodina, and Sanjak in the United States. The Serbian delegation would leave the meeting immediately. The discussions that we are not having with Serbia, if they all stick to this, and they always say Serbia, Vojvodina, and Sanjak in writing and discussions, I guarantee that they will stop the discussions. This is how I am, I'm still spoiled. I tease.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Are you still involved with film and theatre?

**Adem Mikullovc:** No. I've given up.

**Aurela Kadriu:** For how long?

**Adem Mikullovc:** For how long, since I've become a Member of the Parliament. I also quit my show in the theatre, I can't play anymore. I don't have the strength, one hour and fifteen minutes playing the role of myself alone... I noticed that I was playing more of my last shows sitting down rather than on my feet or moving. You can't force it and I quit. Two-three days earlier a guy called me, "*Baca*"<sup>26</sup> Adem, a short film..." I said, "It's not going to happen, I'm done." Good, bad, I did what I did, that's it.

**Aurela Kadriu:** If you don't have anything to add, we can end it here. Thank you very much.

**Adem Mikullovc:** Well, I don't know how this conversation will turn out to be honestly. If the viewers will like it, or if they will not like my memories, my emotions. I want to summarize it a little but, we said a little and a lot remains unsaid. Like any other person, all of us have a lot, a lot to explain about our lives. But most importantly, remember, this life is full of slaps, full of slaps and very few kisses.

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<sup>26</sup> *Bac*, literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful Albanian term for an older person.