

# Oral History Kosovo

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## INTERVIEW WITH MAHMUT MUMCI

Pristina | Date: December 8, 2018

Duration: 77 minutes

### Present:

1. Mahmut Mumci (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.*

## Part One

**Ebru Süleyman:** Welcome.

**Mahmut Mumci:** Thank you very much. As far as I understand, your intention is to do an interview with me. First, I want to provide you some information about me. I actually have two names, Mahmut and Idris. This is because, before I was born, I had a brother named Idris and he passed away, that is why they named me after him. But they didn't want to repeat the same name, so they also gave me the other name which I use on a daily basis. I don't want to bother you with this name issue any longer, but I only found out about this when I was in primary school.

For applying to high school, I needed my birth certificate, but unfortunately there was no Mahmut registered at city hall. I was lucky that the register that was working there at that time was our neighbor, Şeraffettin Salih. He said, "You are not Idris, Idris passed away, but you are not Mahmut either, now I will find you in here." And he knew when I was born, so he searched the registrations and he found that formally my name is Idris not Mahmut, and I only found out about this when I was doing my registration for high school. The situation was straightened out, but all my life, I had to use two names, my friends and family were calling me Mahmut, and in all formal relations I was Idris.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So this reminds you of your family.

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, that's right. Then I paid more attention to understand why this happened, turns out that my uncle wanted to honor his father by giving me his name, so when he registered me at city hall, he only gave the name Idris but not Mahmut. Year 1947, September the 10th is the day that this happened because that day is my birthday.

I was born here in Pristina in a craftsman's family. My father, grandfather and the ones before them were either craftsmen or a trader. My father worked both in crafts and agriculture. We had fields and animals. That type of life lasted until the year 1968. After that year, it was forbidden to have animals in gardens in Pristina, that is why animals were removed from houses. After that, my father worked only in a saddler shop and took care of his children.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So his profession as a craftsman was saddlery?

**Mahmut Mumci:** My father was a saddler. As a kid, I remember that Pristina was a well-known place for craftsmen. According to some data, there were 250 craftsmen shops at that time, at the bazaar, the most common professions were saddlers, shoemakers and tailors. The prominent family for saddlery was our Mumci family. The prominent family for shoemakers was the Sraja family, they had at least four or five shops.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Can you explain what saddlery is for those who don't know it? What kind of profession is this?

**Mahmut Mumci:** So now this profession, saddlery is directly relevant to animals. In other words, saddler is the one who provides and makes the necessary equipment {smiles} for animals to run. They used leather in their work. They made the neck collar, the ring and saddle, they were used for riding horses. Bridle and headstall, they had everything that you needed. In fact, I spent quite a lot of time of my childhood as a helper in my father's shop. Well, I wasn't there all the time, until I was in the third year of my university, I used to help my father in his shop.

After I made it to the third year in university, my path was certain. I had completed more than half of my lectures in the faculty. I was quite good and a successful student. That is why I had to leave my job. I continued with my university. Because I was a successful student, I got the university scholarship. At the same time, I was working as an assistant for the histology courses. I was lucky that everything went great in the last years of university, so I never had any financial problems. During those times, the saddlery profession was almost over. Because cars, horses and animals were banned from Pristina, that's why there was no need for saddlers anymore.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Do you remember your grandfather? Idris?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Now, when we talk about my family tree {smiles}, I don't remember my grandfather, but because I am interested in such manners, I know that I am the seventh generation of my family. According to information that I could access, I am the seventh generation of my family that lived in Pristina. After me, there are my kids, so I could say that we have an eight generation of history here in Pristina.

If I have to put my finger on it, I can't explain because I don't have any information about why they migrated here. There are several stories, but I can say that we have been here since the eighth generation.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So the 8th generation you have been in Pristina?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes. Now my father's name is Mehmet, Mehmet's father is Idris, which is also my formal name. Idris's father's name is also Mehmet and Mehmet's father's name is Agus. After Agus, there is someone named Ahmet. Well, if you put it in the order like this, I am the seventh generation.

**Ebru Süleyman:** What about your mom?

**Mahmut Mumci:** My mother, she is also from an old family from Pristina. Actually, my mother's family is complicated. My mother's father is from Gjakova... Where were we? Like I said, my mother's father is from Gjakova and her mother is from Prizren. Mrs. Bercüzan, she came to Pristina in 1907 as a bride.

**Ebru Süleyman:** 1907?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, in 1907. They are my mother's family from Skopje. Her father was Sadik and her grandfather was Hayrullah. In 1904 or 1905, they settled in Pristina from Skopje.

**Ebru Süleyman:** You were born in 1947, so you spent your childhood in Pristina in the '50s right? Do you remember that period? The neighborhoods?

