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Interview with Senida Husić (FA 1137)

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Project name: Bosnia Project
Field ID and name: KFP2016IYB_0006_VSsr0002
Interviewee: Senida Husic
Interviewer/Recordist: Virginia Siegel
Date: February 22, 2016
Location: Senida's home, Bowling Green, KY
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Transcribing Conventions:

Use of square brackets [] indicates a note from the transcriber.

Use of parentheses () indicates a conversational aside.

Use of dash - indicates an interruption of thought or conversation.

Use of ellipses ... indicates a discontinued thought.

Use of quotations “ “ indicates reported speech.

Use of *italics* indicates emphasis.

Use of underline indicates movie, magazine, newspaper, or book titles.

Names of interviewee and interviewer are abbreviated by first and last initial letters.

Time is recorded in time elapsed by the convention [hours:minutes:seconds].

[00:00:00]

VS: Do like the little intro like-

SH: That's fine.

VS: Okay, this is Virginia Siegel and I am with Senida Husi- Husic [I can't talk [both laugh]] in her house, and it is 7:18 on February 22nd. Thank you for being here, or letting me visit your home.

SH: Thank you for coming and thank you for allowing me to talk about this.

VS: Absolutely. Um, so I guess let's just start, tell me about Bosnian coffee.

SH: So um, Bosnian coffee has a very unique story and I guess tradition and culture behind it.

Um, I think what, you know, well we've talked about this before, but what people in the States and maybe just the Western part of the world are used to as just coffee is kind of their um, you know, their wake up in the morning, um they are getting energized um, you know? Not letting them fall asleep at night, like kids do coffee all night to pull all-nighters and all of that stuff, but for Bosnian people, really coffee has a totally different meaning. Um, coffee is more of um a tradition of uh spending time with your friends and family. Um, it's like a, uh, uh, a pastime, a leisure time. It really is, it, it's got so much more meaning, and I know, again, we talked about it, but there's the, the, the notion of chafe [spelling?] in Bosnia, in Bosnian culture and, and Bosnian language, and chafe would roughly translate into um something of leisure, something of uh pleasure, something that you do for the feel of it, for, for the um, I guess the, the inherited will and need for something. It's like you need to have this time with your family, you know? To talk over whatever, or even if it's just, you know, for yourself if you're doing it for yourself, but it's you're relaxing, you're you're enjoying it. It's like you do something because you enjoy it and it makes you feel good, and that's essentially what coffee is for Bosnian people. Um, and, and you know, it just depends, again it ranges from different groups to where you go in the country, but it is really something that as soon as you walk into somebody's house there is a pot of water being boiled for coffee, um, you know? And if you go over to somebody's house for dinner it's like you usually have coffee before dinner and then coffee after dinner. And this is really the tradition more of people in the countryside and more in the village area, uh rural, but in the urban people also do coffee but it's more that, that Western ideology of what coffee is for. Yeah it's still a, you know, a, a great thing to do with your friends and your family, um but it doesn't have that same feeling, that same chafe, [sp] if, if that, it, it's, it's not the same as if you're having it, you know, at home, you know, with your grandma and grandpa, per se, or if you're just visiting friends and family that you've lived with for a long time in the villages, so. Loosely translated that's the tradition of Bosnian coffee in Bosnia.

VS: And it's the same here in Bowling Green?

SH: Yes, um, uh and I know for me, especially like in the morning um, you know, I have like two giant cups of coffee which uh in Bosnia like that, those are huge cups. So I'm taking like a little bit of the Western notion of coffee and I'm using their giant cups, but I'm still brewing and making this like very copious, very rich coffee taste. So I'm like overdosing in caffeine, probably going to be caffeine like resistant to all the side effects of caffeine. Um but yes, so, you know, and I do that, and again, not to wake up, because coffee doesn't help

me wake up, it doesn't prevent me from going to bed. I know people, and maybe it's because I've had so much coffee, but people say, you know, "I can't have coffee or past such and such time because I won't be able to fall asleep." I can have a cup of coffee and go back- go to bed right away. It, it, it just, you know, has- doesn't have that effect. So I have it here for that reason, just to enjoy it, and it, it kind of gets me in this mood of being very uh, you know, being very motivated. And, and just really if I'm having a rough day at work like I, I take coffee because, you know, it's like this is something I enjoy and it, you know, it just has like these memories and like the feelings of being happy and that be- doing that with your family, and it just kind of, you know, sometimes overshadows or smooths over the stress and, and the worry that your work day could bring. Um, and then I also know like in our, in my circle of friends and family that's, you know, what coffee is. We go over for coffee to enjoy each other's company, to talk over you know what's going on in our lives, and what we want to do, and, you know, coffee has to be, has to be there, [slight laugh] unless somebody is really like sick and then we'll do tea. [00:04:55] Tea is like in Bosnia it's, usually people drink tea if they're sick and it's mostly chamomile tea, [slight laugh] that's like your go-to. And then what people do a lot of times is like they blend different teas and they put them together um, you know, to create like, and each tea of course has like different remedies that it's good for, or it's a remedy for different things, different symptoms. So, you know, they, they kind of make their own concoction of what it is that they're trying to get rid of, or, you know, to, to soothe, so.

