

DIASPORA NATIONALISM: HOW THE BOSNIAN DIASPORA IN THE UNITED STATES ENGAGES IN HOME POLITICS

by

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## **DEDICATION**

For all the former Yugoslav youth living in the United States today, keep the culture alive.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my family and friends for always supporting me and making stressful times not that severe. My parents, Marinko and Ljilja Avramović for supporting my ideas and the thought of creating something new. Drs. Paczynska, Flores, and Lyons, thank you for always providing the amazing feedback needed to advance this project. It could not have been done without your patience, expertise, and support. Finally, thank you to all of those who were involved in this research. I hope that I did a good job of showcasing such interesting and unique stories.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BiH ..... BiH  
Federation of BiH ..... F BiH  
Republic of Srpska ..... RS  
Office of The High Representative ..... OHR



## **ABSTRACT**

### **DIASPORA NATIONALISM: HOW THE BOSNIAN DIASPORA IN THE UNITED STATES ENGAGES IN HOME POLITICS**

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Since the end of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in 1995, much has been done to reconcile the ethnic tensions within the boundaries of the country. Less attention has been paid to Bosnian citizens living in the United States and how these individuals interact with one another as well as participate in their home political system. The purpose of this project is to look at diaspora involvement of Bosnian citizens aged 18-26 living in the United States in Bosnian home politics in terms of voting in home elections and fundraising. Additionally, this project looks at how the three main ethnic groups of BiH (Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs) interact with one another in the United States to see if tensions that are present in BiH are present within the young diaspora population in the United States. What makes this population interesting is the fact that none of them had firsthand experiences of the war, so any tensions that may be present come indirectly from family members, the media space, and politicians.

## CHAPTER ONE

It has been 23 years since the official end of the war in BiH (BiH), with the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords which were signed in Dayton, Ohio. It has had an impact on millions of people and has left a mark on the country, both politically and socially. The war left tens of thousands displaced in countries like the United States, Australia, Germany, and other European countries. These populations have since then been able to form networks in host countries by mobilizing and creating communities that best resemble life back in BiH. In a way, there are attempts made to recreate the idea of home in the place that the diaspora has settled. This construct includes important elements of the country's culture. Outside of starting local businesses that sell products from the home country, members of the Bosnian diaspora mobilize to raise money for humanitarian efforts, create community gatherings to celebrate Bosnian holidays, and assist various BiH institutions. Another way that the Bosnian diaspora mobilize is through political participation in Bosnian general elections.

The way in which this project will approach the idea of political participation of the Bosnian diaspora in the United States is based off of Jan W. van Deth's definition of political participation, where political participation is recognized by multiple methods, which include lobbying, voting, fundraising, and participating in the democratic process.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deth, Jan W. van. "What Is Political Participation?" Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, November 22, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.68>.

In regard to the Bosnian population in the United States, all aspects of political participation will be taken into consideration when conducting the research.

Under Article 1.5 of the electoral law of BiH<sup>2</sup> which was adopted by the Parliament in 2001, citizens of BiH living abroad have the privilege to vote via mail through diplomatic missions in host countries. This project hopes to explore political participation within the Bosnian diaspora living in the United States who are between the ages of 18 and 26, observing voter involvement with the complicated politics of BiH. The population which will be studied is a mix of individuals who are Bosnian citizens and came to the United States because of the war, or those who relocated long after the war because of reasons such as a lack of jobs, corruption, et cetera. The study will also feature those who were born in the United States to Bosnian refugees but still have Bosnian citizenship and are eligible to vote in BiH. The question that this thesis attempts to answer is: what kind of, if any, political participation and engagement is present with Bosnian citizens between the ages of 18 and 26? Specifically, what this project hopes to accomplish is to find if they vote in these elections.

Additionally, this project hopes to uncover if participants have any other connection with the home political system since they do have the BiH citizenship, and what if any are ways in which this specific population mobilizes around election time. Since these are individuals that did not physically go through the war in the 1990s, it will be interesting to see what kind of engagement they have with home politics. Their interest in home politics could mirror the behavior of individuals back home or could be

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.parliament.am/library/norelectoral%20law/bosniahercegovina.pdf>

completely different as the individuals interviewed are not physically present in the country where policies can directly impact them. This will be accomplished through interviews with individuals to best understand their motivations behind any political participation that individuals may be involved in, as well as any other kind of involvement that may be present within the diaspora community during election season.

This project will first go into the problem statement and the significance of the research. Further, it will introduce the political system and the way it was set up by the Dayton Peace Accords, and briefly touching upon the electoral law of BiH which goes into the options that citizens have when voting in general and local elections. Next, it will go into the literature previously written on mobilization of the Bosnian diaspora and exploring ways in which the population has been involved with their home country. Lastly, it will specifically preview the methodology which will be used to collect the data for this project.

### **Problem Statement**

There have been many research projects completed which feature the Bosnian diaspora and place it within the field of migration studies and conflict analysis and resolution which analyze relocation patterns and transnational involvement of diasporas in host communities. Less research has been done on political engagement of BiH diaspora members in their home country and the ways in which they interact with the home political system which includes voting, lobbying for candidates, and funding candidates. That research has been collected mostly from project reports by the Central

Electoral Commission of BiH,<sup>3</sup> and there has been little scholarly work done on the subject. However, there is a dearth of data that looks at what specific issues are diaspora voters concerned about and what are their main motivations when it comes to voting from another country.

### **Purpose of Project**

This study aims to discover if any engagement exists within the younger generation of BiH diaspora living in the United States around elections. Additionally, this study will look at how the three main ethnic groups (Bosniak, Croat, Serb) engage with the home political system either through voting, lobbying, or mobilizing, since their only legal connection to the country is their citizenship status. It will also attempt to look at how these members of the BiH diaspora look at their ethnicity in this context as well, as it could play a part in the polarization between the three main ethnic groups. Further, this study will attempt to see how individuals who escaped BiH because of the war and do not have any first-hand experience with it, interact with the home political system. In this study, I ask the following questions: Does any political engagement exist within the Bosnian diaspora community living in the United States aged 18 to 26? What role does ethnicity play in their individual interaction while in the diaspora? What kind of engagement exists between the diaspora and their home community?

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<sup>3</sup> “Election Indicators.” n.d. Central Election Commission, BiH.  
[https://www.izbori.ba/Documents/Statistika\\_i\\_rezultati\\_izbora/Statistika\\_izbora/Izborni\\_pokazatelji2002-2012-eng.pdf](https://www.izbori.ba/Documents/Statistika_i_rezultati_izbora/Statistika_izbora/Izborni_pokazatelji2002-2012-eng.pdf).

## **Significance of Project**

Looking at the ways in which members of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian diaspora living in the United States vote is helpful to the overall idea of peace in BiH because it would meet one of the main goals of the Dayton Peace Accords. Since the point of the Accords was to create a democratic government with free and fair elections, it could show what kind of role the diasporic community plays in those elections. High levels of involvement by the diaspora from the United States could show that this population cares and is committed to the overall development of the country. Additionally, it could show if and why are younger people not engaged with home politics. For the purposes of this study, the population which will be looked at is a mix of individuals who came to the United States because of the war as refugees, and those that emigrated after the war as well. Additionally, this study will feature individuals who simply are eligible to participate in home elections through Bosnian citizenship.

One factor that might have an impact on the lack of interest of Bosnian citizens living in the United States on Bosnian politics are the economic conditions of the country. The latest migration report from the Ministry of Security of BiH shows that due to the high unemployment rates, where only one out of eight young people (age 16-24) are employed, compared to the European Union countries where that number is one of three.<sup>4</sup> This fact can explain that out of neighboring countries such as Serbia, Croatia, and Albania, BiH has the highest emigration rates among those countries in the region. High levels of emigration and a lack of progress in the home country could possibly alter the

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/MIGRATION%20PROFILE\\_2015\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/MIGRATION%20PROFILE_2015_ENG.pdf)

ways in which people choose to involve themselves with the political system as they may seek to involve themselves more with the host country's politics instead of the home country's political system because there is a need to simply escape the situation in BiH.

In addition to explaining how emigration patterns can lead to different political priorities, this research project will also hope to show if any kind of ethnic tensions have continued from the war in the 1990s that are present even when individuals are not physically present in the country. Since many diaspora organization specifically are connected to the three main religions, it might reinforce the idea that voters will prioritize their ethnic group's agenda ahead of their national one. This concept is based from the fact that during the war churches and mosques both promoted nationalistic narratives<sup>5</sup> which could potentially be stressed today in host countries.