**Mahmut Mumci:** How can I forget? Our home was in one of the oldest neighborhoods in Pristina, they called it Yeni Meytepler [New Schools] neighborhood because our street was around the old Vuk Karadžić Primary School. Actually they called that street Kanlilar neighborhood. Also next to the Kanlilar family's home, there was big empty land.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Which house belongs to the Kanlilar family?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Right next to us, below Suna's home. There was big empty land named Narka. All neighborhood kids used to gather there. There was no foreigner on our street. Everyone had Turkish origins and they were all from Pristina. Only two families were from Montenegro and Serbia. I remember it like today, when you entered our street after where the schools are, just on the right when you keep on walking up, the first home belongs to Abdurrahman and to his brother. They were both shoemaker craftsmen. Then around the '50s, in '56 - '57, they migrated to Turkey. Their neighbor was Kemal Şaban, who also was one of the last principals of Meto Bajraktar. Turkish primary schools, one of the last principals... Kemal Şaban also had two brothers. One of them was our poet Naim, he passed away, he used to write children's poems. And there was Ahmet, his other brother.

After these houses, there was a family who came from Janjevo and settled here, the Bikliç family, Uncle Hasim. Above them was Mrs. Cüzade. Mrs. Cüzade was a woman who became a widow at an early age, she had two daughters, Hatice and Hamdiye. A lot of these people are no longer alive, but passed away. Only Mrs. Cüzade's one daughter is alive, Hamdiye, she lives in Pristina but not in the

same neighborhood. Above them, there was Mr. Şemsi and Mrs. Şükriye living together. Faruk, Celal and Süvey were their children. Süvey used to be a pharmacist, he also passed away. Celal and Faruk are still in Pristina, but not in their old home, they moved somewhere else. After them, there was Mr. Şemsi's uncle Mr. Ahmet. Mr. Ahmet also had four children, sons. One of them died in war, in fact he was a war hero...

**Ebru Süleyman:** In which war?

**Mahmut Mumci:** In the Second World War, while he was fighting as a partizan, he was slaughtered in 1943, his name was Zeynel. His other brothers, Kemal used to be a carpenter. Also another brother Bedri, he used to be a carpenter as well also there was Şerafetdin. Şerafetdin is the one who I mentioned earlier, the one working as a clerk in the city hall, who found the clues and found my formal name. Above us, there was Uncle Faik living. He was also a shoemaker, and he also migrated to Turkey. After them, there was the Maçka family's home. In the Maçka family, there was Mrs. Cemile and Mrs. Vezire. Two siblings, one of them living on the first floor, the other one on the second floor. They had this really old and large house, Turkish Ottoman style.

**Ebru Süleyman:** At that time, were all the houses the same? The old ones?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, all of them.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Now the one next to Elena Gjika...

**Mahmut Mumci:** The Kocadiş' home.

**Ebru Süleyman:** They looked like Kocadiş' home right?

**Mahmut Mumci:** A little bit smaller, not that large but there were houses who looked like that one. Now on our street, there are only two old houses left. One of them is Mrs. Cüzade's home, now her grandchild Pleorat is living there. And on the street corner is Şaçir's home, deceased Şaçir Toygar's home, there was her mother Mrs. Çamile. Now Şaçir's wife and children are still living there. Today Emel, Abdülrahman, Ercan, they are still living there.

These all were on the right side of our street. Now if you go in the same direction again on the left side, the first house was Tanik family's home. They were also two brothers, craftsman Halit and his brother who worked as a shoemaker. They had a shoemaker shop. Below them there was Zaim's home. They still live there, they didn't move, their old house used to have a really large garden, and it was really interesting, but unfortunately they tore down the house and made a new one. Uncle Feta and Ferat used to live there.

**Ebru Süleyman:** What was interesting about that house? The architecture?

**Mahmut Mumci:** In terms of architecture, I especially remember when we were little, we used to go there as a kid, and it had very interesting decorations on the ceiling, but what a shame that it is gone now, all gone... Below them there was Mr. Hayrullah's house, who was a cleric, *hafiz*<sup>1</sup> Hayrullah. He had a calm personality. He also had two sons, Ismail and Ibrahim. They both passed away. He has one grandson Vedat, the house still belongs to them, but they are living in Turkey. They used to come and go, but lately they have stopped visiting their house.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So you spent your childhood in this neighborhood?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, in this neighborhood. I had a lot of friends there. When you start counting from below, there were Atif, Edip, Erdem, Mazhar, İsak from Janjevo. They were all living in the same house. Then above them, there was an Albanian family living on our street, the Vershevcs. Skender Vrshevcı, as a matter of fact, they are still living there, and they also settled there so early that we were only speaking Turkish with each other. Even today {smiling} we still speak Turkish, we are the only two that didn't move from there anyways. Also there are neighbors of Skender, Nozan's living there, Uncle Aliş's grandchildren.

Above all of them, in the neighborhood I mentioned Kanlilar, there were two families living there. The Binçe family, some of them still live there. Kemal, Ümran and İskeder. And they had two more sisters Masume and Suzan, they are living in Denmark right now. Kemal was my classmate in school. Just like this... The ones that I mentioned from Janjevo, they all moved to Turkey. There was Uncle Hakki, Mahzar's grandfather, he was also my classmate.

**Ebru Süleyman:** When did they move?

**Mahmut Mumci:** They moved in 1956. Also migrations to Turkey started in '55. Year '55 - '56 - '57, these are the years that people migrated the most. It's really interesting that I had a photograph from my first grade in school. In that photograph, there are 40 students. Only twelve of them stayed in Pristina; all the others migrated to Turkey.

