

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH AVNI EMINCİK

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Duration: 35 Minutes

Present:

1. Avni Emincik (Speaker)
2. Ebru Süleyman (Interviewer)
3. Donjeta 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.

Ebru Süleyman: Can you tell us your name and surname?

Avni Emincik: Recep's son Avni Emincik. I was born in Pristina. In 1952 April the 7th. Then I grew up here, I grew up here until I was seven. When I was seven years old, we migrated to Turkey. When I was in 5th grade, in primary school, I started doing this job, dental technician, in the year '64. I worked with a doctor. I was going to middle school and working at the same time. There was a period when I was an assistant, they call it helper around here. I worked around 17 years like this. Then in '72... I guess it's not 17 years, maybe less, I went to the army in '72. After returning from the army, I opened a lab. In other words, after graduating from high school, I didn't continue with my university degree. I only went to the army then just continued my profession.

Around '89, I opened my own office here. After some time, I worked together again with some doctors and technician friends. Then, as I said, I opened my own office and, of course, I had doctors working there too. Then in '79... '81 I got married and we stayed married. When I got married, I had a son named Ermal. We grew up together until '95. In '95, we had some disagreements with my wife, so we split up. I gave my son to his mother and I continued living together with my sisters, mother, father and still continued to do my profession. As I continued my work I had a lot of patients, but then an earthquake occurred in Istanbul in '99. After the earthquake, my work wasn't the same. After this stagnant period, after one or two years, one year or maybe one and a half years, I have uncles here in Pristina. I have an aunt, her children, and my uncle's children. They invited me here, so without hesitation I came back here, I was already retired in Turkey, so after retirement, I came back here.

Now about 18 years, I am here working at the same place. I came here in 2001, but I am sorry that, unfortunately, maybe people think another way, but I couldn't learn Albanian, it is a matter of talent. I am sure I can do every job related to dentistry, but I cannot learn Albanian, I don't have the tongue for it. For example, when we were here, we migrated in '59, but in '58, we gave our house to the municipality. We didn't give it to someplace else, it became a museum. After it became a museum for about a year, there were workers and they were Serbs, so I started speaking Serbian with them. They were taking me with them, I was seven years, six years old back then, when I was seven, we left. They were taking me with them to the car, a horse cart to throw out the garbage, "Come on, Avni, come on!", they adored me even though they were Serbs. Then our whole family migrated to Turkey. There we stayed in several rental places. There was my mom, my uncle, my grandmother and grandfather. I also

have a sister.

Ebru Süleyman: Your life in Pristina, well, you were quite young back then but...

Avni Emincik: Yes, I don't remember it clearly, when they first came to... The Serbs, they started to raise animals, live animals, dogs, bears. Then I do remember something, which I just told you before, just five minutes had passed since I entered the house and a wolf dog had escaped from his lair in the yard. He attacked around. Thankfully it was a yard and the doors were closed. There...

Ebru Süleyman: Where is your house exactly located back then?

Avni Emincik: It's around '58-'59.

Ebru Süleyman: Was the dog in your yard?

Avni Emincik: Yes, there was a wolf dog, he attacked everyone, of course, we gave blankets and stuff, it saved them. Actually the owner saved himself. Because it was an aggressive dog, not a pet. They brought him from the mountains. Then, after some time, they turned that place, turned the home into a forest. After turning it into a forest, there were frozen bears, snakes and other stuff. There were around six rooms, three rooms upstairs and three rooms downstairs, they opened it for tourists. Then, when we moved, we went there by train on 16... in 1958, July 16th, in the seventh month of the year, we migrated to Turkey.

Ebru Süleyman: When you were living here, who else was living in your house?

Avni Emincik: There was my grandmother, grandfather, my uncle, my mom, so my uncle wasn't married and my mother married my father. My father's profession is barber and my uncle's profession is shoemaker, he used to make children's shoes. Well, we had some problems in Turkey, life was different back then. I had to get a job after finishing the 5th grade, so after the 5th grade, my life was all about work. Always working, always... So I worked, grew up there and came back here. I have been working here for 18 years, I also got my retirement from here, I already retired in Turkey. So around the year 2010, I got married again here, to a woman from Vuçitrn, we had twins, a girl and a boy. May God give them a healthy life, they are still living together with me.