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<sup>5</sup> Moore, Adam. "The Collapse of Yugoslavia and the Balkan Wars." In *Peacebuilding in Practice: Local Experience in Two Bosnian Towns*

## CHAPTER TWO

The Dayton Peace Accords<sup>6</sup> divided the country into two entities and a completely independent district: The Federation of BiH, Republic of Srpska (FBiH and RS, respectively), while Brčko District was officially created in 1999. FBiH has a majority population that is Bosniaks and Croats, and the Federation itself is split up into ten cantons. Each canton has its own Government as well as Parliaments, a capital city, and several municipalities serving as local authorities. The cantons were created on March 1, 1994 by the Washington Agreement to stop the war between the Bosniaks and Croats in the region. The RS on the other hand is divided by municipalities. The FBiH and RS both have a president, two vice-presidents, a prime minister, and a president of the parliament as well as their own ministries of finance, economic coordination, and internal affairs.

The country has an Office of the Presidency which consists of 3 members, each from a different ethnic group. The three individuals rotate every 8 months and serve as chairman of the Presidency. No matter which individual is in power at that time, consensus must be reached with the other two members of the Office. General elections are held every four years. When it comes time for electing a new president, place of residency has a huge impact on one's vote. For example, if you live in FBiH you are only

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<sup>6</sup> [http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/BA\\_951121\\_DaytonAgreement.pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/BA_951121_DaytonAgreement.pdf)



allowed to vote for either a Bosniak or Croat candidate, regardless of whether you agree with the policies which they have proposed. If you are living in RS you are voting only for the candidate that represents the entity and in accordance to the constitution of BiH, that candidate must be Serb. For example, if you are a Bosniak living in RS you have to vote for someone who is a Serb and represents the RS.

Next, there is a Council of Ministers, and at its head its Chairman, which serves as Prime Minister and names ministers which are approved by parliament of BiH. The Council deals with issues such as currency, foreign affairs, foreign trade, transport and communications, armed forces, justice, et cetera. The Chairman as well as the ministers rotate every four years. Political parties who form the majority in the Parliament of BiH propose three ministers from each ethnic group. In this case, the Chairman cannot refuse this proposal for appointment.

The Parliament of BiH consists of the House of Representatives and the House of Peoples. The House of Representatives features 42 individuals which are elected by proportional representation. 28 members in FBiH and 14 from RS. The House of Peoples is elected by the entity's parliaments. Every decision and every law must be decided not just by majority of Parliament but also by the majority from each entity. For example, if a law in Parliament is not voted by majority of Serbs in Parliament, the law cannot be passed, regardless of the overall majority in Parliament.

Along with the executive and legislative branch, there is also the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which is set up to coordinate the success and development of BiH, as well as implement the Dayton Peace Accords. It is controlled by members of

the international community and reports to the United Nations Security Council. The office has the power to veto any law that has been approved by Parliament, in cases of bias towards one ethnic group, and the right to pass any laws without opposition from Parliament. Additionally, it has the power to remove elected officials regardless of position.

Though the OHR has worked on the implementation of the Peace Accords with international organizations, BiH is still considered by many a developing country because of its weak economy which includes a weak private sector.<sup>7</sup> Others see the problem in BiH as stemming from the existence of the ethno nationalist leadership, along with the system which has pointed the country towards a democratic crisis.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the ways in which the country is viewed by various members of the international community, there has been little to no change in the structure of the complicated political system.

According to the electoral law, the rules for citizens voting in general elections are very complicated as well. Specifically, when voting for the Office of the Presidency, if a voter is living in a municipality in RS or a canton in FBiH, they are only allowed to vote for a candidate that is of their ethnic group, depending on which entity they are in. Due to the misplacement of thousands because of the war in Bosnia, if a voter would like

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<sup>7</sup> Fenger, Ellen Goldstein, Simon Davies, and Wolfgang. "Three Reasons Why the Economy of BiH Is Off Balance," November 30–30, 2001. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2015/11/05/three-reasons-why-the-economy-of-bosnia-and-herzegovina-is-off-balance/>.

<sup>8</sup> Džihic, Vedran. "Failing Promises of Democracy: Structural Preconditions, Political Crisis and Socioeconomic Instability in BiH." *Southeastern Europe* 36, no. 3 (January 1, 2012): 328–48. doi:[10.1163/18763332-03603003](https://doi.org/10.1163/18763332-03603003).

to vote, they would first have to register to vote in their home municipality.<sup>9</sup> This gives little room for ideas to be shared across ethnic groups because voters are not allowed to, by law, to vote for candidates that do not represent one of the three main ethnic groups in BiH. However, if there is a Serb living in FBiH, they are only eligible to vote for a Bosniak or Croat for the Office of the Presidency.

The system that has been set up in BiH in order to stop the war in the 1990s does not seem like one that is set up for the country to further develop. Three members of the presidency and the consistent splitting of officials by ethnic group might reinforce the ideas of ethnic tensions between groups. Further, the presence of the OHR is creates an environment that is complicated and makes cooperation between political officials of opposite ethnic groups challenging.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.parliament.am/library/norelectoral%20law/bosniahercegovina.pdf>

## CHAPTER THREE

### What Is A Diaspora?

Many reports have been released by the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of BiH that outline the emigration patterns of Bosnian citizens and where diasporas are formed. Based on a report from 2016, over 130,000 Bosnian citizens are living in the United States.<sup>10</sup> In this report, this number was not split up between the three predominant ethnic groups. Another report by the same ministry, released in 2012 states that about 350,000 individuals are living in the United States who are either second or third generation Bosnian.<sup>11</sup> For the purpose of this study, which takes into account Bosnian citizenship, both of the populations mentioned above will be observed. Like the previous statistic, the latter number is not split up by ethnic group.

According to reports from the Embassy of BiH, the Bosnian diaspora in the United States is settled mostly in cities such as St. Louis, Chicago, New York City, Atlanta and Jacksonville.<sup>12</sup> The adaptation of Bosnian migrants to the United States includes plenty of reminiscing about the homeland and the focus on the war. As author

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<sup>10</sup> “Informacija o stanju iseljništva.” 2016. Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, BiH. [http://mhr.gov.ba/iseljenistvo/aktuelnosti/Slike/FEB\\_510.pdf](http://mhr.gov.ba/iseljenistvo/aktuelnosti/Slike/FEB_510.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> “Informacija o stanju iseljništva iz BiH.” n.d. Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, BiH. [http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/iseljenistvo/aktuelnosti/Informacija%20o%20iseljenistvu%20iz%20BiH\\_dec%202012.pdf](http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/iseljenistvo/aktuelnosti/Informacija%20o%20iseljenistvu%20iz%20BiH_dec%202012.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> *The Bosnian Diaspora: Integration in Transnational Communities*. 2011. Ashgate Publishing Company. Page 223.

Maja Mišković argues in *The Bosnian Diaspora: Integration in Transnational Communities*, the Bosnian diaspora in the United States tends to be studied only when discussing the atrocities of the 1990s and there is less attention paid to the successes of the transition of Bosnian migrants in the United States.<sup>13</sup> While the numbers of Bosnian migrants to the United States is high, they are not observed in the same light as other populations that choose to settle in the United States.

To best discuss BiH diaspora involvement in home elections, one must first start discussing what in this case constitutes a diaspora and its theoretical background. A starting point for the theoretical approach of diasporas is Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined communities", which states that even though individuals from the same country (in this case former Yugoslavia) do not necessarily know each other, they understand their collective identity and origin.<sup>14</sup> In this specific case, this can mean that Bosnian Serbs because of their shared identity with Serbs from Serbia could see themselves as more of Serbian than Bosnian. Materials such as newspapers, old songs, and, most importantly, histories can create a bond between individuals even though they do not share the same birthplace or even country. With the significant increases of technology in the media, authors, such as Tsagarousianou and Halilovich, argue that identities in the diaspora are recreated thanks to technology available<sup>15</sup> to them. With the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 233.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso Books, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Tsagarousianou, Roza. "Rethinking the Concept of Diaspora: Mobility, Connectivity and Communication in a Globalised World." *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 1, no. 1

combination of Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined communities and the increases in media technology, one can conclude that diasporas are classified as imagined communities. This is backed up by research from author Myria Georgiou, who argues that the reason many diaspora communities are connected to their home communities is because of their ability to use the online space to connect.<sup>16</sup> For the sake of this project, the imagined communities that are considered are both those that are cultural as well as political.

As for the formal definition of a diaspora, many have debated whether the Bosnian migrants after the war in BiH could be considered a diaspora. Professor Muhamed Filipović sees the case of displaced BiH as something temporary rather than something everlasting. Along with that, he notes that the main differences between Bosnians living in BiH and abroad, categorizing them as “unpatriotic, snobbish cousins and materialistic *dijasporci*”.<sup>17</sup> However, Filipović does not consider, as pointed out in literature provided later in this paper, that the Bosnian diaspora community does attempt to keep their roots while in the United States through various cultural centers. While this

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(October 1, 2004). doi:[10.16997/wpcc.203](https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.203), quoted in Halilovich, Hariz. “Trans-Local Communities in the Age of Transnationalism: Bosnians in Diaspora.” *International Migration* 50, no. 1 (February 1, 2012): 162–78. doi:[10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00721.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00721.x).

