

INTEGRATION OF BOSNIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE US

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**Title**

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**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The number of immigrants from different countries has increased in the United States in the past few years. Fargo/ Moorhead area was enriched with individuals and families from various post-war and undeveloped countries. Immigrants face challenges that are far more significant than adjusting to a new lifestyle, a new way of dressing, or a new climate. This paper will discuss the immigration process of the Bosnian women and how the resettlement affected their acculturation process, with a focus on their integration process into the new host community. Although the Bosnian population is a small and slowly growing population, it is becoming a significant part of US society.

This paper should give more insight into understanding the assimilation and acculturation process of Bosnian women. Online oral histories of brave Bosnian women I have used, emphasize the importance of doing more research about immigrant integration in the new environment.

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It's a privilege to have Dr. Nelson as my committee member. Thank you for your time and encouragement to focus on Bosnian women, their experiences, and to let me be the immigrant voice.

Thank you to my parents, Hasan and Mevlida, and my sister, Anesa, for providing endless support and encouragement over the years. Thank you for your confidence in me.

## **DEDICATION**

This paper is dedicated to the following:

To all strong and brave women who became an immigrant to the United States from all over the world and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and their inspiring life stories. To a special Bosnian woman, a fighter, whom resilient spirit taught me about life so much, to my beloved mother, Mevlida Basic, who has supported me in every way possible, wise guidance, patience, and much love.

I am because of you

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

From an early age, I have encountered other cultures, languages, customs, and have not only tried different foods but also got the opportunity to live in Western Europe. Since I was a child and even now as an adult, because of my interactions with other cultures, I have become interested in researching and learning about the integration and the acculturation of individuals in new environments. Throughout my life, I resided in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and the United States and have observed several similarities and a few differences. I was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina, formerly known as Yugoslavia, and lived in its capital, Sarajevo, until I was ten. In 1992 my family escaped to Germany as refugees because of the Bosnian, Serbian War. Because of our refugee status, my family's life took a different path. When the war started, my mother was 30 years old, had two young daughters, and was forced to face new, unexpected challenges. She arrived in a new country without understanding the language and encountered an entirely new culture, new people, different holidays, different food, unique customs, and new traditions.

As I grew up in Germany, I met people from countries such as Turkey, Italy, Albania, Spain, and others. I collected new experiences from these unique individuals and learned about their cultures. One of my memories of spending my early childhood in Germany includes joining my class in the fourth grade. At the time, my younger sister and I were the only refugee children in the school, and everyone looked at us with high curiosity. As a child, I found it easier to integrate with the German children, and eventually, the children from other cultures as they came to the school. I did not notice all the difficulties a transition from one country to another brings.

Many years after I moved to the United States of America (USA) as an adult, I reflected on how my mother must have felt and what struggles she had to overcome to integrate into the

German culture successfully. I immigrated to the USA in 2008 in my late twenties. After a year of my arrival, I started working at the SouthEastern North Dakota Community Action Agency (SENDCAA), which is a government agency that provides various services to the community. I met and befriended individuals from even more countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Russia, Finland, Norway, and Iraq, and learned about their heritage. Although I was very open to learning about other people's backgrounds, I faced many challenges in building relationships with individuals. Integrating as an adult to a new unknown environment, and facing the language barrier made it more challenging to build trust and open towards the people. Experiencing all this on my own, I was able to reflect on how my mother felt when she came to Germany and had to assimilate to a new environment.

Experiencing the status of an immigrant in Germany and the US, I became interested in the experiences of other immigrants who bring the richness of their cultures with them when they immigrate from one country to another.

As the Bosnian community is relatively new in the US, I want to give little more background information about that country, its customs, traditions, and awake curiosity for exploring and to grow the acceptance towards immigrants in general. In this paper, I will talk about the historical background of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the history of immigration, and Bosnian culture. I will focus on the integration process into the host society, including oral histories of immigrants, their challenges, and showing their braveness for accomplishments that lay in the uniqueness of being a bearer of multiculturalism.

## CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

### Basic Information about Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of Eastern Europe, on the Balkan. The surface of Bosnia and Herzegovina is covering 19,767 square miles (51,197 square kilometers) of the Balkan Peninsula. Bosnia borders with Croatia to the north, west, and south, Serbia to the east, and Montenegro to the southeast. Bosnia and Herzegovina have 26 kilometers (16 miles) of coastline on the Adriatic Sea (Culture Grams, 2011).