I was also really active here. When I first came here, the doctor numbers' had increased, well, it was something different for me. They said a technician has come from Turkey. So there were a lot of doctors and I started working together with some familiar doctors first. I worked on making teeth, but not on dental crown prosthesis, I passed that work on to doctors. So my life was like this, right now, I am 67 years old, may God give me plenty more years. What else do you want me to tell you, you can ask and I will tell you.

Ebru Süleyman: How did your family decide to move to Turkey, why did they want to migrate?

Avni Emincik: Why, well, there is a story, one day, my father went to Belgrade. Well, he told us that he went to Belgrade. When he was coming back by train, there was a journalist from Germany and he was going to Turkey. The train stopped for a break in Belgrade. The man was looking for something to eat, but there was no place around, the train stopped in the terminal for around one and a half hours. My father had met him by chance, and he said, “Come with me, let me buy you some food.” He took him somewhere in the bazaar, close to the terminal. He bought him some food. At that time, my father knew Serbian but his Turkish was not really good. So he said, “Brother, I want to come to Turkey with my family.” He asked what we do and stuff, the journalist felt close to my father and said, “All right.” He wrote down my father's name and surname and he went back. Two-three years... this story happens in '55, '56. Then they sent each other letters for two-three years. He asked if somebody else was coming with him. My father gave our names. So this is our story of how we migrated to Turkey.

Ebru Süleyman: In those years, there was already a migration wave in Yugoslavia, a lot of families have migrated from here.

Avni Emincik: Yes, there is, there is a Pristina community, Kosovo community in Istanbul. There are people mostly from Vučitrn and Mitrovica in the Kosovo community. In the Pristina community, people are from here, mostly from here, they go there on weekends and hang out together. Also, they have choirs, elderly choirs...

Ebru Süleyman: In the beginning, was it hard for your family to migrate to Turkey?

Avni Emincik: It was a little hard, hard. My mother didn't want to come, so God rest her. She didn't want to come. One day, we went to take a picture with my father [for documents]. Then the other day, my mom and sister went to take a picture because my uncles said to her, “You must go with them and you cannot leave your family, we will look after you.” They really looked after her, because there were not a lot of things in Turkey at that time, I don't know, there was nothing. There were no brooms or anything like that, they have sent all of them to us.

Then I came here for the first time in the '70s, in '70 for holiday. I stayed here for three months.

Ebru Süleyman: How was Pristina back then?

Avni Emincik: Pristina, that time was chirpy, how can I tell there was *korza*.¹ No one was looking at one another in a bad way, there were no fights. Everybody had their own area. When you were walking in *korza*, Serbians would stay on one side, Albanians on the other side, Turks would be in the middle or

¹ Main street, reserved for pedestrians.

sometimes in the Serbs' area, in a word, it was mixed. At that time I was doing my military service, I came here when I was 18. Then I started coming here more often.

Ebru Süleyman: Here you have your mother's relatives?

Avni Emincik: Pardon me?

Ebru Süleyman: Your mother's relatives in Pristina?

Avni Emincik: Plenty, I have four uncles.

Ebru Süleyman: Who were they?

Avni Emincik: Doburçan's. Mehmet Doburçan, Ahmet Doburçan, Ömer Doburçan, İlyas Doburçan. I also have an aunt Hayriye Safçi here in the neighborhood, she was staying there. I had my grandmother here. There were a lot of children, my cousins, and a lot of family members. In Turkey, I have only one sister, two sisters, my son and his son, my grandson.

Ebru Süleyman: So your family members are mostly here?

Avni Emincik: Yes, but from my mother's side. From my father's side, there is only one family here, Orhan Emincik and his family. So, on my father's side, only Emincik's family and I am Emincik too, and there is no one else. So we stayed here and I guess we will stay here forever. What else?

Ebru Süleyman: So, before migrating to Turkey, your family sold your home to the municipality?

Avni Emincik: Yes, it belonged to the municipality.

Ebru Süleyman: Then it became a museum.

Avni Emincik: Yes, it became a museum.

Ebru Süleyman: When you came here in the '70s, did you visit your home?

Avni Emincik: Of course, I did. I visited all my neighbors, they have all missed me. Orhan Türbedar, who just went outside, he was my childhood friend, we lived in the same neighborhood, we grew up in the same neighborhood. When I came here, I visited everyone, then I did an interview with the folks from the museum. Also, every time when I came here, Birsen Şufto was inviting me to TRT, European Television. They did segments and speeches and they invited me. I talked and I told the same stories there.