<sup>16</sup> Georgiou, Myria. “Diaspora in the Digital Era: Minorities and Media Representation.” *Journal on Ethnopolitics & Minority Issues in Europe* 12, no. 4 (November 2013): 80–99. <http://mutex.gmu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=95770925&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>17</sup> “Fenomen Dijaspore - Kolumne.” Accessed August 6, 2017. <http://www.nezavisne.com/index/kolumne/Fenomen-dijaspore/12368>, quoted in Halilovich, Hariz. “Trans-Local Communities in the Age of Transnationalism: Bosnians in Diaspora.” *International Migration* 50, no. 1 (February 1, 2012): 162–78. doi:[10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00721.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00721.x).

view is not held by majority of migration scholars, it is important to distinguish if BiH citizens living abroad form a diaspora. Safran's classification lists out the different characteristics of what makes up a diaspora:

- 1) They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return.<sup>18</sup>

While this definition does encompass a lot of what a diaspora is, it will not be sufficient when describing the diaspora from BiH. What is missing from Safran's definition is the fact that diasporas can be created by individuals and groups of people who are fleeing from their home country. Cohen adds onto this definition by explaining that diasporas can be those who are escaping different hardships.<sup>19</sup> The two definitions combined give a

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<sup>18</sup> "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return | William Safran - Academia.edu." Accessed August 6, 2017. [https://www.academia.edu/5029348/Diasporas\\_in\\_Modern\\_Societies\\_Myths\\_of\\_Homeland\\_and\\_Return](https://www.academia.edu/5029348/Diasporas_in_Modern_Societies_Myths_of_Homeland_and_Return), quoted in Halilovich, Hariz. "Trans-Local Communities in the Age of Transnationalism: Bosnians in Diaspora." *International Migration* 50, no. 1 (February 1, 2012): 162–78. doi:[10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00721.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00721.x).

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, Robin Lee. *Global diasporas: an introduction*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997, quoted in Halilovich, Hariz. "Trans-Local Communities in the Age of Transnationalism: Bosnians in Diaspora." *International Migration* 50, no. 1 (February 1, 2012): 162–78. doi:[10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00721.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00721.x).

good explanation of how to look at the BiH diaspora and will serve as the formal definitions for this project. There is a space for Filipović's viewpoint on the Bosnian diaspora in this study as well, as it may prove it right if individuals are not engaged in the politics of their home country, if voting and mobilizing are placed within the same context of patriotism.

While participating from afar can be considered as patriotism by some, others will push back on the idea, stating that activism from a diaspora community creates a "lack of political community",<sup>20</sup> because they are mobilizing for something that will have a little impact on them in the host community such as the United States. This, in turn, can create a break between the agenda of the diaspora activists wanting to participate in home politics and the political actors in the home country.

### **Literature on Bosnian Diaspora Mobilization**

The body of literature surrounding political participation in the Bosnia and Herzegovinian diaspora living in the United States is limited. Most mentions of political participation within the diaspora of BiH focuses on their increase in participation regarding the "host" country (the place which is serving as a new home for the diaspora), specifically the United States.<sup>21</sup> Outside of focusing on voting and political mobilization

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<sup>20</sup> "Blurring the Lines: Diaspora Politics and Globalized Constituencies." Accessed February 24, 2018. <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/16224/blurring-the-lines-diaspora-politics-and-globalized-constituencies>.

<sup>21</sup> Halilovich, Hariz. "Trans-Local Communities in the Age of Transnationalism: Bosnians in Diaspora." *International Migration* 50, no. 1 (February 1, 2012): 162–78. doi:[10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00721.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2011.00721.x).



of presidential and local candidates in the U.S., literature has mostly evolved around the adaptation of diaspora members to different societies around the world, specifically after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995.

Even if the literature is limited on this specific topic, there are examples of other diasporas and their levels of political engagement with home politics such as fundraising for elections. Though these case studies might not exactly mirror efforts from the BiH diaspora, they still could serve as good examples of how diasporas become engaged. One example of diaspora involvement in home politics is the fundraising around the Croatian elections in 1990, which was mostly funded by the Croatian diaspora,<sup>22</sup> for the support of the political party HDZ.

Another example of diaspora mobilization for home elections that can be observed is the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States. As Terrence Lyons points out, “most diaspora organizations, businesses, and media focus on cultural, professional and economic self-help initiatives rather than partisan politics. These social and professional organisations, however, contribute to the web of relationships and social capital that in turn may be used by more political leaders”.<sup>23</sup> While there is no direct proof that this is the same case with BiH, this research will hopefully show if there are individuals who are involved in similar organizations which mobilize around home elections specifically.

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<sup>22</sup> Stares, Paul. 2007. *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers?* Tokyo, JAPAN: United Nations University Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/georgemason/detail.action?docID=3039614>.

<sup>23</sup> Lyons, Terrence, Peter G. Mandaville, and Faculty Author Collection. *Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks*, 2012. Columbia University Press.

Another study looks at the possible incentives of diaspora communities to engage in their home politics. The two categories of incentives which are identified are socioeconomic and political incentives.<sup>24</sup> Both categories could serve as motivations for Bosnian citizens living in the United States. The article also states that there is a possibility for diaspora engagement in home politics to be good for the democratic process as diaspora involvement could increase the home population's political advocacy.

When discussing the Bosnian diaspora around the world, the objective of scholars is to observe how a diasporic community re-creates their version of "home" wherever they might migrate to. Halilovich points out that trans-localism would best describe the relations between communities from BiH. In this case, trans-localism is discussed as "local-local connections and the performative enactment of embodied identities embedded – or imagined to be embedded – in particular locations".<sup>25</sup> Though the author does add to the field of diaspora studies, what is missing from this specific piece of literature is any mention of political participation that may be present within these communities. Rather, the main point is to address the re-creation of cultural and social ties to the homeland.

Some pieces of literature have provided some incorporation of political participation within the diaspora. Though overall numbers are used in some of these

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<sup>24</sup> Burgess, Katrina. 2014. "Unpacking the Diaspora Channel in New Democracies: When Do Migrants Act Politically Back Home?" *Studies in Comparative International Development* 49 (1): 13–43. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-014-9151-5>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

reports to show diaspora disengagement,<sup>26</sup> the differences in ethnic preferences when it comes to voting, as well as taking the political engagements of all ethnic groups separately has been taken out of these reports. While this project will touch on the reasons for political disengagement within the Bosnian diaspora living in the United States, its primary purpose is to show the different priorities that voters have when casting their ballots, either ones that focus more on the success of one's ethnic group, or a national focus.

While this project's geographical focus is the Bosnian diaspora in the United States, members of the Bosnian diaspora elsewhere must also be discussed. One example is the Bosnian diaspora in Australia, which can be traced back to the "Yugoslav" diaspora which was established before the start of the war in 1992.<sup>27</sup> The population that settled in Australia because of the war was able to form local clubs that are able to bring a sense of home to the host country. A primary reason for the creation of clubs such as the 'Podrinje-Srebrenica Association' is to bring individuals together from the region and serve more as places that combat nationalism rather than political organizing<sup>28</sup>. A common theme that can be seen not only in the United States but more generally with the

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<sup>26</sup> "Organised Diaspora Networks and Homeland Peacebuilding: The Bosnian World Diaspora Network as a Potential Development Actor." *GSDRC*. Accessed April 27, 2017. <http://www.gsdrc.org/document-library/organised-diaspora-networks-and-homeland-peacebuilding-the-bosnian-world-diaspora-network-as-a-potential-development-actor/>.

<sup>27</sup> *The Bosnian Diaspora: Integration in Transnational Communities*. 2011. Ashgate Publishing Company. Page 67.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 70.

Bosnian diaspora around the world is that organizations in order to keep the culture and language intact with future generations.

Another country that has received a large number of Bosnian immigrants since the war is Croatia. An aspect that is interesting to observe is that according to literature, Bosnian Croats who moved to Croatia can be considered as ‘ethnically privileged migrants’ or ‘genuine Croats’<sup>29</sup>, because there are no racial differences between Bosnian Croats and Croatians. Along with race, their names are very similar, and according to a study, Bosnian Croats are ‘Croats as any other Croats’<sup>30</sup> instead of being considered as immigrants. This will be an important piece of information when interviewing participants, looking at how what they choose to identify themselves with. The same can be assumed with Bosnian Serbs and Serbia because of the common religion and language that is associated with both groups.

Other authors have highlighted the ways in which diaspora become involved with events occurring in the home country. The argument that is made is that traumatic events in BiH caused the diaspora to become more involved with the host country’s politics, to lobby for involvement by the country’s government, as well as other sympathetic politicians around Europe.<sup>31</sup> While this study clarifies why members of the BiH diaspora

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<sup>29</sup> *The Bosnian Diaspora: Integration in Transnational Communities*. 2011. Ashgate Publishing Company. Page 286.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 286.