**Ebru Süleyman:** In which year did you start going to school?

**Mahmut Mumci:** I started school in the year 1954.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So in '54, there were 40 students in school.

**Mahmut Mumci:** More than 40 students actually. Yes. In '54, we were 40, more than 40 students, 42 in

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<sup>1</sup> A term used by Muslims for someone who has completely memorized the Quran.

school. But in '55, a lot of them migrated. So in the second grade, I guess that our number fell down by a half. I cannot remember all of them but, I remember most of them, the ones who stayed here. I registered at Meto Bajraktar Primary School, which just opened. And there were not 40 but more than 40 students in our class. My first teacher's name was Ismail Sičan or Aksoy, he had two surnames, but he used Sičan more. Then one day, our teachers made a list about where we live. According to that list, they divided our class into two, and they moved some of us to Vuk Karadžić.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So you started going to school at Meto Bajraktar and then continued at Vuk Karadžić?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, I continued there, I finished the first grade there. For the second grade, they had opened a class in the gymnasium, today's high school, it is called Sami Frasheri. Back then, it was called Miladin Popović. Primary school students, we finished our second grade there. That year we had two teachers. First Naim Şaban, then he went to do his military service, and Mrs. Behice covered for him. Then again in the third grade, they changed our school. We went to the old technical school, where we call it Lovac in front of Internat. Today, it is city hall's archive building. That building is also remaining from the Ottomans.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So the technical school was the one next to the white building, today's city hall archive building?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, yes, the old one, where the archive building is. At that time, the school's name used to be Miladin Popović. So I finished the third and fourth grade there. There our teacher's name was Müberra. Teacher Müberra, actually she was from Mitrovica, but her husband was a politician, so they had to move to Pristina, and that's how she became our teacher. Then we moved again to Meto Bajraktar and I finished my fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth year there, and then went to high school. After high school, I went to university.

**Ebru Süleyman:** About these migrations that started in '55, during '55 - '56, why did people migrate from here?

**Mahmut Mumci:** We were so young, so we couldn't understand exactly why. We only predicted that, this family is gone, maybe they will go too. But when we achieved awareness after some age, I surely can say that the reason was pressure. There was a case that everybody knew really well and made a lot of people's lives miserable. They used to say that supposedly there are some families hiding guns in their home, and they used to force themselves into family members in order to collect guns from houses. Here our folks were the ones who suffered a lot. With all the beating, money, they couldn't handle this pressure, so in other words, they were forced to migrate. They asked, "Why Turkey?" Because no one else accepted, at that time, people who migrated were not only Turkish, there were Albanian families too, but Turkey accepted everyone. Now, here, according to some data, supposedly there was an agreement between Yugoslavia and Turkey, based on this agreement, Turkey had

accepted all immigrants. They were almost forced to migrate, people sold all of their stuff or abandoned their homes and migrated almost completely naked.

**Ebru Süleyman:** I guess these families had a lot of farms and stuff but they were all nationalized, right?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, everything was nationalized, but this is some kind of pressure. They interrupted their lifestyle with force, for example, *ferECE*<sup>2</sup> was a tradition back at that time and they made it forbidden to wear. There was pressure on religion in schools, in order to move people away from religion, the mosques were either turned into shopping centers or were being shut down.

**Ebru Süleyman:** In the '50s, what did people used to wear? Did they wear *ferECE*?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Well, as much as I remember, until the year '51 - '52, ladies in Pristina used to wear *ferECE*. Although that was rare, you could see women without *ferECE*, the ones who were wearing it were usually locals. Then in year '51, '52, *ferECE* was banned, it was forbidden to wear. *Ferece* was forbidden, but the ones who wanted could only wear a scarf on their heads. Then, when we slowly look at the situation in schools, we can now understand some pressures that we were not aware of before. For example, besides the other classes, we had Serbian language as a mandatory class, almost every day in a week, at least three classes. Also, if you had a bad grade in Serbian language, it was mandatory that you have to repeat your grade. You would lose a year just because you didn't know Serbian language very well.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So classes were usually held in Turkish language, but Serbian language was extra?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Now you had only one class of Serbian language when you were in primary school. The others were held in Turkish. It was because you had only one teacher, but we often held classes in Serbian because supposedly there was not enough staff for teaching in Turkish. For example, chemistry, physics, arts, back in that time, we had a class called "good writing," Serbian teachers would also teach these classes to us.

**Ebru Süleyman:** When you were a kid, you obviously went outside to play. Do you remember those times?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Of course, kids not playing in the streets {smiles}, there is no such thing, we played around in our neighborhood with kids, we played various games. We played hide and seek {smiles}, we played a game called "fanta" with marbles, or sometimes we used walnuts to play that game. Then there was a game called "five stones"... *alti taş* [six stones], we would dig a hole and throw stones at that hole from a distance, the one who could throw all the stones into the hole would win the game.

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<sup>2</sup> Turk.: *ferECE*, a veil concealing the whole face except the eyes, worn by Muslim women in public.