Table 1

*Information about Bosnia Herzegovina (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019)*

Capital City	Sarajevo
Climate	The continental climate in Bosnia features long, hot summers and cold winters. Areas of high elevation have short, cool summers and long winters. Coastal winters are mild and rainy.
Population	Bosnia and Herzegovina's population of about 3,849,891 (July 2018 est.), is growing at a rate of roughly 0.2 percent. In 1991, Bosnia had very few areas where only one ethnicity was present.
Religion	Muslim 50.7%, Orthodox 30.7%, Roman Catholic 15.2%, atheist 0.8%, agnostic 0.3%, other 1.2%, undeclared/no answer 1.1%(2013 est.)
Ethnicity	Bosniak 50.1%, Serb 30.8%, Croat 15.4%, other 2.7%, not declared/no answer 1% (2013 est.). Small numbers of Albanians, Roma (Gypsies), and others also live in the country.
Language	Bosnian (official) 52.9%, Serbian (official) 30.8%, Croatian (official) 14.6%, other 1.6%, no answer 0.2% (2013 est.)

The uniqueness of Bosnia-Herzegovina lies in the fact that this is a country of three ethnic groups. The largest group of the three are Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. Bosnia and Herzegovina was split into two entities after the war, the Federation of Bosnia with (51 percent) and the Serb Republic (49 percent). The capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina is Sarajevo (Culture Grams, 2011).



*Figure 1.* Bosnia and Herzegovina after the war/ Republic Serbia (blue)and Federation of Bosnia (grey). From “PCL Map Collection” "Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin 2019”  
[https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia16/bosnia\\_and\\_herzegovina\\_sm\\_2016.gif](https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia16/bosnia_and_herzegovina_sm_2016.gif). Reprinted with permission.

Josip Broz Tito was a president that ruled Yugoslavia from 1945-1980. He successfully united people and suppressed the differences between them with communism until his death. After Tito’s regime, Yugoslavia started to unravel, countries began to separate, and Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence, which was followed by a devastating war (1992-1995) (Culture Grams, 2011).



Figure 2. Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of Ex-Yugoslavia. From “PCL Map Collection” "Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin. 2019" [https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/europe/former\\_yugoslavia.jpg](https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/europe/former_yugoslavia.jpg). Reprinted with permission.

The beginning of the war is marked by the first victim, young Bosnian woman, killed at a demonstration in Sarajevo. During the Bosnian War (1992–1995), Bosnian Muslims had to survive intolerable cruelties, were beaten, held in concentration camps, women were abused, raped, and killed. In December 1995, the three presidents of Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the Dayton Agreement in Dayton (Ohio), ending the devastating war. During the Bosnian war, 1992-1995, over 1.8 million people were banished from their homes, and over 250,000 lost their lives in Bosnia, and the unknown number is still missing, years after, yet not found. Most refugees found a new home in other European countries and other parts of the world (the USA and Australia). Sadly, 25 years later, after the Dayton agreement, political and economic conditions still don't let people return to their homes (Culture Grams, 2011).

## History of Immigration

### Bosnian Culture

The feelings of strong affiliation into a community is the essence of Bosnian life. Bosnian culture and its values enrich lives in many unusual ways. Being appreciated and respected as a member of a community is invaluable: it gives people a unique charm and enriches the soul in exceptional ways. Close communication with family and friends makes any community stronger, but Bosnian communities value a unique form of togetherness: coffee. As the Bosnians say, “nema razgovora bez dobre bosanske kafe,” there is nothing better than a conversation over a good cup of Bosnian coffee. “Enjoying Bosnian coffee is iconically called “Ćejf.” (Kentucky Folklife Program, 2017-2018, n.p.). Family gatherings, holidays, moments of joy and sadness, and more are accompanied by Bosnian coffee.

The Bosnians describe the particular leisure time, something of pleasure; something is done to feel better, what is inherited, and is a need for something to enjoy, that makes everybody feel good with the term “Ćejf.” The *expression* “Ćejf” is a typical notion in Bosnian culture. *Ćejf* (to act spontaneously for enjoyment and without regard for consequences like cost and time) is a typical attitude. “Ćejf” can also be described as something that brings “pleasure, enjoyment, and is a way to connect to the deeper parts of oneself” (Kentucky Folklife Program, 2017-2018, n.p.).

Bosnians are known as very sociable and hospitable people who value close relationships with neighbors and friends. They enjoy visiting and entertaining guests. One custom is to bring small gifts when visiting while hosts are serving coffee, sweets, and drinks. Usually, three coffees are offered. “The first one is called “dočekuša” (greeting coffee), the second one is “razgovoruša” or “brbljavuša” (talking coffee), and after the third coffee which is known as “kandžija” (Turkish whip), or “sikteruša” (Turkish Go away! Go home!) the guests are expected

to leave” (Sujoldzic, Bozic-Vrbancic, Kulenovic, Plavsic, & Terzic, 2006, p. 22). For many Bosnians, coffee, and the customs surrounding it is the biggest part of their lives: coffee life equals social life. Going for coffee is a social time for Bosnians, and you will seldom see a person sitting by themselves in a cafe. Bosnians spent hours with bosanska kafa (Bosnian coffee) with their friends, sharing daily news and gossip. These interactions amongst Bosnian immigrant women in the US brings nostalgia about our “old lives.” This reflects how cultural values have formed our senses of belonging and the ability to feel part of a community. We all reminisce about good old times we had to leave behind and now are trying to assimilate to culture in the United States.