<sup>31</sup> Koinova, Maria. “Sustained vs Episodic Mobilization among Conflict-Generated Diasporas.” *International Political Science Review* 37, no. 4 (September 1, 2016): 500–516. doi:[10.1177/0192512115591641](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512115591641).

mobilize, it disregards any type of lobbying or connection between the diaspora and the home country politics that's specific to the BiH diasporic community.

Other studies have also shown that attitudes of Bosnian migrants towards their home country has had mixed reviews. Qualitative data has shown that members of the Bosnian diaspora living in the United States do not always have the greatest opinions about returning back to Bosnia and sometimes have no interest in doing so, outside of short visits.<sup>32</sup> While this specific research project's aim is not to look at how the diaspora youth look at return to BiH, it will address any connections that they might have to their home country and how that impacts them directly. The same study discussed how the ideas of the war and the memories that are felt by an individual's family members back in BiH will continue with diaspora members often visiting BiH<sup>33</sup>. The same concepts can be related to the concept of chosen trauma, discussed later. I plan on looking at how these visits can impact not only how individuals are connected to their home country but how those experiences back home have an impact on their relationships in the United States.

Studies that have been completed on other countries which look at how individuals living in the diaspora could impact home elections. Ways in which diaspora individuals have the most impact deals with voter turn-out and financing home

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<sup>32</sup>*The Bosnian Diaspora: Integration in Transnational Communities*. 2011. Ashgate Publishing Company. Page 118.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 118

elections.<sup>34</sup> Aside from active support during election season, some countries have created different chapters of political offices in various migrant communities. Some data analyzing Dominican, Salvadorian, and Colombian immigrants shows that the number of individuals that engage in home country politics are small but are also differing when it comes to demographic data.<sup>35</sup> Though data has shown that diaspora members do engage less with home country politics, it will be interesting to see what levels of engagement are of individuals who are in a second generation of a post ethnic conflict situation.

### **Ethnic Vs. National Identity**

Due to the nature of this conflict, it is safe to say that identity and ethnic politics has played an important role in the outcomes of the Bosnian conflict, and it is something that will have to be taken into consideration with the diaspora population as well. Previous studies on identity and ethnic diaspora politics has found that identity plays an important role in the diaspora's life in the host country. As Camilla Orjuela states in *Politics from Afar*, "for groups marginalized or persecuted in their original home country – for example, Turkish Kurds, Sri Lankan Tamils and Palestinians – the diaspora existence can provide freedom to express and preserve "culture", language and

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<sup>34</sup> Meseguer, Covadonga, and Katrina Burgess. 2014. "International Migration and Home Country Politics." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 49 (1):1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-014-9149-z>.

<sup>35</sup> Guarnizo, Luis Eduardo, Alejandro Portes, and William Haller. 2003. "Assimilation and Transnationalism: Determinants of Transnational Political Action among Contemporary Migrants." *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (6):1211. <http://mutex.gmu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=11275882&site=ehost-live>.

religion”.<sup>36</sup> While this may not be the exact case with the Bosnian population, simply because the three main ethnic groups all share the same language that simply differs in dialects, it will be interesting to see how the constructs of ethnicity have an impact on the life of Bosnian diaspora members.

Literature about the BiH diaspora mostly goes into the different organizations, businesses, and clubs that form once thousands of individuals migrated, or sought refuge in the United States, and other countries around the world. Their ability to recreate their culture and showcase it to the host countries has been an important step into their assimilation into these host countries. What most of these studies have argued is that cultural organizations, shops, and clubs do their best to recreate the idea of “home” to Bosnian immigrants.<sup>37</sup>

Organizations like the Advisory Council for BiH based in Washington, D.C. works with the United States government to lobby and pass resolutions which would acknowledge events and increase the engagement of the U.S. government with the BiH diaspora.<sup>38</sup> While they have pushed an agenda that involves the host country government, little is done to advocate for the political involvement of diaspora members into their

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<sup>36</sup> Lyons, Terrence, Peter G. Mandaville, and Faculty Author Collection. *Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks*, 2012. Chapter 5.

<sup>37</sup> Hume, Susan E. 2015. “Two Decades of Bosnian Place-Making in St. Louis, Missouri.” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 32 (1):1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873631.2015.1005880>.

<sup>38</sup> Karabegović, Dženeta. “Što Te Nema?: Transnational Cultural Production in the Diaspora in Response to the Srebrenica Genocide.” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 20, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 455–75. doi:[10.1080/13537113.2014.969151](https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2014.969151).

home politics, especially those who are children of refugees and do not have as much of a connection to the homeland.

During the Bosnian migration boom after the end of the war in 1995, BiH citizens gravitated towards their specific ethnic group and those divisions continued to exist. While divisions exist in the home country, little has been done to increase the mixing between ethnic groups in the diaspora communities as well.<sup>39</sup> While this research focuses on organizational ethnic divisions, it does not mention if those same divisions are present during election time especially since many Bosniaks can vote for a Serb candidate for the Office of the Presidency and vice-versa.

Research has also compared the attitudes of the Bosnian diaspora in Sweden and locals from BiH, where topics such as reasons behind the 1990s conflict, victimization, and reconciliation,<sup>40</sup> were compared between the two populations, but also further divided between the three main ethnic groups as well, to see which group would be more extreme. The findings of this study show that migrants are more favorable to ethnic mixing when it comes to marriage and are more for inclusion between ethnic groups.

The identity constructs of Bosniak, Croat, and Serb were highlighted after the war, especially for diaspora members. The evidence that Jacqueline Mosselson presents through her qualitative study is that Bosnians are feeling ethnic divisions within the

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<sup>39</sup> Palmer, John R. B. *Patterns of Settlement Following Forced Migration: The Case of Bosnians in the United States*, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Hall. 2016. "Are Migrants More Extreme Than Locals After War? Evidence From a Simultaneous Survey of Migrants in Sweden and Locals in Bosnia." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60 (1):89–117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002714540471>.



diaspora, something that was not present during their time in their home country. What was before patriotism towards Yugoslavia, has now become patriotism towards one specific ethnicity and ethnic group.<sup>41</sup> Though this can be seen through migration patterns, and the creation of ethnic-specific organizations, there has not been any research which connects it to the motivations of voters and the way in which they mobilize around elections in home countries. This is something that will be looked at indirectly throughout this study.

Additionally, what could impact this study regarding the differences in ethnic and national priorities is the idea of chosen traumas, introduced by Vamik Volkan. He defines the term as different moments that define large group identities, which could be brought up later in a way to trigger those identities. Volkan argues that those triggers could cause further violence to happen and further divide large groups.<sup>42</sup> This kind of trauma can be passed down through generations as well,<sup>43</sup> which will be interesting to see in this study. Since participants for this study will only have secondary experience in the war (through story telling from parents and friends), it will be interesting to see if ethnic divisions are

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<sup>41</sup> Mosselson, Jacqueline. "From the Margins to the Center: A Critical Examination of the Identity Constructions of Bosnian Adolescent Refugees in New York City." *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 3, no. 4 (October 14, 2009): 260–75. doi:[10.1080/15595690903227772](https://doi.org/10.1080/15595690903227772).

<sup>42</sup> Volkan, Vamik D. 2004. *Blind Trust : Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror*. 1st ed.. Charlottesville, Va: Pitchstone Pub.

<sup>43</sup> "Transgenerational Trauma in a Post-Conflict Setting: Effects on Offspring PTSS/PTSD and Offspring Vulnerability in Cambodian Families - ScienceDirect." n.d. Accessed November 9, 2017. [http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178116309155?\\_rdoc=1&\\_fmt=high&\\_origin=gateway&\\_docanchor=&md5=b8429449ccfc9c30159a5f9aeea92ffb&ccp=y](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178116309155?_rdoc=1&_fmt=high&_origin=gateway&_docanchor=&md5=b8429449ccfc9c30159a5f9aeea92ffb&ccp=y).

present. In this specific case, the idea of chosen traumas is something that can explain any ethnic divisions within the diaspora community.

John R.B. Palmer shows that one of the main priorities for members of the BiH diaspora was the construction of religious institutions like churches and mosques in the United States, specifically cities like Chicago and St. Louis.<sup>44</sup> The reinforcement of ethnic priorities and preferences can also be highlighted by the enforcement of religion and a physical division of the different ethnic groups of BiH which in turn creates a further disconnect between citizens living abroad. Though this has not been proven in the ways in which people cast their votes for the Office of the Presidency, it does provide some insight into how individuals who are not in BiH might be polarized. I hypothesize that these religious and ethnic specific institutions potentially will have an impact on how diaspora members choose to engage with the home political system.