Then there was a game called *derecik* [little river], we played that. We would blow up carbide for special days like Eid or Ramadan. We would dig a hole in Narka where I mentioned before. We would place a tin there and fill it with carbide so it would make a sound when it exploded.

**Ebru Süleyman:** What is carbide?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Carbide is gunpowder, some kind of raw gunpowder. Like that, we used to say carbide explosion. During those times, we often used to go out with neighborhood kids and walk around. We would go to *Tavuk Bahçe* [Chicken Garden] and *Girmi* [Gërmia]. After *Tavuk Bahçe*, there was a place called *Strlište*, “field of fire.” It was a *teferiç* [picnic] place for the towners, people would often go to the ridge, they used to call it the ridge as well. Actually back in those times, Pristina had four *teferiç* places. First one is this ridge, the second one is *Tavuk Bahçe*, the third one is *Girmi* and the fourth one *Dragodan*, they used to call it *Çingene baglığı* [Gypsy’s vineyard], people would often go here for *teferiç*.

**Ebru Süleyman:** What would you do for *teferiç*?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Now when you say *teferiç*, we mean picnic, it’s all the same. We would prepare food, the ones easy to carry, and we used to drink tea and coffee there.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Did you used to drink tea from a *samovar*?<sup>3</sup>

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes from a *samovar*, and we also used to light a fire. As much as I remember, everybody drank tea in their home, at least once a day. One teapot for sure and maybe, when guests came, they would also drink tea a second time. Yes. In our neighborhood, every house had a large garden. In those gardens, there were various flowers and trees. Among these trees, there was a gazebo and we would hang out there and enjoy {smiling}.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Was the gazebo in the garden?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, it was usually made from wood, and we would hang out in there, usually in the middle of the garden or in the corner, but there were no houses without flowers.

**Ebru Süleyman:** I guess the town was more beautiful back in those times, right?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Now we can count it, on our street up to the schools, to the Rijeka street, there were eight on the other side, ten {counting}, there used to be 18 houses, now today, if we go there to count houses again, there would be more than 30. So everybody used to have large gardens, where you could hang out comfortably. Also houses were large, there weren’t any small houses.

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<sup>3</sup> A heated metal container traditionally used to heat and boil water.

**Ebru Süleyman:** You finished primary school, then high school?

**Mahmut Mumci:** After finishing primary school, I registered in high school.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Where did you finish your high school?

**Mahmut Mumci:** In Pristina.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Yes, but at which high school?

**Mahmut Mumci:** I studied at Sami Frasheri, back in time, it used to be called Miladin Popović, but then they changed it to Ivo Lola Ribar. Now it's last name is Sami Frasheri.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So in these times you were studying in high school and also helping your father at work?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes. Until I graduated from high school, I was a trainee at my father's shop.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Where was your father's shop located?

**Mahmut Mumci:** It was in the old bazaar.

**Ebru Süleyman:** In the Covered Bazaar on Divan Yoli street?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Well, I missed the bazaar with covers because it was demolished in '46, '47, but according to the information we have, it was just below the *Çarşi Camisi* [Mosque's Bazaar].

**Ebru Süleyman:** It was below the *Çarşi Camisi*?

**Mahmut Mumci:** While going to Divan Yoli street, in that dead end. There were three things, three streets {explaining with his hands} in the old bazaar. At the end of the road, there used to be a *şadırvan*,<sup>4</sup> after the *şadırvan*, there were again three streets to the north, where the craftsmen's shops were located.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So today, the *şadırvan* isn't there anymore, right?

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<sup>4</sup> The fresh water drinking fountain in the main square of Prizren. *Shadervan* (*Sadirvan* in Arabic) means precisely a fountain, built to provide water for more than one person at once, usually for ritual ablutions, and is a typical element of Ottoman architecture.

**Mahmut Mumci:** No, no, no. This *şadırvan* used to be really close to the sculpture in the main square. I think that the remains of the *şadırvan* used to be there until the year 1960. Then there were landscape projects. Because of that, the bazaar was demolished, and there was no trace of old sculptures. According to some information, in the old bazaar, there used to be more than 200 craftsman shops in Pristina. They all had specific locations, for example, there was a blacksmith bazaar, saddler or tailors' bazaar. They all had specific locations.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Where were they? For example, tailors?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Tailors... now when you go to the north from the bazaar on the first street, there used to be saddlers and shoemakers. Other than these professions, on the second street, there were mostly tailors. And on the third street, there was an *Uzor*<sup>5</sup> shop. That street was the ropemakers' street, there were ropemaker's shops there.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Where was your father's shop, I guess you said it was in the old bazaar?

**Mahmut Mumci:** In the old bazaar, where I spent my childhood as a trainee, also they used to call it the old bazaar street, I remember the owners of every shop. Now it's...

**Ebru Süleyman:** Where is it now?

**Mahmut Mumci:** The only remaining building from the old bazaar is the shops below the Kosovo Parliament Building and Social Insurance Institution. Now the first shop is jewelry, I guess the second one is a lawyer, then there is a coffeehouse, I guess Barış from Bölükbaş's family is running it. There is only one shoemaker shop that has never changed, it belongs to the Straja family. The last owner Irfan passed away, now it is rented to someone who is continuing the same profession.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So that shop is the only structure that remains from the old bazaar...