The wealth of a Bosnian culture is shown through the Bosnian people with their outgoing, warm and friendly attitude, who value hard work and sincere devotion and endless love gives this beautiful land her a unique charm and provides opportunities for quality of life.

### **The Social Status of Bosnian Woman before the War**

The position of women in society is the subject of interest in sociology. This topic becomes more relevant to the technical and technological progress and development of society. According to Basic (2008), in Bosnia, a woman is considered a fundamental basis of the family through history. She wore the burden of its survival and growth, from biological to economic and social functions. The woman is also the holder of the transformation of the family. Above all obstacles, Bosnian woman gained extensive autonomy in society, her activity and her role, first accomplished in the family and later in the community. The loss of the traditional functions of the family, Bosnian woman, gains an essential part again in society. Her role supports social development, primarily economic and economic growth, the possibility of existence outside the family, and a prominent position of women as an economic, political and

general social potential. The industrialization of society changed the status of women, as well as her traditional place in the family. A woman gains a role in the production and enterprise outside the family. Women becoming equal a man not only in manufacturing but also in society mean the loss of traditional biological division of labor. Women are primary holders of reproduction, so the extension of the human species, they are wives and mothers, taking care of the household, children, and men, obeying the tradition. Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had formal legal equality with men, but her life as a wife was strongly patriarchal influenced. Before the war, the right to education was a standard requirement for everyone, and primary education was obligatory and free. The literacy rate before 1991 was over 90% for men and women (Basic, 2008).

### CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

*Ovdje nisam, a tamo me nema.  
I am not here, but also not there.  
(Bosnian expression)*

Since the existence of humanity, people are migrating. “Migration is the movement of people from one location to another and widely associated with the change of permanent place of residence. There are two types of migration: internal migration and international migration. Internal migration is the movement of people from one place to other places in a given country. International migration is the movement of people from one country to another in order to take up employment or establishing residence or to increase living standards” (Thet, 2012. p. 2). Emigrating is not as easy as it might seem. Leaving the country of origin or place of residence seeking another country with the intent to settle down elsewhere and to start a new life can be a long and complicated process. Individuals may face various difficulties in their country of origin. Motives to leave the country of origin can be different (voluntarily or by force). These motives either bring people to move out, known as push factors that push people out of their home environment or voluntarily leave their home to look for better life opportunities. “The common push factors are low productivity, unemployment, and underdevelopment, poor economic conditions, lack of opportunities for advancement, exhaustion of natural resources, and natural disasters. The pull factors are factors that attract migrants to an area.” (Thet, 2012. p. 3). The main pull factor is better educational and job opportunities, political freedom, opportunity to find a spouse, better climate, or the liberal opportunities to cross the boundaries. These factors can force people to seek permanent residency in a foreign country or may lead to permanent emigration.

Emigration is a transition that is happening in society. It takes place by specific patterns and lawfulness of the processes that generate them. Changes take place everywhere around us,

accompanying us in or out of them or encouraging them. In global terms, changes are happening in the structure of the population. It happens in its growth, the structure of production, technical and technological progress and manufacturing development, in the migration of the population of the village to the city, the underdeveloped areas and industrial centers, the changes of the social system, and the political forces and the movement. Changes are happening in ourselves as well, in the structure of occupation, education, and family status. The changes that occur in the last two centuries marked continuous controversy at the global level of socialism and capitalism, and of democratic and totalitarian regimes, of the developed and not developed countries, between the issue of equality and indigence.

### **Bosnian Experience in the US**

Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the countries that experienced change. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995), ca. 2 million people were forced to leave their homes and find a new safe place with regular life opportunities all over the world. Even 25 years later, lots of these populations are not able to return or lost the will to return and to rebuild what they have lost. Bosnians were resettled to the US in the mid- to late 1990. The first immigrants were sent to States where they could rejoin their family, friends, and neighbors. Later, different social organizations like (Lutheran Social Services in Fargo, ND) helped them resettle in a new environment. Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota (LSSND) provides refugee resettlement services through its Center for New Americans. The Center is required to meet the refugees at the airport; to provide housing, health checkups, and necessary clothing; to enroll children in school; to assist adults in learning English, and to help them apply for Social Security cards, and become “job-ready” to seek employment. Services are provided for the first eight months and funded through federal and state monetary grants. The refugees are encouraged to become a part

of their new communities and economically self-sufficient as soon as possible. (Hansen, D. A. (2004).