Based off of documents received by the Central Electoral Commission of BiH, originally obtained in summer 2017, shows that the number of people who voted in the United States have decreased since 2006, when 2101 individuals voted. The data shows that in 2008 that number was 1328 and 1510 in 2010. These results are for the general election. The number of registered voters from the United States in home elections has increased since 2002 when the data was first recorded. While in 2006 only 2683 voters

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<sup>44</sup> Palmer, John R. B. *Patterns of Settlement Following Forced Migration: The Case of Bosnians in the United States*, 2014.

were registered, the number rose to 4663 in 2008 before declining to 3057 in 2010<sup>45</sup>.

Data obtained does not show the number of individuals who voted in the 2002 and 2006 elections. The same data shows that when comparing voting data, the diaspora that is the most involved in the 2008 elections is based in Croatia, followed by Sweden and Germany (5853, 3131, and 2643, respectively). In the 2010 elections, the numbers stayed the same, as the three diaspora communities did contribute to the Bosnian home elections the most.

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<sup>45</sup> Central Electoral Commission. n.d. "Election Indicators 2002-2014." [https://www.izbori.ba/Documents/Statistika\\_i\\_rezultati\\_izbora/Statistika\\_izbora/IZBORNI\\_POKA\\_ZATELJI\\_2002-2014-eng.pdf](https://www.izbori.ba/Documents/Statistika_i_rezultati_izbora/Statistika_izbora/IZBORNI_POKA_ZATELJI_2002-2014-eng.pdf).

## CHAPTER FOUR

This study will plan on engaging with 15 Bosnian and Herzegovinian diaspora members between the ages of 18 and 26 who are citizens of BiH living in the United States. They will be interviewed to explore their motives when it comes to voting as well as their willingness to participate in the political process though abroad. Along with participation, this study will look at how and why diaspora members mobilize around political candidates in home elections and will touch on their identity as individuals who might have not had a first-hand experience with the Bosnian War. Additional questions will open up a discussion about how members of the Bosnian diaspora in this specific age group engage with one another.

### **Participants**

The population that will be looked at for this study will be a mix of individuals who were born in the United States to Bosnian refugees, or were refugees themselves, and those who have come to the United States after the Bosnian War because of reasons such as the economy, corruption, or simply wanting a better life. Potential participants will be gathered through the religious institutions of the three ethnic groups (mosques and churches), as well as other diaspora organizations which tend to organize around social media networks, including Facebook and Twitter. A digital flyer which outlines the criteria to participate in the study will be distributed on social media pages, while the

places of worship will be contacted directly by phone. The sample for this study will be purposive, as participants will need to meet a set of criteria before they are interviewed.

All participants meet the criteria: they (1) are citizens of BiH; (2) are between the ages of 18 and 26; and (3) are living in the United States at the time of the study. During the search for voters, there will be no mention of specific political parties or affiliations. Mainly what will be emphasized when conducting the search for participants will be members of the Bosnian diaspora that are within that specific age group. The reason that this specific group is selected is because they are individuals who did not experience the war first-hand and were either born in the United States or were refugees that came from Bosnia in the late 1990s. This means that most of what they might have learned about interactions between the different ethnic groups is not based off of interactions they had during the war, but stories from parents and influences such as the media.

### **Demographics**

Since BiH is a multi-ethnic country with the three primary ethnic groups mentioned earlier, all of them will be equally represented in this study. The main purpose of this is to see if ethnic motivations and/or priorities take precedent over ones that seem to benefit the overall development of the country. Participants that will be participating in this study will either be dual citizens of BiH and the United States of America, or simply citizens of BiH.

### **Interviews**

By pursuing a semi-structured interview approach, the participants will be able to share certain experiences in the diaspora as well as directly discuss their involvement

with BiH elections. Additionally, I will be able to follow the interview protocol and cover several of the important themes of the interview, while at the same time creating a space where participants can share their own experiences regarding ethnic tensions that they may have experienced while living in the United States that could add on to this project. For this project, the original proposal hoped to interview fifteen individuals, so five individuals from each of the main ethnic groups could be interviewed, to compare results. During the recruitment stage of the project, there was only one individual who responded to the recruitment form and identified as a Croat. The low number of Croats in this study can be explained by some of the literature stated previously, which explained that there is little difference between Bosnian Croats and individuals who are from Croatia. When this was recognized, the advertisement was adjusted to find participants who are from towns in BiH that are majority Croat. Even with the adjustment, the number of Croat participants remained one.

Interview participants were selected based off of the requirements that were listed previously. From there, participants were e-mailed to set up a time for the interview. The reason that social media was used as a main strategy for the recruitment of participants is because of different Facebook groups that showcase social events. Twitter was also used as it has become a popular avenue for sharing common experiences and memories of people from the Balkans.

The interviews will begin by collecting demographic data (place of birth, voting entity/canton, ethnic group), followed by current engagement in the BiH political system. Then, the interview questions for each participant will be grouped into two specific

themes: (1) priorities when voting in BiH elections, and (2) willingness to participate as a member of the diaspora, considering ethnic tensions and the current developmental status of BiH as a country. Interviews will later be transcribed and kept confidential on the recording device of the interviewer. The list of questions is below.

- How are you involved with the Bosnian diaspora community?
- How are you connected to the homeland?
- How are you involved with the political system back home during election years?
- Is there any interaction between candidates and the Bosnian diaspora during election seasons?
  - Are there calls for civic action in your diaspora community?
- How do you engage with other ethnic groups within the diaspora community?
  - Spaces in which you engage across ethnic lines.
  - Hesitations with interacting with the other?
  - Does distance create commonalities between the groups?
- Have there been any changes in which the diaspora members interact after the recent Hague rulings?
  - Are these interactions similar or different than their interactions before the rulings?

Outside of the questions listed above, if the conversation in the interviews does change to address other issues related to their experience as a member of the Bosnian diaspora, those conversations will also be entertained and explored, to best understand the story the participant is sharing.

The way in which this data will be analyzed is based off of themes that were picked up in the interviews that were conducted. As mentioned earlier, only nine interviews were completed and transcribed. These include four Bosniak, four Serb, and one Croat participant. The reason for the low number of Croat participants can be explained in the way in which the advertising flyer was advertised in online forums such as Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit. The posting states that the author is looking for

Bosnian citizens who are living in the United States. While there was an overwhelming number of Bosniaks and Serbs who replied to the posting, the number of Croats was not high, simply because, as one member of the Serb diaspora stated multiple times that “Bosnian Catholics really do not care what goes on”. This can be explained by Bosnian Croats wanting to identify themselves as Croatian, instead of someone who is from Bosnia but of the Croat ethnic identity. This can also be seen in some of the literature noted earlier. The advertising efforts have been adjusted to increase the number of Bosnian Croat participants. Instead of asking for a general statement of Bosnian citizens in the United States, a more focused approach has been taken, of asking individuals to participate who are from for example Mostar, a town with a majority Croat population, which will hopefully increase the number of participants. This section will be adjusted accordingly.



## CHAPTER FIVE

The sample that was interviewed for the study has all of the requirements as listed in the advertisement. Individuals are Bosnian citizens who are living in the United States, are all between the ages of 18 and 26, are originally from various cities and towns in BiH. As mentioned earlier, there is only one Croat participant. This is because there is little difference for individuals who are from Croatia, and those who are from Bosnia but identify as Croat. The sample is also scattered geographically in the United States, but some of the major “hubs” indicated in the literature such as Chicago and Atlanta are present in this sample.

This analysis will look at three major themes. The first will be the participant’s connection to their home country, BiH. Based on all of the data that has been collected in the interview, the participant’s connections with BiH is something that was continuously brought up because all participants have family members that are currently in BiH. The second theme that will be looked at is the engagement, or lack thereof, of the research participants with the home political system. The final theme will be one that looks at the interactions of diaspora members in the United States, specifically what interactions look like between differing ethnic groups.

For the purposes of confidentiality and with IRB standards, no names will be used in the thesis, but instead codes B (Bosniak), C (Croat), and S (Serb) will be used to

distinguish between the different research participants. Something to keep in mind when observing the three ethnic groups is the kind of language that they use when describing their specific ethnic group and country as it could give insight into how these participants choose to identify themselves in the diaspora community. For example, if someone chooses to discuss more about the collective country of BiH instead of centering their talking points more around their specific group. Table 1 shows the overview of participants. The citizenship section is important as it shows their eligibility for these individuals to vote in home elections.