**Mahmut Mumci:** From the old bazaar, that is the only shop that remains. On the other side, all the shops are in the same place on Divan Yoli street, but the owners and the professions are different now. In front of these shops, there used to be an inn, they used to call it *Bitli Han* [Liced Inn]. There used to be a fountain, *bitli çeşme* [liced fountain]. A lot of people from the bazaar used that fountain. Either that fountain or *Çarşi Cami's* fountain. The old fountain still remains there.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Do you remember that inn?

**Mahmut Mumci:** I remember, I remember. That inn was demolished in the year of 1956. That is where the ProCredit building is in the same place now.

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<sup>5</sup> State franchise store.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Because my grandfather told me about this, his father owned the inn, he used to work there.

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, it's possible, I remember when it was an inn, also, I remember that there was an entrance to the inn from the *Bitli* [Liced] street {explains with his hands} with doors and arch, you would enter from there, and there was a big space for cars, people used to come there on Sundays with their cars. It had two floors, there were rooms upstairs, and downstairs was used as storage.

From the inn to Divan Yoli street, there used to be a barrel maker, a craftsman who makes barrels. Also, we had a friend from school named Ibrahim, we used to call him Kataroz, their shop used to be there. They had a kebab shop next to them. From the old bazaar street walking down to robemakers street, there used to be a synagogue, so in the bazaar, also Jews used to have shops besides Turks and Albanians. Back in that time, there were two quiltmakers, one watchmaker and two tailors that I can remember. Kara Kusević and Nasko were Jewish watchmakers. There was also the Pirlićević family who used to be tailors as well. They were the craftsmen from the old bazaar.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Where was this synagogue located?

**Mahmut Mumci:** The synagogue is next to the Parliament's biggest entrance. After that area was demolished, they moved the synagogue. The synagogue still remains today, they moved it next to Emincik's place, next to the Ethnological Museum.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So I guess the Jewish families aren't living here anymore?

**Mahmut Mumci:** I heard that Jewish families lived here during the Second World War. They were protected by locals. Some of them were taken by German invaders to concentration camps. Then after the Israeli state was established, they slowly started to migrate. I remember there was a Jew's grave above *Tavuk Bahçe*. It wasn't far away from our neighborhood, so we would often go there. I don't remember the exact number, but there were ten, twelve graves like a tomb. We would go there {smiles} lay down into the graves, take our clothes off and sunbathe. There were Jewish symbols and Hebranic writings, but I am not sure if they still remain or not. I heard that there are still three or four graves and they have taken them under protection {explains with his hands}, but I have not seen it.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Now they call this place the Boxing Club, what was that place before?

**Mahmut Mumci:** The building was built in the Serbian period, Serbo-Croatian Kingdom period. It was made as a sports club. It was made for performing various sports, as a sports club. Also, after the war, the *Sokol* [Hawk] residence's owner was the Pristina Boxing Club, they used to continue their exercises there. Also Pristina received the best results in the sport of boxing. I do remember there was the

*Radnički Klub* [Workers' Club] whose boxers won championships several times while we lived in Yugoslavia. There were some successful boxers there from the center of the town. For example, Mehemet Ali Türbedar, İbuş Çolak. There was Bırklaç in heavyweight boxing, there was no one who could defeat him, he was really successful.

**Ebru Süleyman:** It's interesting, so boxing was Pristina's sport.

**Mahmut Mumci:** Best results in Pristina in sports were from the sport of boxing. Until the '50s, '60s, '70s, it was successful, then the '80s, there was a period of regression. Then in the '80s, the first wrestling club was established. Also, they made big progress, even that Pristina wrestling club had a world champion in freestyle wrestling. We also had a Mediterranean Champion. I have knowledge about all this because I was one of the councilmen when the club was established. I was even assigned to the presidency for two periods. That is why we had such great results.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Did you also practice the sports?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Not in wrestling, only in administration {smiles}, not active in sports, I don't have an athlete's body.

## Part Two

**Ebru Süleyman:** I have heard that you were a very successful student. After that, how did you decide to study medicine? When did you decide on this?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Well, it is true, I was a successful student. I liked my school and lectures. I had only one flaw, that my handwriting was really bad {smiles}. Now, if we talk about deciding on this, we lived together with my uncle. He was really sick from tuberculosis, at that time, there was no cure for tuberculosis, so the patients lived long and confined to bed. In high school, we had a Turkish subject and I remembered how he suffered a lot. There was a written examination that day and the topic was "What do you want to be?" There was only one thing that passed through my mind, I wanted to be a doctor, I wrote about that and I never changed my mind again... after graduating from university, I worked as a doctor for 40 years in Pristina.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Where did you attend university?

**Mahmut Mumci:** I registered at my university in Belgrade, first, second and third years, I studied there, then I came back to Pristina.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So in that time, the medicine faculty had just opened here.

**Mahmut Mumci:** Same year I registered in Belgrade, it was opened also in Pristina, it was opened in December. But I registered in Belgrade in September, that is why I continued there. It was really nice there, I was also successful in Belgrade too.