VS: Yeah.

SH: Yeah.

VS: That's really cool. So, walk me through the steps of making Bosnian coffee.

SH: Yes. So um, and we've talked about this before, but making Bosnian coffee is something that you have to learn, and it's like a, it's an acquired skill. Like you, it's like almost an apprenticeship that your [laughs] your mom or your parents put you through. But um, so what you'll do essentially is you'll have a pot or a kettle, whatever you'd like to use, and you'll boil water in it, and the water has to be boiling, it can't be warm, it can't be about to boil, like it has to boil, you know? Be past the boiling point for you to be able to use it. And then you will have this, um, what we call a *džezva*, and this is like a, a, a specifically made pot for coffee, to make coffee in. So I wouldn't call it a coffee cup because it's not a coffee cup, but it's a, you know, a, a, a container in which you make your coffee. So you will have that ready, and what my mom has always taught me is that it has to be dry, um because if it's wet like the, the, once you put it on the hot plate uh on the stove, it'll actually like the water that's in there and the coffee that it's getting wet, like you won't get the same aroma and the same taste. Um, so your, your coffee container, your coffee pot um has to be clean,

and you have to, what I do is like so you, depending on how much you're making, you know, you're adding in your amount of coffee, um ground coffee of course, and you put it on your stove for it to warm up. Like just to get a little warm, you don't want to put it on there for too long because then it kind of like burns the coffee and you have a really strange like burnt taste, which I, every time I go to a gas station and there's not a good like, if I'm traveling long distance, going to Chicago or something along those lines and I have to like make a stop at a gas station or, or exit that I'm not familiar with and I just need coffee, like I just I haven't had coffee and I just want coffee, um, you know, to, to have the ride more enjoyable. And of course it's a gas station, there is nothing else around, and I get coffee and like that, that coffee sometimes tastes like the [laughs] coffee that every now and then when I was learning to make it, I'll actually leave the pot with the dry coffee in there for too long and it'll kind of like get that burning, or burnt feel, or burnt taste I guess. So you don't want to do that, so I usually say like, you know, depending on how big it is and how hot your plate is, I would say three seconds, four seconds max, and then you pour your uh, pour your boiling water into it. And once it all mixes, you will keep it on that stove or that hot plate um until you see like this giant bubble starting to foam from the bottom, and just like moving your, um, we call it pena, but it's like the foam, the coffee foam, um and it's a very thick and rich, you've seen it, very thick and rich coffee foam, and it'll start to like move it up. And what it's doing is like as the water is starting to boil, it's moving all the coffee grains up to the top. And, you know, one of the, one of the signs or the key um necessities I guess to make, to making a good coffee, is the fact that there is so much foam and it's like nice and rich texture. Um, so but one thing that my mom has always told me, and I don't know maybe this is just my mom's preference, but she's like, you know, "you cannot let it boil over." [slight laugh] Like if that bubble that's coming, if it bursts and like boils over, then you've gone too far, then your coffee is not the, [laughing] you know, it's not the optimum prime level. Um, so essentially and, and once, once you've gotten it coming all the way up, you take it off really fast before it boils over and then you're ready to serve your coffee. And one thing that my mom is a very big stickler, and again this is like, this is what my mom says, um and I know I've just talking to my friends and family, that's how they do it as well, um you don't, you want to serve your coffee right away. At least pour it right away and then people can wait, you know, some people like it like hot, like burning your tongue off, um others like to have it cool down before they drink it, so it just really depends, but the key thing is to pour it into your coffee cup, as soon as possible, because if you wait a while that foam will start to disintegrate and then you're going to lose the aesthetics of it, and um I'm pretty sure also the flavor as well. Because I think there's something with the shape of the cup, or of the coffee pot, versus the, you know, ones that actually goes into the coffee cup, so.

VS: Hmm.