**Table 1 – Overview of Participants**

Participant	Hometown	Current City in US	Citizenship
B1	Bosanski Novi	Chicago, IL	US and Bosnian
B2	Mostar	Pittsburgh, PA	Bosnian
B3	Bosanski Novi	Atlanta, GA	US and Bosnian
B4	Zavidovići	Germantown, MD	US and Bosnian
C1	Bosanski Brod	Atlanta, GA	US and Bosnian
S1	Tuzla	Seattle, WA	US and Bosnian
S2	Konjic	Chicago, IL	US and Bosnian
S3	Ključ	Chicago, IL	US and Bosnian
S4	Sarajevo	Charlottesville, VA	US and Bosnian

## **Connection to Home**

The first major theme that will be looked at is the participants' connection to home and how they are engaged with BiH. This can mean anything from frequent visits to the way in which the participants communicate with individuals who currently live in BiH. Overall, this theme has mostly negative responses that are mostly associated with experiences when participants have been back in BiH since the war ended in 1995. One of the findings within this theme is that there is a lack of acceptance by the home population of the diaspora population. When these diaspora members choose to go back home, they are not often fully accepted as fully Bosnian. This is something that is experienced no matter what ethnic group one might be. As participant B1 pointed out:

I think the way they see it is you left when we went through the hardest, so you're not exactly welcome back. Even though I'm coming and spending money and stimulating the local economy with my American dollars. It's at least how I perceive it. I think that the resentment is that you left when it was the hardest. Things are still pretty shitty over there when it comes to employment, finding jobs, getting educated and they see you as an outsider who is living the dream in America just visiting.

The participant also brought up that they choose not to go back to Bosnia often because it is depressing. Another thing that this participant stated is that when they choose to go back, there is an attempt to reinforce older norms such as marrying within your own ethnic group. Those ideas are then countered with the individual's experiences in the United States, where they have been exposed to various identities.

Something that was also brought up in the interviews in regards to connections to home is the difference between the diaspora members and the home population when it relates to mentalities of individuals. Along with that, what the diaspora members observe when they do visit BiH is the structural factors that might be in the way of an individual succeeding in that system. The differences in mentality is something that participant B3 experienced when visiting family in the town of Mostar:

I actually used to feel bad about going over there and I would try to kind of, lay low in terms of me being from America. I would try to fit in as much as I can by not wearing like, lavish clothes or anything like that, not that I'm like rich or anything like that but you know, people can tell when you're not from there, when you're an outsider, and definitely been made to feel like an outsider, just based off of looks or attitudes, like, people thinking I'm above them, or they THINK I think I'm above them when that's not the case at all, or even if I try to talk to them about politics or their views, or goals, or anything like that. I felt very uncomfortable a few times, just because I felt like I was unwanted there.

As seen above, the difference in mentality is another factor to an individual from the Bosnian diaspora when it comes to choosing whether or not they want to engage with

individuals back home. While the experience of Bosnian diaspora members living in the United States is one of diverse ideas, and the notion that if you work hard you will succeed, the opposite seems to be for individuals in BiH from their interaction with diaspora members.

A similar experience was shared by participant S3, who shared that the treatment diaspora members get in BiH is one that is directly related to immense financial wealth, as well as the representation of what is “America” for the home population. The participant shared that:

There's most people assume that you have money and that you, your family is rich and there's a lot of jokes that are made kind of they call you like “the American”, although you were born over there and although you had no choice of coming to America, that was a decision made by your parents and in general like that. They kind of might think that you think you're better than them and things of that sort.

The negative observations experienced by the diaspora members deal with the attitudes of individuals who are currently living in BiH, and their perception of the American way of life.

An additional common theme that was identified in respect to an individual's connection the BiH is the structural factors that directly have an impact on the home population. Participant C1 brought up that while mentalities are different, the political structures that individuals are placed in also have quite a negative impact on the life of

people living in BiH, as observed by the participant. They state that in their home community of Bosanski Brod:

I just think it's maybe a lack of faith in the government and just kind of seeing that things haven't necessarily gotten better for them from their eyes, from what family tells me. They aren't getting better for them, and it's not just them, but a lot of people in the city are in the same situation. I couldn't tell you, I don't know if it's a mentality they're born with or not, but it comes with the hard times, especially over the last decade, kind of driving a lot of people out of there.

While this experience might vary for people living in BiH based on the town that they are in, it is an important observation to note, as the structural factors might contribute to the negative attitudes of individuals who are there.

Along with the lack of faith in the government as mentioned by participant C1, when diaspora members discuss going back home to BiH, there is also mentions of a lack of overall progress in the country that dates back to even before the war in the 1990s.

Participant S1 states that:

I realized like, has there been any progress that's been made since Tito passed away? And seemingly it hasn't, but everyone is a subject matter expert on everything... You know, and based on my parents' point of view, there is still a lot of animosity especially towards Serbs. Don't visit Sarajevo as much as they used to and

stuff like that, but in terms of me being American, I'd say that the most animosity is from the Croatian side which is bizarre because it's the side that loves America.

This is a very different narrative than other ones because it still seems to show a strong connection to the Yugoslav identity that this participant is experiencing even though they did not live in a period where Tito was the head of the country. Participant S1's responses indicate not only a lack of development in the country, but also tensions that still may be present between ethnic groups when they visited BiH.

Though most of the experiences by the participants as it relates to connections to home have been negative, one of the participants shared that the most exciting time of the year is when they have a chance to visit BiH and experience what it is like to feel at home. Participant B4 states that:

I mean that's why I end up getting so sick of being here for like four or five months out of the year, because I want to go back home, and miss the feeling that I get when I am back home because it's also with love, and um, what's it called? Don't know, love, happiness. And I just feel at home. I don't feel at home here as I do when I'm down there.

The participant mentioned that because of strong connections to family and friends, they are able to feel that positive connection to the country. They mentioned that they visit every year and it is something that has a very positive impact on them. This participant was the only one out of the sample that cited any positive interactions when visiting BiH.

The first theme allows us to see what the experience is like of an individual who is a member of the Bosnian diaspora visiting and interacting with individuals who are currently living in BiH. While the majority of these experiences are negative, they still provide key insights into the status of the country as a whole, as well as how members of the home population perceive members of the BiH diaspora.

### **Participation in the Bosnian Political System**

The second theme that was uncovered by the interviews of Bosnian diaspora members is the level of political participation by the participants in the Bosnian political system. Looking at the sample as a whole, there was only one participant who stated that they vote in a home election. Outside of that one participant, the others stated a wide disinterest in the home political system for various reasons. As for participant B2, the only participant in the sample that has voted in a home election while in the United States stated that while they have voted in the past, they have had issues voting in their specific canton that includes the city of Mostar. Participant B2 also mentioned that they have no further interaction with the home political system outside of voting in past election. They stated that “everybody keeps to themselves when it comes to that [voting] from what I can see here”. This included any sort of interactions with political actors visiting the United States as a part of any campaigns in the past.

Outside of the one participant that has voted, the participants overall cited their reasoning for not wanting to be involved with the political system. One of the main reasons, which is also shown in the existing literature, is that individuals are focused more on the political system in the United States. Participant B1 explained that: “I think



that there is less involvement especially because of this political climate in the United States and the focus is more here than it is voting to create change across the Atlantic". Another reason why participants choose not to get involved in the home political system is simply because of their viewpoint of politicians that are running in Bosnian elections. S1 stated that "We just see it as like all the politicians back home are crooks, and no one is really doing much for the interest of the people, and if once you visit the Balkans enough you tend to realize that. People are working for like \$400, not even \$400, 400 KM [Convertible Marks] or whatever it is a month, it's another catastrophe. No one really wants to discuss that, it's pathetic". While there does seem to be concern for what happens in BiH, there is also a reality for members of the Bosnian diaspora because of stories that are shared from family members back home. Further, participant S2 stated that there is little engagement in the home political system simply because their family members do not engage in politics, both those who live in the United States and family who is currently in BiH. The reasoning behind that is a lack of care for what goes on in the country politically, along with the fact that while this individual is in the United States, political decisions in BiH have little impact on their lives.

While the participants showed little to no participation and mobilization in the home political system, they did share other ways that they are involved within their own diaspora community. One of the ways that participants are involved is through various organizations that plan events for their diaspora and host communities. An example of

that is “Omladina Atlanta”, which directly translates to “Atlanta’s Youth”. One specific event that participant B3 recalls is Bosnian-American Day<sup>46</sup>:

One project my little baby, as I call it, that I really am proud of that we did was Bosnian-American Day, and we made that a reality here in Georgia, in the state of Georgia, which is March 1<sup>st</sup>. Every March 1<sup>st</sup> we observe it by having an event here at the State Capitol here in Georgia, and we just, you know, kind of mark it down by exposing the house representatives and the senators to Bosnian culture and we have food and ethnic dance and things like that, on March 1<sup>st</sup>, every year. Something that I guess I was a part of “Omladina” as well, but more so just me and a group of my friends that were the ones who kind of started the whole thing here.