Although they were far from the horror of war, their struggle did not cease. Now the immigrants had to contend with new unknown challenges, which in those moments might have seemed worse than those they had gone through in the war. Research done by Erickson (2010) about the Bosnian immigrant population in Fargo shows how the first impression of immigrants was when they first arrived in Fargo. One of her respondents, Alma, a Bosnian woman who resettled in 1996 with her family to North Dakota, said:

It was very difficult, but we made it... I cried every day. I was so depressed. But then I finally said okay, I can sit here and cry, or I can do something about it, so I decided to learn the language and go out there, get a job, and we went and bought a car, our interest rate was like 21 percent (laughs), but we needed a car. (p. 186).

Erickson (2010) concluded that Bosnians had to struggle with the prejudice of inadequacy and superiority, besides the feelings of loneliness, isolation, and humiliation.

Yugoslavia was a semi-industrialized country with a relatively high standard of living compared to that of other groups of refugees (and varied according to one's status in the Party, socioeconomic standing, and proximity to cosmopolitan centers in B&H). Thus, many Bosnians were appalled at being told how to flush a toilet, turn on lights, or the difference between the refrigerator and freezer. At cultural orientation classes, Bosnians often joked (in Bosnian) about other refugees and snickered at what they believed were banal instructions about how to ride a bus, shop for groceries, or the appropriate times to call an ambulance. (p. 187).

Like many other immigrants, Bosnians struggled with the lack of understanding in the U.S. about socioeconomic and regional differences in B&H. Bosnians, who came to US, were from different social-economic layers, had to learn how to be tolerable and acceptive to receive help. Their struggle was mostly to be accepted by the US society and seen on the same level as in Ex-Yugoslavia.

Aida, a second respondent in research done by Erickson (2010), had a similar experience as Alma.

Aida a Bosniak business woman and mother of two in her forties was appalled when a volunteer from the church, a woman she considered a "friend but not really," showed them their apartment in 1997, turned on the faucet, and said, "water," and then brought them to the bathroom and said, "toilet." Shouting and gesturing wildly as she recalled these experiences, Aida said the woman made them felt like they had come from Kunta Kinte land or some jungle like Tarzan. People here have *no idea* what it's like to go from here (demonstrating high) to here (demonstrating low) and how hard it is to get to that high place again. Because when you go from high to low, it's absolutely the worst thing in the world. And it's hard to go from low to high. (p. 190)

According to Hansen (2004), the principal issues confronting Bosnian refugees as they pursue economic self-sufficiency in Fargo are the lack of English language skills, not working in their former occupations, and low wages. He suggests that the success of their resettlement programs depends upon a concerted effort to address refugee employment concerns, including finding ways to integrate early employment with learning English (i.e., job shadowing, on-site English language classes, etc.), job fit, hourly wage, and career opportunities.

## **Assimilation and Enculturation**

Besides many other countries in the world, Bosnia and Herzegovina is also a country that went through a transition process and felt the change in the period between 1992-1995, which led to the collapse of Yugoslavia and its political regime. The war conflict forced its citizens to abandon their hearthstone, hearth homes unwillingly, and seek new opportunities, start a new life far from their country. In some cases, this transition has brought a lot of constructive advantages for the Bosnian society, but also many challenges and negative characteristics lead by displacement of the entire family to different continents.

“In the last centuries, Eastern Europe has been characterized by dramatic socio-political and economic transformations. Countries were formed and revised; political ideologies were imposed and then dropped, leaving lasting marks on individuals and families” (Robila, 2008, p. 1). Robila (2007) shows that the total increase in the number of immigrants coming from Eastern Europe in the US has been calling for more research on immigrant adaptation processes. Also, research conducted will increase the understanding of today's diverse immigrant population and their adaptation in the host society.

Robila (2008) indicates that immigrants from Yugoslavia and other Eastern European countries significantly differ from each other. The difference is in the immigration process, which is regulated by the immigration laws of the receiving countries. “Many people from Yugoslavia came during the armed conflict and arrived in the U.S. as a refugee.” (Robila, 2008, p. 10). Balkans refugees (including Bosnia) came mostly from rural areas. They escaped the challenges of a war conflict from their home countries looking for freedom and giving their children regular life. “The United States is not an immigration destination for Eastern Europeans who have fewer human capital and economic resources” (Robila, 2008, p. 3). “Many of the other

EE immigrants come with job-sponsored visas that require advanced professional degrees” (Robila, 2008, p. 10). Lack of human capital requirements for Bosnian immigrants resulted in the “highest economic disadvantages” (Robila, 2007, p. 10), similar to immigrants from Mexico.

According to Nathanson's report (2013), the first Bosnian refugees arrived in St. Louis in 1993. The report reflects on the experiences of immigrated Bosnians from learning English, opening businesses, finding housing, employment, access to credit, and social support. “Refugees arrived from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), a small southeast European country the size of West Virginia, escaping a war that ended up claiming over 100,000 lives and displacing more than two million from their homes” (Nathanson, 2013, p. 4).