So I am really happy here because Istanbul is a very crowded place. When it is crowded, therefore, it takes two hours to go to my office. Also, coming back from work, two hours, four hours. Four hours spent on the road. When I was married, we were staying in Florya with my wife and I was going to Şişli. I was taking two or three means of transportation. There was a train to Yenikapı, now there is again. I was going to Yenikapı by train, then I was taking two means of transportation from there. At that time, the station, the train station wasn't open yet. Taksim, Şişli, Mecidiyeköy train line, so I was using the bus, it was quite a trip. On the other side, here everywhere is close. You go everywhere on foot, the atmosphere is nice, the atmosphere is nice for me, maybe not for others...

Ebru Süleyman: In which aspects is it nice for you?

Avni Emincik: For me, it is nice because Albanians respect me, Turks respect me, everyone does. I have clients coming from Gjakova, Peja, Prizren, I made a name for myself.

Ebru Süleyman: What about Istanbul, how is life for those who have migrated from here to Istanbul? Does life have challenges for them?

Avni Emincik: Well, to be honest, they don't have any challenges. There are a lot of people who became rich, they bought land a long time ago. Now most of them sell land for skyscrapers. Then they become apartment owners. They do not have any trouble at all, most of my friends are factory owners now. As my profession is art, I only worked for the money I needed. For example, I opened a jewelry shop in Istanbul somewhere close to my workplace. When I first started working in '79, I had partners. We worked together, we had a company. Then I came here, after I came here, I opened a jewelry shop at KFOR. I was importing gold coins, gold jewelry from Turkey. I opened [my shop] on the base. Of course it was more expensive because it had expenses like importing from Turkey, labor costs. The soldiers realized this, so they started going to Skopje for jewelry shopping, therefore we closed our shop. It didn't work for so long. Here my life was like this. What else? You tell me? {smiles}

Ebru Süleyman: I am curious about how it makes you feel visiting your father's home, where you grew up, as a museum?

Avni Emincik: Of course something inside still stands there... you feel sorry. If you ever read it, there it says that, a foreign woman celebrated her birthday there, just think about that, I don't know, a lot of people said different things about it.

Ebru Süleyman: Did you ever celebrate your birthday there?

Avni Emincik: No. If I request something like that, they will allow it, do you know what I mean. Because there...

Ebru Süleyman: As a kid?

Avni Emincik: We didn't celebrate birthdays as a kid, for God's sake, did even birthdays exist? We would lounge around in the neighborhood all day, let alone celebrating birthdays {smiles}. So our yard was really big, and plenty of neighbor kids would come there, I don't know, we had a walnut tree, which still stands there. It was a lovely place after all, back then, if I lived here, I wouldn't think of selling it to anybody.

Ebru Süleyman: Yes, it is a lovely house.

Avni Emincik: It's a nice place, there is a small house, even the small house has radiators. Think about it, when they were building this house, there is an oven in the kitchen, and they have thread the pipe around the house, they made small holes {explains with his hands}, we used to call it *kunya* [kujna(kitchen)], do they say it like that? You had a place for taking a bath. Even from there, you have hot water and steam, what else would you want more?

Ebru Süleyman: Heating system.

Avni Emincik: Yes, a system, just think about it, they have thought about it before 100, or maybe 150 years ago, because that small house is really old. They used to call it *konak* (mansion), Turkish mansions in the Balkans. They also did research here, they came from Turkey and they examined all Turkish mansions here in the Balkans. There is one house exactly the same in Skopje. Same model, but how they did it or what they did, I couldn't analyze those.

Ebru Süleyman: Before your family, who was living in this small house?

Avni Emincik: My father's uncle was living there. His name was Uncle Aziz, my father's uncle. Then after him, there was a family who lived there, but they also migrated to Turkey before us. My father's cousins, but they were a different family, although still with the same surname, Emincik. Also there is a thing which makes me sad at this museum, it's the name that they have changed. They call it Eminciku, Emin-Eminciku, what is this, I cannot really understand it. We don't have anybody short in our family, my father is 1.85 meters tall, my uncle is 1.75 meters, I am 1.80 meters. They are making this up, that is only what I think now, because I don't know my origins, only if I knew...