[00:09:56]

SH: And then, you know, i- a- as far as like what you take with coffee and all of that, um usually it's, like my father drinks coffee without sugar and milk. He just has coffee and then he'll have those sugar cubes and he'll use that. Sometimes he'll um do rahat lokum, which uh, you know, I've, I've showed you that before. Um and rahat lokum for those who don't know, it's just essentially sugar [slight laugh] with like some key um flavorings in it. Sometimes it has all kind of different nuts, like pistachios, and walnuts, and uh almonds and all of that stuff, but really most uh common is walnuts. Um, so people will have them instead of the su- the, the sugar cubes, um and then of course people can have it with creamer, but back in the day there was no creamer of course, so you'll use milk and it'll actually have to be boiled milk, like previously boiled milk because it has a different taste and once it's mixed with the coffee it doesn't take away too much from the actual coffee taste, so.

VS: Yeah.

SH: That's, you know, a little bit about how you make coffee. [laughs]

VS: Tell me about the place setting, or the um how the cups are arranged, you know? Is there a specific way of doing that or?

SH: Uh there, there isn't really, and it just depends on how traditional you want to be with your coffee presentation. Um, and some people like A- I, I know you know Adisa, and she's very big about like being very, very traditional and holding on to our roots, so she drinks her coffee from a fildžan, and that's a coffee saucer. So it's not like a cup, it doesn't have the little handle, but it's a little saucer, um and I'll actually show you some when we get downstairs. Um, so uh, you know, she'll have her's in that, and up until a few years back, my father just wanted to use the fildžan as well, because again like to, to my father, and I'm sure to Adisa too because she's very, you know, interested in the past traditions, but, you know, to my father like that I'm sure brought back memories of, you know, having coffee with, you know, his brothers and some of his late brothers, and then his late parents. So it just, like it's, it's, it's a very powerful thing if you really think about it, and sometimes, you know, coffee will get us reminiscing about the good and the bad of what's been and what, you know, what history is somewhat repeating itself in so ways, so it, it, it's a great conversation starter and it, it's just, so it really, you know, when it comes to presentation it just depends on you. If you want to be more traditional, if you want to be more modern, like there are all kinds of different coffee cups, um usually so you have your coffee cup or um, if you're doing the coffee cup then you'll have a little plate to put the coffee cup in, um and usually what people do with presentation like they'll put the uh sugar cubes on there.

Some people, and again, it's uh, again kind of a preference, personal preference for each people, but if you go to somebody's house they won't even put like the sugar in your coffee or even ask you, they'll just give you the cubes and then, you know, you can use as much as you want or as little as you'd like, um, so that depends. And then as far as like the, the look of the cup, it can be huge, it can be smaller, it can be more modern, more like dainty, more Victorian-like, or you know, more traditional-like. Or, of course, you can do the little saucers, and with the saucers there's no, you know, plate to put them on or anything like that, they're just served like that as little saucers, and they will just go around. And usually the saucers are smaller, although they can also range in different sizes as well. Um, and as far as, you know, there is a uh which is essentially just like um, I know you have uh, um, like a little-

VS: Like a tray?

SH: -tray, that's the word I'm, yeah, it's a tray. And, you know, people, manufacturers and other companies, they get very crafty with how that looks, and the coloring, and the detailing on it, and all of that stuff. So what we've got down there, we've got two different ones, those are probably the most popular ones that you'll see, almost in every household there's the silver one and a different shade, and then now they've come out with like more of the copper-ish looking ones, and those are more for like a, if you, if you're in the mood for a very traditional presentation, um, you know, of course you will use those. And other than that, essentially, you know, you can add sweets, sweets are always a good thing to go with it. Depending on, you know, doesn't matter if it's something that you made at home, something that you bought at store, like at a dessert shop, or if you just went to like your grocery store and you bought some like wafer cookies or, you know, whatever the case is, like there usually is something to go with coffee always, always.

VS: And some of the sets I've seen are very beautiful, is there a metal-working tradition in?

SH: A- as far as how they're made and all? Yeah. Well it just depends, um if you, the fildžan, I think for fildžans, it that there's more um kind of like the tradition in Bosnia, from what I've noticed. Um, but then again I haven't been in Bosnia in a while to, to kind of um give you more of an accurate statement, but I know that like a lot of um the coffee cups are made in Turkey, a lot of those are made in Turkey, and then England likes their tea. [00:15:08] So they made a lot of really cute tea cups that people, you know, essentially use for coffee as well. Um, and I know like the Middle East, with their Arabian coffee, they do more of the saucers as well. So you will have different saucers everywhere. I think in Bosnia um really it just depends, I don't think there's a particular cup that you would say is Bosnian, but there is a particular saucer presentation. Like remember I was telling you there's uh like a little small coffee saucer and then it has a metal kind of like a holder that you put in, and

the essence of that is, again it gives more detailing and more like the traditional feel, but it also like the metal will keep your coffee in there warmer much longer, and but at the same time it will kind of protect you from holding, like having direct contact with the saucer itself, that'll kind of be warm. Because if you, and I don't know if you ever get a chance to like see videos or movies of people drinking coffee from that, like they'll have to hold it from the very top because the bottom is very, very warm. So that's why that little encasing, that holder, is at the very bottom, so that you can actually hold it from the bottom and not worry about burning yourself.