**Ebru Süleyman:** How was life there, going to Belgrade after Pristina? It's a big city...

**Mahmut Mumci:** Well Belgrade was really attractive and a big center. There were various places to visit and see, it was really nice. Then there was a protest among students in 1968, it lasted for four-five days...

**Ebru Süleyman:** Were you there at that time?

**Mahmut Mumci:** No, the event happened in April, I went there in September. After those events, there were a lot of positive efforts in education, university education, especially for university students, they made dorms. Students had rights, for example, cars used in traffic took students everywhere for a small fee. They created a standard level with really good quality.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So you caught that level?

**Mahmut Mumci:** New, I was one of the first one {smiles} to get a scholarship from the developments.

**Ebru Süleyman:** So you lived in Belgrade for three years?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, actually two years, in the third year, I moved here.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Were there students from other places of Yugoslavia?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, there were, at that time, there were almost 500 students in medicine. There were students from all Yugoslavia in this number. We were 50 students that were registered from Kosovo to Belgrade at that time.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Did you know each other?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes we did, we used to hang out. Also there were associations.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Were they also from Pristina?

**Mahmut Mumci:** They weren't all from Pristina, they were from different places in Kosovo, but some of them were from Pristina. There was Selahattin Kaykuş, he was Gorani, I used to hang out with him a

lot. There were also some other people that I used to see, but we hung out together the most. There was Nusret, Nusret Ziyabeg, and İskender Çıtak who went there before me. Also it is interesting that, when I went to Belgrade, I didn't know Albanian really well. Because in school, it was either Turkish or Serbian. In our neighborhood, we spoke no other language than Turkish. It is interesting that after migration started, the first family who settled in our neighborhood learned Turkish and they were talking to us in Turkish. When the number of people who migrated increased, also people who were settling increased, so we started learning Albanian. I would joke and say that I learned Albanian in Belgrade, "How?" They asked, and I told them I had two roommates in a dorm room and they didn't speak either Turkish or Serbian, so {smiles} we had to speak Albanian.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Which year did you say that you came back to Pristina?

**Mahmut Mumci:** I came back to Pristina in '72. In 1972.

**Ebru Süleyman:** In those years, Pristina had changed, it got very modernized.

**Mahmut Mumci:** Now maybe the year '72 was the brightest time of Pristina after the Second World War. It was like this certainly because of political reasons. Because at that time, there were constitutional modifications and changes in order to be democratic, and we all started to feel that. Also, as the Turkish minority, it was our brightest time too, it is interesting that in some ways the rights we gained in the press were really good achievements. For example, there was our *Tan*<sup>6</sup> newspaper, radio broadcasts, we even had two programs, first program and the second program. There was only one flaw at this time, Albanians were pressuring us by saying, "Don't go to Turkish schools." In schools {smiles}, staff numbers started to increase but student numbers decreased.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Why not to go?

**Mahmut Mumci:** When Serbian nationalism started to decrease, on the other hand, this other type of nationalism began to develop. I think that this kind of nationalism had negative impacts on our education.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Maybe it was because of trying to show Kosovo as more homogenous?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Maybe, we can say that this was a kind of assimilation. There were forced situations. On the other hand, like I mentioned, we had an opportunity to have a program on TV, on the radio, press rights, even for education, some books were brought from Turkey or published here. Then we started to have cooperation with Turkey in cultural events. In the 1970s, there was at least one artist coming here, I remember this. We would be delighted. All of the artists that we knew and that we had

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<sup>6</sup> Turk.: *Tan* literally means dawn, is the first newspaper in Turkish language in Kosovo that started its publishing life on May 1, 1969 and closed down in 1992.

heard starting from Emel Sayın to Kadri Şalman, various artists were guests here: Muazzez Abacı, Kadri Şalman, Emel Sayın, and who else was there, İnci Çayırılı and Barış Manço came at later times.

**Ebru Süleyman:** It seems as though cultural life was very vital.

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, yes.

**Ebru Süleyman:** If we compare, even livelier than nowadays.

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, yes, it was richer... It was richer and more marvelous because the artists who would visit were not coming alone as a person, but with all of their crews. It would be quite hard to find an available place to go to the concert, or sometimes they had concerts with meals at Hotel Grand or some place like that, and it would be very hard to find a ticket to those.

**Ebru Süleyman:** In those times, did you go on holiday? I guess you had more freedom in terms of traveling in the Yugoslavia period.

**Mahmut Mumci:** That's right. You reminded me well. Even when we were in primary school, there were holidays organized by city hall and the Provincial Directorate for Education. First trip I remember was when I finished my first grade, I went to Girmi [Gërmia] for a month. But at that time, we used to camp there with tents. We were going there early in the morning and returning late at night. But only children, the bigger students were usually staying over there at night. So this traveling that had started early was almost an opportunity for holidays. In the last few years, we had the possibility to travel to other places. For example, there was a camping area in Kaçanik, Brezovica and Deçan.

Then we started going abroad. I was lucky to be one of the first ones that went to the beach because they had just started organizing the trips. In 1957, we went to Dugirat next to Split. We went there by train in two wagons, they took us to Split. Then we took the ferry and we saw the sea for the first time, it was the first time that we were so far away from Pristina. There were some of us that even took the train for the first time. We went to a place called Dugirat near Omis. It lasted for a month, then they created a campus in Pula, so we went there.