Bosnians laid the significant groundwork in society; today, they represent one of the largest communities outside Bosnia and Herzegovina in the St. Louis area. “Most Bosnians came to the U.S. with little to no English knowledge, no money, and belongings. In St. Louis, most found early work and housing through the International Institute, Catholic Charities, or family or friends that were already living and working in the St. Louis area” (Nathanson 2013, p. 4). According to Lutheran Social Services in North Dakota, a Social Service Organization that provides services to the community, the first Bosnian refugees started arriving at Fargo in 1997 till 2004.

	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004
<b>Bosnia</b>	197	267	303	424	246	26	19	2

*Figure 3.* Refugee resettlement in North Dakota. (Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota, Center for New Americans). Reprinted with permission.

Fargo counts about 3,000 Bosnian immigrants who came begin of 1997 from Germany, one of the European countries that accepted refugees from Balkan during the war 1992-1995. According to Franz (2005), Germany accepted about 320,000 refugees from Bosnia and expected them after the Dayton agreement to return to Bosnia and Herzegovina back. Immigrants who did

not see their future again in their home country decided to resettle to the third country USA and Australia. The U.S. government began the resettlement between 1993 until 2004 and accepted more than 140,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Erickson, 2010).

Bosnian community is still relatively young in the USA. There is not much research done to show how individuals experienced the acculturation process and how much acculturation depends on their personality. Not every individual is able or willing to acculturate in a new environment. Personal characteristics may influence how acculturation takes place, as well as whether they enhance or hinder adaptation. Personality characteristics of a person can contribute to the stress reduction in the adaptation process.

Immigrants are a significant part of each society worldwide, it is essential to look at their integration, acculturation, assimilation through their personal experiences. Even Bosnian immigrants faced a painful past and tried to cope with their experiences that can make the transition and integration more difficult; they continued to grow and accomplish, fulfill their dreams in the USA.

The concept of *acculturation* is employed to refer to the cultural changes resulting from these group encounters, while the concepts of *psychological acculturation* and *adaptation* are employed to refer to the psychological changes and eventual outcomes that occur as a result of individuals experiencing acculturation.” Three interrelated aspects of adaptation are identified: *psychological*, *sociocultural*, and *economic*. (Berry, 1997, p. 6)

With the globalization, like an increased cross-cultural and mutual influence, there is an increased need to answer the question about the acculturation. According to Sam and Berry (2010), “acculturation refers to the process of cultural and psychological change that results in the following meeting between cultures.” (p. 472) Acculturation effects are noticed at different

levels (individual or group level). Group level of acculturation includes changes in customs, culture, social institutions. At the individual level it cannot just include changes in daily behavior but also in psychological and physical wellbeing. “Adaptation is referred to as an individual’s psychological well-being and how individuals manage sociocultural. Adaptation is thus considered a consequence of acculturation” (p. 472). “... definition of acculturation identifies assimilation to be only a phase of acculturation” (p. 473). There is a constant need for more research about acculturation based on the individualistic nature of immigrants and their different cultural backgrounds.

To answer the question: “How Do People Acculturate?” Sam and Berry (2010) identify two issues. “The first issue is the degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage cultures and identities; the second is the degree to which people wish to have contact with those who are outside their group and participate with them in the daily life of the larger society” (p. 476). They identified four different acculturation strategies (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization.). “These strategies depend on the extent to which the individual balances the two issues of culture maintenance and contact” (Sam and Berry, 2010, p. 476). The four strategies are defined by Sam and Berry (2010) as a constant attempt to keep the relationship between the immigrant groups and the larger society.

*Assimilation* is the strategy used when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek close interaction with other cultures (or, in some cases, adopt the cultural values, norms, and traditions of the new society). The *separation strategy* is defined by individuals who place a high value on holding on to their original culture and avoid interaction with members of the new society. The *integration strategy* is used by individuals with interest in maintaining one’s original culture while having daily

interactions with other groups— there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while at the same time they seek, as a member of an ethnocultural group, to participate as an integral part of the larger social network. The *marginalization strategy* is defined by little possibility or lack of interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss) and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination). (Sam and Berry, 2010, p. 476)

Research about the growing cultural diversity and their complex challenges between the receiving society and the immigrant society can build a solid ground of acceptance. Also, Titzmann & Fuligni (2015), in their article, show that in modern multicultural societies, more and more individuals deal with two or more cultures due to the increase in international migration. Research about immigrants' adaptation to various life domains, about the demands of dealing with different cultural scripts, and about how immigrants can successfully bridge different cultural requirements are in increasingly need. Padilla & Perez (2003) point out that social stigmas affect the acculturation and adaptation of immigrants and that more research is needed to better understand how newcomers 'cognitions of ingroup and out-group relations, including stigmas, affect the acculturation adaptation strategy used by immigrants.