VS: Hmm.

SH: Mhmm.

VS: Um, and I remember we talked briefly about coffee beans and how, I guess-

SH: Yeah.

VS: -it's mostly desirable to have- grind them yourself.

SH: It is the, if, if you really want to like get to the, like the, the best aroma and taste, you will go buy raw coffee beans, you will cook them or bake them, I'm not really sure what the, the correct expression is for that, but you will put them in your oven and you'll just let them roast them. Right? Is that?

VS: Mhmm.

SH: It's roasting coffee beans? [laughs]

VS: Mhmm, mhmm.

SH: So you would roast them, and my mom uh used to be an expert at that. Um, we haven't roasted coffee beans in such a long time, um but I'll have to show you the [unclear] that we have. So, yes, so you'll roast them and you'll get it out and it'll just cool down and all that good stuff, and then you have your [unclear] which is a coffee grinder, and it's like a manual, traditional, like back three, four, five hundred years, however long, you know, coffee existed, it's been much longer than that I know. Um, because, well the Bosnians, the more and more uh research is done in Bosnia, the more and more we find out that there was such a civilized civilization I guess, a civilized people, um that lived in, in, in that region that it, it's amazing. And I mean this is kind of like a side note but the, the pyramids in Visoko, it, they're dated further back than the ones in Egypt, and I'm just baffled. Like I- it-

are they wrong? I don't know, but it's just really strange, you know, it's, it, it's a strange fact and it's kind of hard to believe, and I'm very curious to find out what else they're going to discover as they're going through these. So, anyways, um this little instrument has been in use for a very long time, and it's very basic, and um, I was telling you, more of the older ones were kind of like copper-ish looking, more of like that goldish color-

VS: Mhmm.

SH: -and then the newer ones are silver, of course, more modern and all of that good stuff. But essentially you'll take your roasted coffee beans that have cooled down, you'll put it in your little um coffee grinder, and there's a little lever and it's like a little, inside there's a little wheel that grinds the coffee, um like little blades that grind together the coffee, and you'll just sit there and you'll- and that's done every time somebody comes over.

VS: Hmm.

SH: And the, this is like one of the most amazing things that, I don't know to me it's amazing, and back then it was just routine, it's like, you know, washing your face before you go to bed, but now it, it's so much has changed, like even now people in Bosnia don't necessarily do that because you, ground coffee and fine ground coffee is so easily accessible anywhere, even like the, the most remote villages in Bosnia can get ground coffee now without having to roast their coffee, grind it themselves, and all of that stuff. And a lot of other people, now that they don't have to do it, they do it just for the pure [chaffe]. The pure like beauty and, and, and the feeling and um I guess, you know, the, the it's just hard to describe [chaffe] I'm sorry, it's just really hard. It's one of those, it's one of those notions that almost doesn't exist in English, that you have to like use different, and I really haven't like looked into it more and how to describe it, but so you'll, you know, you'll take your little coffee grinder and you'll just grind it, and, you know, you'll pour it in your coffee and, and usually you have your coffee pot or your coffee container and you know how much you will need to grind to be able to make that whole coffee serving. So it, it's really neat, and I kind of miss it because then like you really had- because, you know, coffee loses it's flavor and it goes stale, and, you know, we don't know how long our coffee has been packaged and how long it was sitting somewhere in a warehouse. So when you're grinding it there and then, you're getting that fresh, fresh stuff.

VS: That's really cool.

SH: It is really cool. I'm actually gonna have to make my mom, or I'm gonna find some, you know, unroasted, which now it's like crazy finding that, it was kind of like back then finding ground coffee was impossible, now it's the opposite.

VS: Hmm.

SH: Yes. [laughs]

VS: Well is there anything else you want to add or?

SH: Um, no, I feel like we've talked- I feel like I talked a lot more than I, I thought I was going to. [laughs]

VS: Well thank you, this um we'll, we'll just conclude it then, how about that?

SH: Yeah.

VS: Okay.

SH: Thank you so much.

VS: Thank you.

[00:20:57 End Track]