I guess that these trips and holidays are the best times of our childhood. It was tradition back then to travel to Yugoslavia after finishing high school. We would travel. Also I remember, when we were in high school, our friends usually had some financial problems {smiles}. All of us couldn't afford the trip. I was thinking of what to do, then I remembered that there was a guy named Abdül who worked at the hospital's telephone center and established the connections. I heard from him that they needed to dig a canal for a phone cable.

Then I thought maybe we can do it, we are in our best shape, 17-18 years old. I went to my class and asked them if they would work in this kind of job. There were some saying yes and some saying no so I



thought, “Let me just go there again and actually ask if they would give us the work.” Then I went to the hospital. There was Rüstem Statovci who was working on finance, I found him. Abdül took me to him and said, “Talk to this man.” Then I started talking to him. I told him that we have information that they will dig a canal. From the dental polyclinic to the children’s hospital, they needed a canal, around 150 meters. I heard I said, “We want to go on a school trip but only four-five of us can afford it, we are 24 students.” I said but we were only 18. “If you could contribute somehow, it would be great.” I said. “We can dig that tunnel and you can support us financially.” He stopped for a second and looked at me, and said, “Can you do it?” “Yes, surely we can.” I said. Then I called a few people back, at that time, there were really strong guys in our class {smiles}, there was Çamil Vlahinja, Emin Mecihan, Hamdi Begoli, İbrahim, Mürteza, myself, Recep Şlek, all of us, I was the smallest, I was the smallest. We just went there, so he could see who he was working with.

Then we said, “Look, we will come here in the early morning and start digging,” our classes were afternoon, so in the afternoon, we will go to school. He went to talk with the manager, Sogović, he was a well-known doctor at that time, he said that, “Give the job to them.” So we started, we dug that canal, we worked for one week almost ten days, 150 meter canal. We were going there with our school bags, after digging, we would go to school. We were digging for three or four hours. I remember it just like today, they gave us 150,000 denars in that period’s money, I know that three-four people didn’t come with us, we were 15-16 students who worked, we all got twelve thousand each. For the school trip we had to pay 600 denars, so we paid and the rest was our pocket money. It is one of the best memories, we worked, earned, and traveled all of Yugoslavia and saw everything.

**Ebru Süleyman:** You only mentioned guys in your class, there were also women there right?

**Mahmut Mumci:** No, we took ladies with us too. From the ladies, there were Aliye Muyko, Leman Safçi, Nermin Bayram, İgbal Cinci, Cemile Mümin, Sebiha Hüdaverdi, Meliha Spahi, Nazan Geli, Nazan Kurteş. Who else? There was a girl called Behar from Prizren, I had a crush on her. Who else? There were 18 people there.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Then did you travel in Yugoslavia by train or how?

**Mahmut Mumci:** By train. From here, we went to Belgrade, we began our trip at night. In the morning, we arrived in Belgrade. Then we walked around all day in Belgrade, we went to the stone square, castle arena, and to the zoo.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Was it your first time in Belgrade?

**Mahmut Mumci:** No, I had an opportunity to go there before, I already knew Belgrade. Before that time, I went there to high school in 1963. “Are we going on holiday? Yes. Where?” One year ago, we were in Pula, the city hall had organized a trip. “How can we go?” Then we five close friends went to be

a member of *Ferialni Savez*<sup>7</sup> then we got our card, we found our *Ferialni Dom* [dormitory] in Pula, the address was Banjola Vesalina number 6 {smiles}. We made a reservation, paid half of it in advance. Then with this member card, there was a 75 percent discount on tickets. Five of us went to Pula when we were only 14-15 years old. Almost 1500-km road, five people. We stayed there for two weeks. After that year, almost every year, we went to a different place, when summer was coming, we would gather at *Ferialni Savez* and just travel.

**Ebru Süleyman:** What is that, you were a member of what?

**Mahmut Mumci:** *Ferialni Savez*, it is kind of like the summer holiday association, Ferie...

**Ebru Süleyman:** Now it does not exist...

**Mahmut Mumci:** Holiday association, summer association, something like that... we first went there in '63. Then there was a concert in '64 in Belgrade. They used to call it Balkanijada. Tanju Okan, Erol Büyükburç, and Zaliha were three artists who represented Turkey. After going on these holidays, we said, "Should we go to Belgrade for this concert?" We had our cards from *Ferialni Savez*, we bought the tickets gathered together and went to Belgrade. We traveled around all day, at night we went to the concert, it was held in the stone square. We met with artists from Turkey. They were also surprised, Turkish youth in Belgrade, then we explained that we are not from Belgrade, but we are from Pristina, we came from there. Then late at night, we took the train back to Pristina, Kosovo Polje.