The type of mobilization that is exhibited here by Atlanta’s Youth deals more with exposing the host community to certain aspects of Bosnian culture and might not have any political lobbying efforts or anything similar behind it. Other participants, such as S4, stated that in the diaspora, they are involved in other organizations like the 28 June organization<sup>47</sup>, which is a humanitarian organization that assists individuals in

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<sup>46</sup> “2nd Annual Bosnian-American Day Takes Place inside Georgia Capitol.” Accessed April 24, 2018. <https://gwinnettcitizen.com/local-news/gwinnett-pulse/2512-2nd-annual-bosnian-american-day-takes-place-inside-georgia-capitol>.

<sup>47</sup> “28. Jun | Engaging People Worldwide in Humanitarian, Social and Philanthropic Projects to Assist and Empower Underprivileged Communities.” Accessed May 1, 2018. <https://www.28jun.org/>.

underprivileged communities across the Western Balkans. Outside of cultural and humanitarian efforts, the participants did not state any other type of organizational involvement while they are here, especially those that are politically motivated. Another kind of humanitarian assistance that was showcased in the interviews comes from the diaspora for other diaspora members. Participant S2 stated that their student organization at the University of Illinois-Chicago collects funds for diaspora members in the United States who are in need.

Something that was also discussed during the interviews with diaspora members is the way in which the politics of BiH are discussed in the diaspora community. From what one can see already, these diaspora members might not be engaged by voting or lobbying for certain candidates but some of them still stay informed about what is going on in the country. Participant S3 stated that “it’s just more of just basic, you know, you’re out at a café or something or with family and it’s just constant. You know, talking about the situation back at home, but nothing is really done here in the States for it”. What can be observed is that while there is an acceptance of the current situation in BiH, there is no sort of call to action or effort to make change from the United States.

Further, there is also sometimes a hesitation for individuals who are in the diaspora to discuss the politics of BiH with other members of the diaspora community. This hesitation stems from a perception that conversations about Bosnian politics will ignite tensions between ethnic groups, even in the diaspora setting. Participant B4 stated that their overall engagement with politics is passive, but they are careful when interacting with other ethnic groups:

I keep up on current events, but I don't vote, just because like I actually put pretty much everything I know about politics would be through my friend, whose mom works in the embassy and like she just kind of feeds stuff to me like what's happening on the inside. But other than that, I honestly try and stay away just because, the more I get into politics or even if I were, if I were to bring politics up and like I'm in a, like in a setting where I'm like with friends or whatever, my friends are Croatian and Serbian, I just feel like it would cause tension between all of us and like no one really needs that. So, I don't even talk about it.

This account is very interesting because it implies that even discussing the current state of Bosnian politics in the diaspora community with this specific generation that did not have a first-hand experience with the war.

Overall, the engagement of the individuals in this study in home politics is very passive at best. While some of them stay engaged with current events and what goes on in the country, they choose to remove themselves from actively participating in the home political system through voting, lobbying, and fundraising for political candidates. The engagement that individuals are involved with is centered more towards the diaspora community, as well as humanitarian efforts which will be explored further in the next section.

## **Interactions with BiH Diaspora In the United States**

The final theme that will be looked at with this sample is the ways in which the participants interact with other members of the BiH diaspora in the United States. From the overall sample, one can conclude that Bosnian diaspora members within this age range interact with one another. While those interactions are mostly positive, there are tensions that are sometimes perceived by participants when interacting with members of the Bosnian diaspora. As a lot of the participants cited, the perceived tensions mostly come from family members that are in the United States and from stories that they shared with the participants. One of the participants, B1, stated that “My parents are still not thrilled that I have a Croatian friend, Serbian friend, a friend from Macedonia. They’d rather I exclusively hang out with Bosnians”. The same can be said for one of the Serb participants in the sample, S3, who reflected on an experience when they were younger: “I also remember the younger kids were more open to getting to know each other and being friendly while the parents were kind of hesitating about their children interacting across ethnic groups”. What can be seen here is that even though the age group in this sample did not physically go through the war, some of the perceived tensions that exist are because of the ways in which their parents discuss the war in Bosnia with them. While this, at times, may be considered good by some, because they get an intimate perspective about what happened, it also can cause rifts in the ways individuals interact.

Outside of daily interactions where members of the Bosnian community can cross ethnic lines, one thing all participants noted was a sense of nationalism that is sometimes present in various spaces where diaspora members interact. The main space that

participants noted they interact and cross those ethnic lines is concerts by ex-Yugoslavian bands in the United States. In those spaces, they noted that there are no real hesitations when it comes to interacting with one another because, in a way, the concerts can represent a shared ex-Yugoslavian identity. Participant B3 noted a specific concert experience: “Especially if they’re more geared towards like ex-Yugoslavia, like ex-Yugo rock concerts and things like that. One or two specifically that I can think of that occurred recently was the popular group Bijelo Dugme was here in Atlanta a few weeks ago, and that was a huge concert, very sold out, and all ethnic groups of course attended”. The group, Bijelo Dugme<sup>48</sup>, is a group that is also ethnically mixed, and has been active since 1974. This shared space that is experienced by Bosnian diaspora members, as it reinforces an idea, Yugoslavia, that they did not have a chance to experience first-hand, but instead they are experiencing it through these concerts and family stories. Attending ex-Yugoslav concerts is an additional way in which the diaspora community in the United States stays connected with the Balkan region. This is in addition to the creation of stores and shops that sell Bosnian products, and has been covered in previous literature which discussed the Bosnian community in St. Louis<sup>49</sup>, as one of the major Bosnian hubs in the United States.

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<sup>48</sup> “Bijelo Dugme.” Accessed May 2, 2018. <http://www.discogs.comh/artist/488253-Bijelo-Dugme>.

<sup>49</sup> Hume, Susan E. “Two Decades of Bosnian Place-Making in St. Louis, Missouri.” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873631.2015.1005880>.

In some cases, the Yugoslavian identity is more present in some than it is in others. One of the participants, S1, recalled their time as a refugee: “We were all friends, and I didn’t understand, and I didn’t know any of this until I got to high school and one of my basketball coaches, her husband was Serbian and my dad kind of explained to me the situation but prior to that, my identity was a Yugoslavian more so than anything else, and I didn’t know I was Serbian”. While the strength of this identity may not be seen in the entire sample, it is an interesting finding because in a way, individuals are still experiencing some aspects of Yugoslavia without having lived in the period when Yugoslavia was a country. These ideas seem to be passed down from family members and other members of the ex-Yugoslavian community.

While individuals interacting and crossing ethnic lines is happening at these concerts, it does not always end peacefully. Participants in this study shared that these concerts are a space where nationalism occurs in various ways, further creating a rift between different ethnic groups. For some, this kind of behavior is something that they consider as a regional feature of individuals from the former Yugoslav countries rather than a quality specific to one ethnic group. S3 explained that:

Everybody from the Balkans is extremely nationalistic, I would say, and passionate about who they are because once the war happened everybody kind of, like I said, picked sides. So, it’s definitely...I’m definitely extremely proud of where I’m from and I’m not afraid to show it. And it definitely comes from...I think that most children are talking to their parents for sure.

What can be seen from this is that if individuals are experiencing nationalism within the diaspora community within this age group, like the ex-Yugoslavian culture pieces, it is something that is passed down from parents and other family members. Further, this perspective shows that any kind of nationalism can be seen from multiple countries and is sort of a more cultural aspect that is tied to the identity of someone who is originally from that region.

The viewpoint that nationalistic thoughts and actions are not cultural but instead are tied to an individual's ethnic group was also an opinion showcased in the participant interviews. A specific way that this is showcased is in the three-finger salute, which is often used as a symbol of Serbian unity in the Balkans and abroad. Participant B3 noted that behavior in the past: "it doesn't even matter who the singer is honesty, people will, they'll put up three fingers or something in pictures and things like that, and I've seen fights break out because of what someone said to another person that was nationalistic". Differences in opinion about this specific issue are present when comparing the Bosniak and Serb communities as a theme during these interviews, especially because earlier participants showcased hesitations when interacting with someone that identifies as someone of a different ethnic group.

Another way that nationalism has been sparked within the diaspora community is the fairly recent International Criminal Court rulings that convicted Ratko Mladić<sup>50</sup> and

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<sup>50</sup> Bowcott, Owen, and Julian Borger. "Ratko Mladić Convicted of War Crimes and Genocide at UN Tribunal." *The Guardian*, November 22, 2017, sec. World news. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/22/ratko-mladic-convicted-of-genocide-and-war-crimes-at-un-tribunal>.



Slobodan Praljak<sup>51</sup> of war crimes. Participants stated that the nationalism has come from all three of the major ethnic groups in BiH. One of the Serb participants noted that most of that nationalism has happened in online forums, specifically social media: “Go online the day after the verdict and there’s murals all over the place. There’s songs being written, and that’s the nationalistic rise”. What participants identified as the problem with the rulings was the way both Mladić and Praljak were framed in both the Serb and Croat community, respectively. Participant B1 stated that “All three sides have war criminals that they are convinced are national heroes”. The differences in the framing of these individuals is what explains escalating tensions between ethnic groups both in the diaspora community and in BiH.