Ebru Süleyman: Didn't you have a chance to intervene in the situation?

Avni Emincik: No, after all this time, I am not going to try to intervene for God's sake. Actually...

Ebru Süleyman: Well your surname is certain.

Avni Emincik: No, no. We explained to them, but they just say “We named it that way,” and they don’t say anything else. You must go to the Ministry of Tourism and write a letter there, it’s a lot of work. If I knew Albanian, maybe I would write this letter, do you understand? I would write this request letter, because in *Express*, the *Express* newspaper, there was an article published ten, twelve years ago. At that time, my cousin was the deputy director, deputy director of RTK. I told him about this, and he said, “I cannot do anything about it.” I said, “Let’s talk to the newspaper’s authorities,” and he just said that I should let go of it because it’s a short article, not a big one. I didn’t persist with it, I don’t know why. What else?

Ebru Süleyman: So the house is known by that name?

Avni Emincik: Yes, it’s known like that. What else do you want to ask? {smiles}

Ebru Süleyman: Well, how was growing up in Istanbul like, can you tell us a little about that?

Avni Emincik: Well, growing up in Istanbul means only working to me.

Ebru Süleyman: So you always worked?

Avni Emincik: I always worked. You can count the times I went on holiday, with my wife or alone. After the year ‘95, I stayed alone for a few years, well not exactly alone, I had friends but not a female life partner... I always worked, I always worked... What else? {smiles}

Ebru Süleyman: Do you have a story that you would like to share with us?

Avni Emincik: Well, how can I...

Ebru Süleyman: What else do you remember from your childhood?

Avni Emincik: What can I tell you from my childhood {smiles}, the thing I want to say is that I was gone from here, I stayed there for five years, in primary school in...

Ebru Süleyman: Maybe you remember your grandmother and grandfather?

Avni Emincik: Of course, I do remember! My grandfather, he had sisters, they all passed away in the war in the year ‘45. They also beat my grandfather, his back is bent twice, it’s broken from here {shows with his hands}.

Ebru Süleyman: What’s your grandfather's name?

Avni Emincik: Hayrullah. My grandfather's name is Hayrullah, he is a *hafiz*². He was always reading the Quran. He only ate one or two times a year, he was always fasting. Of course, as his back was bent twice, he couldn't walk too much, he was always home, around the house yard. As a...

Ebru Süleyman: Can you tell what a *hafiz* is for those who don't know what it means?

Avni Emincik: *Hafiz* is someone who always reads the Quran. *Hafiz* is that, not a *hodja*.³ *Hodja* goes to the mosque and reads there, but my grandfather, God knows how many times he has read the Quran. His father was also a *hafiz*, but I don't remember his name. I guess his name was Recep, that is why my father's name is Recep.

He was also a *hafiz* in the Ottoman period, I guess it was like that with grand *vizier*⁴ and stuff. I guess the *hafiz's* job was, when there was a need for reading the Quran, grand *viziers* would invite them for special occasions. Here we have around ten domains, but I don't know the locations. If we could translate Ottoman Turkish into English or Turkish, then we can know where they stand. In other words, I don't know where the locations of the domains are. There are a lot of things given, there are achievement letters, with the *pasha's*⁵ or grand *vizier's* stamp. Of course, these are really long stories that frankly I wasn't interested in at all.

Ebru Süleyman: What about your home?

Avni Emincik: For the home, we sued them. My wife worked on this, as she is a police officer, there are some friends who work for the jail. Well, not jail, but the place where they keep you 48 hours and do an investigation. We gave the case to an advocate there, now we are waiting for the result, but this takes a long time, in other words, it will not be finalized soon. If we win the case, even if I am not here, my children, my grandchildren or my son will get it. What else? {smiles}

Ebru Süleyman: As a family heirloom.

Avni Emincik: Of course, doubtlessly.

Ebru Süleyman: What about your grandmother?

Avni Emincik: My grandmother, my grandmother. I remember my grandmother was someone who used to work, she cooked together with my mother. Back in those times, they used to, a gypsy woman would wash clothes with her hands with clay, at that time, there were no washing machines. Clay is the best compared to other detergents, when they used clay for washing white clothes, they would be

² A term used by Muslims to describe someone who has completely memorized the Quran.

³ A Muslim schoolmaster.

⁴ High-ranking political advisor or minister, usually in Muslim countries where Ottoman's ruled.