**Ebru Süleyman:** In those times, did you compare Pristina to other cities, was there a big difference?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Well, in the '70s, Pristina was developing fast. The condition and appearance had changed a lot, also construction of buildings and establishing the university was a huge step. There was a lot of progress, which could be seen with bare eyes and were appreciated, there was positive progress, especially after these political modifications. In 1971, with constitutional modifications, Kosovo's political status was changed from province, it became an autonomous state. It was almost a republic. We felt those positive developments. Like I said, everything was good except that the student number was decreasing in schools.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Do you remember the time when the first TV came, or when did things like this start to become widespread?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Like this {he claps}, I remember. Here in Pristina, we watched the first program in the year 1960. The occasion was that Rome, Italy was hosting the Olympic Games. The football match was one of the games that they did a live broadcast. Back in that time, there was a supermarket next to

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<sup>7</sup>Serbian: *Ferijalni Savez*, organization that gathered youths, educated them, sent them to travel and provided food and accommodations.

*Çarşi Cami* [Bazaar Mosque], now there is a parking area. The supermarket manager was Rifat Macir. I don't know how he could get it, where did he take it from, but he placed a television to showcase. He placed the satellite on the mosque's minaret, he turned the satellite to Jastrebac, and there were hundreds, maybe thousands, of people waiting to watch the football match. In 1960, first television... Then for two-three years, it became widespread and programs started to have more quality. Here they were building the transmission stations, the first transmission station was built in college.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Before that, I guess there was only radio?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, radio.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Do you remember something else?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Well, I remember these things that I mentioned, I am not sure what else to tell...

**Ebru Süleyman:** When did you meet Mrs. Resmiye?

**Mahmut Mumci:** When I came back from Belgrade, I met her here, when I was a student. Our relationship began in the year 1972 and we got married in '74. When we got married, she just graduated from university. After a few months, I graduated. Then we have a total of 85 years of service in healthcare. In healthcare and in the other fields, we always tried to be active as much as possible. She had a great opportunity that she was a manager at a community health center in Pristina. I worked as a head doctor at the chest diseases dispensary for 30, even 33 years, as a head doctor. At the chest diseases dispensary, I worked for 37 years.

After the most recent war, we did all we could in all aspects. We were active in the [Turkish] political party. And after that there was an offer, actually, the offer came to me: the first prime minister, there was a need for one of the ministers to be Turkish. It was requested that the Turkish [have a ministry] then and, in the same vain, other minorities were also to be given ministries after that. Back then, they had come to an agreement that there shouldn't be two minority ministers acting in the same mandate, so they split the mandate in two for a ministry, half of the mandate Bosniak and the other half Turkish. Bosniaks suggested a candidate who became the Minister of Health, and apparently they did not do a very good job there. So they were removed from the office. Removed really shortly after they began. After that, automatically, it was our turn.

The talk went around here and there and the offer came to me. And I said, "If I only have to work at the ministry formally, I can accept it, but if I have to be a minister and work in a number of jobs, then I suggest Resmiye because she has more experience in organizing and public administration works." In fact, there was the *Dom Zdravlja* [Health Center] before the war, where there were 1500 workers and more than 200 doctors, and she was the director, she worked as a director for the mandates there.

They took my suggestion into positive consideration and Resmiye became a minister, Minister of Health.

**Ebru Süleyman:** If we go back a little bit, do you remember the '70s and '80s when the protests were going on? What year was that?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, '81.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Remembering it over all, do you remember the tension?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Yes, there was. Back then, the Serbs had almost lost their minds, and they were applying a lot of pressure. They were letting go of many people in the [bureaucratic/state] functions and such. These were really difficult times, but exactly around those times, I was not here because of my specialization. I had gone to Zagreb for specialization and, coincidentally, Resmiye was appointed to her first mandate as a director. She was having a lot of difficulties, and I would come as often as I could to see what was going on. I was hearing that those days were very bad days. The nationalism had reached its peak point, the Serbian nationalism.

**Ebru Süleyman:** And after that, the '90s...

**Mahmut Mumci:** Ah, so in the '90s, the Serbs let go [of everyone], they removed all of the rights won by the Albanians. They made changes to the constitutions, in those changes, they practically erased all of the rights won. People resisted, and we resisted as well {smiles}, as much as we could. During the war, we were forced to leave, and we went to Turkey, stayed there for three months. We had the opportunity to stay there permanently, but we didn't stay, we came back.

**Ebru Süleyman:** It's hard to migrate...

**Mahmut Mumci:** Hard...

**Ebru Süleyman:** Now you still live in Pristina?

**Mahmut Mumci:** Now in Pristina, it's been six years since I have retired from my job, but I am not completely unemployed. Once a week, I go to Kaçanik Health Center as a consultant doctor. I look at the cases of chest diseases that couldn't get diagnosed. Sometimes they call me when they need me, when I am required.

**Ebru Süleyman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Mahmut.

**Mahmut Mumci:** You are welcome.

**Ebru Süleyman:** For everything, for your stories, your memory is remarkable, you told us everything. Thank you also for your time.

**Mahmut Mumci:** You are welcome, I also want to say that I am sorry that I was not able to prepare enough after our last conversation. Things came up, that is why I did not have enough time, but I do have a lot of photographs and I wanted to bring them here, but I guess it wasn't meant to be.

**Ebru Süleyman:** It's okay, we will do it again another time.