While the diaspora community that was interviewed for this study did feature negative interactions and cases of nationalistic acts, participants did state very positive experiences interacting with individuals from a different ethnic group. Some of that comes from individuals choosing who they want to interact with and just knowing that there is someone in the community who they share certain aspects of their culture with. Participant B4 emphasized that:

I really don't look at religion or ethnicity or any of that when I'm picking and choosing my friends from Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia just because I'm, like I said, happy to just be able to share a language to

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<sup>51</sup> Bowcott, Owen. “Bosnian Croat War Criminal Dies after Taking Poison in UN Courtroom.” *The Guardian*, November 29, 2017, sec. Law. <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/nov/29/un-war-crimes-defendant-claims-to-drink-poison-at-trial-in-hague-slobodan-praljak>

be able to, sing the same songs together, be able to share a culture, like relatively the same culture between all three together... I feel as though like religion more or less is not important at all just because for me it's, it's important to have to be able to share the same language with somebody to share the same slang term, to share the same taste in music and things like that regardless of like where you're from.

This kind of mentality can be seen as something that can lead this specific population into peaceful interactions in the future with possible declines in some of the negative behaviors observed above. Additionally, participant S4 stated that when in need, it is always nice to have someone there: "It's nice to have people from your country there even though you don't necessarily associate with them every day. Like you have someone to call if you really need them". What can be interpreted from this is that even though there still might be tensions present between ethnic groups, individuals are still willing to help one another in a time of need.

The interactions between individuals in the Bosnian diaspora community observed in this sample range from celebrating ex-Yugoslavian culture, to nationalism, and so on. The interviews provide key insights into the ways these individuals think and feel about what happened in BiH and how it impacts them on a daily basis. In the end, one of the participants noted a recommendation for individuals who struggle to accept others of a different ethnic group. Participant C1 noted that "I've always asserted that

they should just talk to each other. More than anything they should talk to each other because I can't hold 3 or 4 generations of Serbs later guilty for things that their great grandparents might have done". Though this recommendation may not solve every issue in this community, it is something that has the potential to have a large impact especially in the diaspora community moving forward.

## CHAPTER SIX

The overall results offer new insights into the experience of a diaspora community but also back up previous literature that was discussed earlier. As for new visions, the analysis shows that members of the Bosnian diaspora specifically in this age group are not engaged in home politics at all. On the one hand, what can be seen from the participant that does participate by voting, is that they are not fully informed on what they are voting for and what stances they are supporting. On the other hand, the individuals who are not involved with home politics at all are not because either they are not informed on what is fully going on in the country, or they do not care because it does not directly impact them. One common theme that has emerged when discussing home politics with the participants is the lack of progress that is currently present. If individuals were involved in home politics or not, there seemed to be a presence of negativity based off of regular interactions that they have had with the rest of the diaspora community. This can also be seen through their experience of actually going back to BiH and their interactions with individuals back home. The theme of a lack of progress and a lack of willingness to participate in home politics can also be seen in the literature discussed earlier. It showed that the Bosnian diaspora community in the United States is much more focused on the recreation of home in the United States, and less on political engagement. The results of this research show that this is consistent with the diaspora population as well. While this research cannot compare the experiences of Bosniaks versus Croats

versus Serbs because of the low number of Croat participants, it is something that is expected, as literature discussed in the methodology section showed.

Further, the results can provide a look into how the Bosnian diaspora community will interact with the home political system in the future. In previous chapters, reports by the Central Electoral Commission show that the number of individuals who vote in home elections from the diaspora community in the United States has decreased significantly, and the disengagement from the diaspora members who were interviewed for this project shows that the trend will continue. While this small sample does not represent the entire diaspora population in the United States, it does give insight on what some of the general themes are when it comes to individuals connecting over home politics. The reason behind the detachment of the participants can be the fact that this generation of Bosnian diaspora members is simply tired of discussing the war in its entirety and would much rather move on from it, instead of being stuck in the past, as that is the mentality of individuals who are currently living in BiH, according to the interviews presented above. Though this sample is not big enough to cover the entire Bosnian diaspora population, it does offer a view of what is to come. Future generations will spend less time worrying about what happened in the Bosnian war because their parents will not have as much rooted memories with them. This has positive and negative outcomes. As for positive ones, it means that individuals here will care much less about the differences in ethnic groups and will see themselves more as simply Bosnians. As for the negative consequences, it will mean that less individuals are looking at BiH as home and will become more detached from that region.

Results which were provided above also support some of the literature that was covered in previous chapters. Earlier, some of the literature stated that individuals who are members of the Bosnian diaspora are not really considered Bosnian. This is also seen in the interviews, as the participants' interactions with individuals when they go back to BiH are ones that are mostly negative, as the participants are seen more as outsiders to the Bosnian community, regardless of the fact that they are citizens of the country and have strong family ties. The common theme that does emerge when discussing all three ethnic groups is the way in which they are perceived when they go back, as individuals with unlimited material wealth, and those who "left us" rather than "escaped" which is what most of the participants did. This can be seen in both the work done by Filipović, and the interviews with diaspora members. These negative experiences can imply that future generations of Bosnians living in the United States will choose to engage even less than the current generation.

Additionally, what can be seen is that while Bosnian diaspora community members are not well accepted in their home country when they go back, they do come together and do attend public events where they are able to connect with the homeland. Though the literature showed that the way in which Bosnians in the United States are connected to the homeland is through the creation of shops and cultural organizations, the interviews reveal a new space where ethnic lines cross. Those interactions are centered around concerts of bands from the ex-Yugoslavia. This space can be looked at as the space where individuals in this group gather, which is a new discovery. The results show how negative feelings can be passed down from one generation to the next but the

cultural piece of attending these concerts is also a piece that can be looked at something that is passed down through family. Yugo-nostalgia,<sup>52</sup> a concept that looks at how individuals in 2017 connect over cultural pieces that were present in former Yugoslavia. The same concepts can be applied with the diaspora community as well, because of the cultural pieces that seem to be essential in their engagement and are something that keep them attached to the idea of Yugoslavia, a country that they were not alive to see for themselves.

Looking at the third theme from a broader lens, there are definitely differences when it comes to what was shared from the participants. Based on the responses when discussing BiH, Bosniak, as well as Croat participants were quick to view the country as theirs, whereas some of the Serb responses did seem very different in the ways in which they discussed everything that has happened since the war. The Bosnian Serb participants also brought up a very different perspective when it comes to their experiences with the war, as they cited clear bias towards the other two groups which was something that seems very different in their experience as a part of the Bosnian diaspora in the United States. While the experiences of Bosnian citizens in this age group is very similar in terms of participating in home politics and their experience interacting with their home country, their viewpoints differ greatly when it comes to their interactions with other diaspora members. While comparing the experiences of the three ethnic groups might not

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<sup>52</sup> “Rise of Yugo-Nostalgia ‘Reflects Contemporary Problems.’” Accessed February 28, 2018. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/yugonostalgia-as-result-of-unfinished-nation-building-processes-03-14-2017>.

be productive because of the low number of Croat participants, it still is significant to note the differences in experiences of the participants.

One consistent theme that was brought up was nationalism within the borders of the United States. Existing literature mentioned earlier that diaspora members are more prone to crossing ethnic lines and engaging one another. While that is true for the individuals in this study as well, every participant stated that they have experienced some level of nationalism from other Bosnian individuals in this country. The consistency also follows in the ways in which the acts of nationalism are played out, as participants cited that it comes out in online forums, as well as various public events. The supporting literature surrounding chosen traumas and glories is also significant as all of the participants stated that their viewpoints came from their parents and other family members, as their experience during the war was able to influence the ways in which they interact with other ethnic groups.

Lastly, the Hague rulings were something that not only had an impact on the Bosnian community in BiH, but also had quite an impact on those that are living in the United States as well. This is again seen in public events and online forums. The origins of these periods of nationalism seem to be a protection from one's own group. This can be seen in the participant's answers of simply wanting to protect their own and not focusing on negative behavior towards another group, something that is also consistent in the literature of diaspora populations.

The insights provided in these interviews provides a look into the future of what is to be expected from members of the Bosnian diaspora community. Low levels of political



engagement, and viewpoints that are passed down from one generation to the next. Further, it shows that the idea of Yugoslavia will continue to be passed down through family members and cultural events. At best, this research serves as a case study for this specific community. One can see from previous studies that diaspora populations mobilize around various political movements in their home country. This kind of mobilization does not necessarily apply to the Bosnian diaspora community, as one can see obvious rifts between ethnic groups as shown in the interviews conducted.

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