These articles illustrate the growing necessity for research in increasingly diverse societies and the importance to learn more about the challenges of immigrants' adaptation to various life domains, about the origins of such demands, and about how immigrants can successfully bridge different cultures, incorporating their original culture with the host culture increasing the tolerance on both sides and value multiculturalism.

When considering the lack of research done on the settled Bosnian community, their integration process, and also being motivated by my own experience as an immigrant woman

from Bosnia living in the US. and being inspired by peers' similar stories, it would be resourceful to show through few oral histories how brave, strong, powerful Bosnian women are and how she successfully made a bridge between her traditional role, integrating into the new host community.

Even when a Bosnian woman stays in the background, her role in the family and impact in her country is significant, and she contributes with hard work to her surroundings. Tufekcic (2014) showed how much the “processes of upbringing and growing up throughout the stages of a child’s life, from a newborn child, early, middle, and late childhood in traditional culture” (p. 90), are significant for spiritual and physical development. Bosnian woman is a carrier of the culture, and her role in raising the newborns has valuable importance as a preserver of cultural values. He points out that “childhood is a period in which children adopted numerous social norms from which their status within the family and the community is derived” (Tufekcic, 2014, p. 90).

However, besides the traditional values, the Bosnian women showed their strength and abilities through participation in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. High emphasis was put on their role during the war 1992-1995. “These women played an important role and contributed greatly in resistance to war. Women obtained various functions during the war, such as education, social work, health care, and others” (Omanic, Serdarevic, Ovcina, Omanic, & Omanic, 2010, p. 136).

Their bravery and strength were recognized in various domains during the war. “According to the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s data, there were 5360 recruited women. Some were engaged in logistics, and some were fighters” (Omanic et al., 2010, p. 135).

Bosnian women were recruited as health and social workers, nurses, teachers, politicians, and in many other domains where they took care of those in need in the face of brutal aggression, whose main goal was to destroy and disable a primarily civilian population, including women, children, and the elderly (Omanic et al., 2010).

Besides the challenges she had to overcome during the war, Bosnian woman is facing continuous challenges when escaping to save her life in the new country with her integration process. Immigrated individuals have to face various challenges, which require a lot of resourcefulness to improve their socio-economic status in the host country when transitioning. Also, Borjas (2006), in his research, emphasizes the challenges of social mobility. “ First, most immigrants are at sizable earnings disadvantages, relative to native born workers. Second, the earnings of different groups of immigrants vary widely” (p. 55).

To be able to change their social status upon arrival, immigrants are “forced” to adapt to the new environment. This includes taking ESL classes, taking additional courses besides taking care of the family, working low paid jobs. To improve their social status, they are not even running away from multiple jobs. Borjas (2006) emphasized the importance of working towards the improvement of the social status in their new country, by “cultural adaptation, that immigrants and their children make to their new environment, their adaptation of social norms, and attitudes that may differ widely from those in their home countries and their accumulation of “human capital investments,” such as education, language skills, and geographic relocation)... (p. 57).

Besides the challenges Bosnian women faced when arriving in the US, she found her motivation in her family. She is not hesitant to take even lower-paid jobs or to work multiple jobs to support her family and to secure a better future. The uniqueness of a Bosnian woman

showed through the strength of womanhood, not being humiliated by the social mobility and holding on the reputation which was described by Franz (2003) that "women's economic and social downward mobility in (re)settlement, however, did not significantly change the self-understanding of Bosnian women" (p. 86).

For Bosnian families in the US is important to support their children and to enable "better and easier life." Daughters are more encouraged by their parents to pursue advanced education, but not losing the patriarchal values and customs of their country of origin.

Being a part of the family that went through an immigration process, my sister and I fulfilled our parent's biggest wish to finish school and pursue a professional career. Growing up in Germany, I remember how our mother worked two jobs to provide for us, telling us that our only obligation is to go to school, receive good grades, and finish school. With a higher educational level, life becomes more comfortable, and we would not have to work multiple jobs. We will be recognized for our knowledge and hard work and be more accepted as immigrants' children.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PERSONAL CHALLENGES WITH INTEGRATION**

This chapter will provide examples of experiences of immigrants and challenges which immigrants face during their acculturation processes in the host society like language barrier, housing, health care, transportation, education and employment, and climate and many more. I will mainly focus on language, work, food, and social life using examples of BW from oral histories. Immigrants regarding what their background is, are facing many challenges that are common to other immigrants across the globe. Examples of oral histories of Bosnian women focused on the topic of resettlement and the challenges immigrants face. Oral histories used are found through online websites. First oral history is from Dr. Edina Karahodzic found on a Saint Louis local newspaper article written by Moore (2013) about “Making St. Louis home/Bosnian resettlement 20 years later”. Dr. Edina Karahodzic is a medical professional who resettled with her family in 1995 in St. Louis.