⁵ Turkish meaning head, chief was a higher rank in the Ottoman political and military system.

extremely white. Even when we took a bath, we used clay, we used it for cleaning our hair. It was in year '52, '53, there was nothing much back then.

I have nothing to say, God willing that they all will have a faculty diploma, with all the goods, I don't know, I hope they will maintain my surname with all the goods. If I hadn't had a son here, the Emincik surname would be spread by two different families. Now there are three of them, if my daughter gets married, her surname will change. I would be happy of course, you don't know until when you are going to live. It's a decision that God makes.

Ebru Süleyman: Yes. Your sisters are living in Turkey, do they come here to visit you?

Avni Emincik: Of course they are coming, here in our family, there are not only males, there are females too. They are friends with them, they are in the same age group. One of my sisters was born in '56 and the other one in '61. But they have, our family has a strange thing. For example, my aunt's daughter was never married, my sisters never got married, they live in the same house, in my parents' house. That is why about every night, my children talk with their aunts via video call, saying, "Aunty, Aunty," they, of course, love them. They also adore my grandson there. There is nothing to say. While I am alive, I will do everything to make them happy.

Ebru Süleyman: Even if you went to Turkey, you didn't break your connections with your family here?

Avni Emincik: No, why would I? My wife will only go to Turkey when she retires from her job. The kids grew up here, went to primary school here. They also have Turkish citizenship. There we don't have any problems, I also helped my wife with citizenship. It's humanity, if you pass away one day, they can get your pension from there. Here, when you are retired, they cut the salary, they don't pay it to your family. On the other hand, there [in Turkey] they give it to your family, even your kids can get your pension.

Ebru Süleyman: What about the train trip to Turkey, do you remember that?

Avni Emincik: No, I don't remember it, I don't remember it.

Ebru Süleyman: At those times, families would get all their stuff and...

Avni Emincik: Yes, of course. We didn't have much stuff, we didn't get much stuff with us. We took a bed, some stuff, and that is how we arrived there. I remember, when we left our house for the last time, we cried. My father was sad, also my mother. I don't remember that much, but I remember arriving at the terminal. For example, I remember when we arrived at Sirkeci Terminal. There my father's family members welcomed us. I don't remember much...

Ebru Süleyman: At that time migrating was different, compared to now, the status of migrants is different.

Avni Emincik: Now, if you get a [specific] certificate, you can go to Turkey right away, in those times, the prime minister accepted, in those times, the prime minister accepted migrants. I guess he gave 5 thousand marks or 10 thousand marks to people who stayed here. He said, “We are going to accept them.” Just like I have been telling you, I never had a thing, I never had a life, I only had a working life and weekends. {his friend enters from the door} Come, Ekrem, come, come, it will end only now, it’s not a thing that ends in 30 minutes. And there, he is my childhood friend, we grew up together, there is only a one-year age difference. They enrolled in primary school, and I couldn’t, we went to Turkey, they went to primary school together. They remember the day when I was gone, the entire neighborhood cried, well, the ones in my age...

Ekrem: I didn’t cry at all.

Avni Emincik: You were always crying, you said so... {laughs}

When I came back here, I visited all my childhood friends. Plenty of them passed away, some of them. For example, I had a next door neighbor, her daughter who worked with me here. A friend named Şevki, Nobırdalı, Şevki Nobırdalı. He was next to my building, next to my yard, there was a little door between...

There was a thing, around the time we were about to leave, there was an uncle, Uncle Ali, Ali Macun who was from Vuçitrn, he used to import pastries from Turkey. He lived above our apartment for two years. There were two girls, a boy and the parents, and when we had a guest, they wouldn’t mind it, and they would quickly make a cake together and come to visit us while the guest was still here, it happened every time, we had such an adventure. Then I met with them in Turkey, their father passed away a long time ago, he was very old. Then I used to go to school and his shop was just next to our school, it was a grocery store back then. Just like that, I was visiting them, we had such adventures together, I don’t know, when I think about it, I start to remember again. Do you understand and, if you want, we can just end it now?

Ebru Süleyman: Yes.

Avni Emincik: How was it, did you like it?

Ebru Süleyman: Yes, thank you very much. Thank you for your time.

Avni Emincik: Thank you too. I don’t know what to say, thanks a lot. Have a nice day.