The second oral history is about Dr. Ajlina Karamehic-Muratovic (n.d.), published on the International Institute Saint Louis website under the title “Immigrant Stories: Bosnia & Herzegovina.” International Institute of St. Louis is a social organization, which provides services for immigrants, families, and broader communities, encouraging immigrants to become a part of a successful society, gaining positive experiences of resettlement. Dr. Ajlina Karamehic-Muratovic immigrated to the US at the age of 18 to pursue her American college education and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in St. Louis, where she lives with her family. Third oral history is from Natalie, a law professional and Bosnian immigrant who lives in Seattle, with her family, written for Radio Liberty by Brooks (2013) in the article “Coming to America: A Bosnian Refugee Empowered.” I selected these three oral histories because they show a strong Bosnian woman, who, with hard work, lots of

effort, finds a way to overcome most challenges and demonstrates the successful integration in a new environment, pursuing her dreams and professional career.

Also, I used some quotes from Erickson's (2010) article, "Citizenship, refugees, and the state: Bosnians, Southern Sudanese, and social service organizations in Fargo, ND, support listed Bosnian immigrant challenges in the new environment when resettling in Fargo, ND.

These women are representatives of many strong Bosnian women, who are ready to overcome all obstacles, take all challenges, being strong and not giving up on their goals, fulfilling their dreams, being stronger than before. Bosnian refugee Natalie, 40, said:

When you come somewhere, even if you just go for work, even more if you are [a] refugee, you are in some kind of state of shock, it's almost like a culture shock -- which, actually, it is. It lasts approximately four to five years, and every single immigrant in [the] U.S., from doctor to cab driver, will tell you the same thing -- it takes five years to adapt," Natalie explains. (n.p.)

And that's exactly how it is. The first year is usually amazing. The second year you become a little bit delusional -- [it's like] you are not sure what's happening around you. The third year you are depressed. The fourth year you are getting out of depression. And the fifth year, you become an American. (n.p.)

The first challenge immigrants face when resettling is the language barrier. When an immigrant is not able to communicate, it affects every segment of its life (jobs, school, finding a way around or buying food). I faced the same issues when arriving in the US. Although I had learned English and thought I had a good base knowledge, I could not understand anything, and everything sounded same for the first months upon arrival. One of the situations, I can recall

being at the grocery store at check out, and the sales associate asked me if I found everything ok. I just looked at her, being confused if I did something wrong.

Even I spoke multiple languages, had a bachelor's degree completed in my home country, I had a lot of difficulties in recognition of my credentials with excuses to not have local work experience. So, I faced a year-long challenge to find suitable employment and to continue with further education.

The second challenge immigrants need to overcome is to accept downward mobility in the workforce. An immigrant needs to make up its mind to do a job that is not in his professional field. These jobs are mostly low paid jobs that do not require a degree and very low skills, not even language skills are required.

Dr. Edina Karahodzic, a medical physician, who immigrated from Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United States in 1995 with her husband and son, worked at first, at the assembly line packing boxes for Allen Foods, one of the country's largest foodservice distributors. Before coming to the United States, both were physicians in Bosnia. How they say "Pride aside, you have to feed your kids. You have to pay for rent. Send money to family in Bosnia, still in the war. There is no shame in that." (n.p.) After two years of hard work, Edina got a job as a pharmacy technician and started studying for her medical exam to become licensed as a physician here. In 2003 she started her practice as a family medicine physician and her husband as an office manager. I noticed fast that it doesn't matter which degree you have, how many languages you speak, what your social status was before. You should push all aside and start from zero again. As an immigrant, to be accepted and recognized for the skills you have, knowledge, and hard work, you are required to accomplish higher expectations and to prove yourself and still not be recognized for the achieved accomplishments. Immigrants are generally

pushed in curtain drawers, treated as second class people, and are mostly doing jobs that an average American would never do. As an immigrant, you learn how Natalie describes it to “become humble -- being [a] refugee or being [an] immigrant -- you become humble. And that's, I think, the best thing that can happen to any human -- to become humble.” (n.p.)

Natalie got a job just a month after arriving. She worked in retail at a large department store. She says she is eternally grateful for that job, both for the money it provided and the perspective it gave her. As she recalls,

To meet average American [people], you can learn a lot, because you are becoming part of society, you are learning about different cultures. But at the same time, it's not easy if you are fresh out of law school, to have to clean a four [foot (1.2 meter)] by four [foot] sitting room full of 20 or 30 prom dresses that somebody just came and tried and threw away -- [someone] who is 16 years old. (n.p.)

My personal experience doesn't differ much, and I had to grapple with my status. Even being college-educated and having multilanguage skills, I worked a low paid retail job and was treated with disrespect from coworkers to the manager.

The third challenge, and personally my biggest, was and still is the food when I arrived in Fargo. Since the Bosnian community is much smaller in Fargo than in other parts of the US, there are no Bosnian grocery stores or restaurants. The first year was tough to get used to the local food. Even years later, I am still struggling with the taste and smell of American food. Now, when I visit my home country, I eat all the food my heart desires, preparing myself for another year not having it.

The fourth challenge that an immigrant faces when resettling is the change in social life, which was not different in my life. In the beginning, I was holding on my culture stronger and

did not want to give it away. Over the years, I started to change, and now I have entirely different understandings when it comes to the Bosnian way of enjoying coffee. Also, “cejf” as a significant part of Bosnian culture changed and feels different in the US than in Bosnia. Even the coffee smells and tastes differently in the US than in Bosnia, I am trying to keep the tradition alive, retain our Bosnian culture as much as possible, and find the moment of cejf (relaxation and enjoying the moment) in the fast living American culture.

For an immigrant that had to leave all their family and friends and come to a new environment, not knowing anybody or the customs and the mentality makes it challenging to integrate and is questionable is it possible to be accepted entirely in the new society. When I first came to the US, I used to communicate only with Bosnian people. I was fortunate to work beside Americans with people from other countries. Still today, I communicate more with immigrants than with Americans. We (immigrants) are more open to share our experiences and stories with each other comparing and giving each other advice because we all are in the same boat-immigrants.

When comparing life in the US with Bosnian life, Rahima said:

Everything here is about money. You work and work and work for money, and you may not even have time to enjoy it. It's like the rabbit and the hare – America is the hare - you run, run, run but don't enjoy life. In Bosnia, you have time to enjoy things, go out for coffee or ice cream, and see people. Here people sometimes have coffee together, but everyone has such different work schedules that it can be hard to find the time.

Everyone's busy. (Erickson, 2010, p. 204)

Renata, who was in her mid-twenties and came to the U.S. in 2005, missed the slower pace of life in BH and the connection between people. A slower pace of life changes the

nature of social, work, family, and other relationships. At one point or another, most Bosnians I met in the U.S. mentioned the lack of free time to enjoy the fruits of their hard work. (Erickson, 2010, pg. 204)

Dzenana appreciated that she had seen life in B&H, and she understood that life could be slower and more relaxing; there could be time to enjoy a long, slow cup of coffee, to take a walk in the center of town, to window shop (but not buy anything) and to hang out with friends. (Erickson, 2010, pg. 204)

Besides all challenges and obstacles immigrants face, they are carriers of multiculturalism and are the bridge to bring the people, cultures, customs, traditions together how Dr. Karamehic-Muratovic (n.d.) expressed, “I am a mess of cultures, that is how I think of myself you.” (n.p.) For her, it is important to welcome and celebrate many aspects of American culture, but also to keep working on retaining her original Bosnian identity, values, and practices. (n.p.) Ajlina enjoys American cuisine, the emphasis on individualism, and the expected politeness from strangers, friends, and family, but she also with her husband strongly values and attempts to sustain her native Bosnian language, cultural values and to teach her children about Bosnian heritage (Karamehic-Muratovic, n.d.).

More time you spend in a host country, the more integrated you become, the more local you feel. Assimilation becomes part of yourself, and you become part of the melting pot. The oral histories reinforce the statements about challenges that immigrants need to face when resettling in a new country.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This paper points out the constant need to do research about other people, countries, cultures, customs, traditions. Technological advancements make it easier to learn about each other, even not needing to travel, to become more tolerant, and more open to advance our coexistence. No matter how integrated a person is in a new society, it will always feel the need to merge these two cultures within himself and to try to balance and seek its place in the great universe. Through communication, boundaries and prejudice can be removed. Integration can be simplified for every immigrant, and the sense of belonging increased, decreasing the feel “I AM NOT HERE, BUT ALSO NOT OVER THERE.” This can quickly be done through communication.

The immigration challenges that immigrants face in the USA but also in other countries are multidimensional, and there is an urgent need to approach their immigration process from different aspects. Although every Bosnian woman, with whom I had the opportunity to talk, has been coping and struggling in her own way, their bravery and the strength of these women is evident in all oral statements. The Bosnian woman, although traditional and family-oriented, is indeed a woman who is ready and capable of taking on the heaviest burdens to secure a safe life for her family and herself.

The purpose of this paper was to show and give an introduction to this topic that until now hasn't been researched enough, but due to the constant migrations from other countries to the USA, there is a need to do. My goal was to invite people who will be reading this paper to think about and relate to the challenges and obstacles that immigrants have been facing for generations in this country. Looking forward to motivating future students to do more research on the new generation Bosnian-American women exploring their position in society.

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