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Across the Stream: An Ethnography of Biculturating

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Abstract

This study explores cross-cultural adaptation process from an ethnographic perspective. The data come from my own experience of adapting to a new culture and place, combined with the observations from numerous other individuals, international students and emigrants going through the same process. The biculturating patterns emerged through using Wolcott's ethnographic techniques on data gathered primarily through observations, interviewing numerous international students and immigrants, and my own experience of moving across cultures over a decade in Northern Colorado. After summarizing the previous research, explaining the method and the culture, the paper describes biculturating patterns as acculturation, biculturating, and becoming bicultural. The interpretation and conclusion of the paper is that biculturation could not be studied in model. Biculturation is the outcome from the combination of the background of the settler, the motives for crossing cultures, and the host culture environment, where the motivation is the driving wheel of the process.

Key words: Cross-cultural adaptation; Identity; Bicultural; Intercultural

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INTRODUCTION

People move across cultures every year for a variety of reasons and at various times. Cross-cultural adaptation is essential in their journey. Cross-cultural adaptation research has increased significantly over the decades and still needs to move forward. Most of the research undertaken is seen in light of a dominant host culture talking about the newcomers or non-dominant culture (Kim, 2007, p.28). The tendency in cross-cultural study so far is to look at the process of adaptation in models and categorize it.

Qualitative research, in general, and ethnographic approaches, specifically, offers a better picture for understanding, describing, and discovering the process of becoming bicultural in its whole complexity from the participant's perspective. Culture is an amorphous term, not something "lying about" (Wolcott, 1987, p.41), but something researchers attribute to a group when looking for patterns of their social world (Creswell, 2007). Along the same line, so is acculturation and biculturating. They are amorphous, not solid. Communicating culture is as complex as our life experiences, and an ethnographic approach allows us to study the process without the need for categorizing or "boxing" the culture. Biculturation cannot be modeled; it can only be told as a story of a life changing journey.

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to describe the process of cross-cultural adaptation, up to becoming bicultural, for international students and immigrants in the Northern Colorado area from 1998-2009. The data has been gathered primarily through longitudinal participant's observations, my own experience of adapting to a new culture and place, interviews, and additional documents and materials concerning international students as sojourners in search of academic and cultural growth and immigrants as settlers in search of better lives.

After exploring the current literature on adaptation models, theoretical lens and methods used, the cultural

description, the biculturating patterns that emerged from the ethnographic approach, describes an authentic portrait of becoming bicultural. This study nourishes the existing theory by highlighting the outcome of the adaptation process as a combination of the settler's background and the motive for crossing cultures with the host culture and climate.

1. PREVIOUS CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTION RESEARCH

Kim, Y. Y. (2001) incorporates the existing conceptions of cross-cultural adaptation into three groups: macro and micro level, long and short term, and adaptation as problem and adaptation as learning/growth. Macro-level perspectives view acculturation as a group phenomenon that was typical among anthropological studies more than fifty years ago. Micro-level perspectives focus on the experience of individuals crossing cultures. Long-term adaptation is the study of the processes that are more or less permanent, and short-term adaptation studies the adaptation process of temporary sojourners. Adaptation as problem focuses on cross-cultural experiences as stress and frustration (culture-shock studies), while adaptation as learning/growth accesses acculturation.

Long-term adaptation, as a process of personal evolution, describes the essential process of adaptation that settlers undergo over time. In a way, individuals crossing cultures can be described as experiencing a degree of existential alertness; all newcomers are compelled to make adjustments in their habitual ways of carrying out their life activities (Kim, 2001, p.5). Acculturation, the learning of the host cultural practices, is thought of as going along with deculturation and assimilation. Assimilation is an "ideal" state characterized by the maximum possible convergence of internal conditions to those of the dominant culture (Kincaid, 1988). Assimilation is at the extreme end of the cross-cultural adaptation continuum in the case of long-term settlers and can only be observed over generations (Kim, 2001). The alternation model posits that sojourners are able to gain host communication competence within two or more cultures without losing their identity or having to choose one culture over another (Kim, 2007, p.229). The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic views adaptation as a response by the settler. The push of the new culture and the pull of the old, a conflict between keeping the original identity, on the one hand, and the desire to seek harmony with the new milieu, on the other hand (Boekestijn, 1988; Zaharna, 1989).

Kim's Structural Adaptation Model explores the factors that impede or facilitate the adaptation process, which include host communication competence, host receptivity, and host conformity pressure (Kim, 2004, p.345). The underlying assumption of this model is that adaptation is an interactive process and that communication is the vehicle through which adaptation occurs. The U-Curve Adjustment Model introduced by the Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard in 1955 continues to influence the research on cross-cultural adaptation. The U- Curve Adjustment Model has been further developed by other scholars (e.g. Oberg, 1960; Chang, 1973). According to this model, the adaptation process goes through four stages: honeymoon, crises/culture shock, adaptation, and biculturation. When and if the sojourner goes back home, he/she has to go through a similar kind of adaptation process. It is referred to as W-Curve Model, where the second curve is meant to describe the re-entry shock and readjustment.

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986, 1993, 1998, & 2004) was created as a framework to explain the reaction of people towards cultural differences. The model suggests that people with intercultural sensitivity pass from the ethnocentric stage of denial, defense, and minimization to an ethno-relative stage of acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

Chen and Starosta (2000) also have contributed to the intercultural sensitivity dimension. Intercultural sensitivity is a precondition for living harmoniously and meaningfully in an increasingly pluralistic world (Chen & Starosta, 2000, p. 407). Along the line of intercultural sensitivity, Starosta and Olorunnisola (1992) introduced the Third Culture Building (TCB) theory, a cross-cultural adaptation that facilitates the possibility for successful adaptation by recognizing and integrating cultural similarities and differences so a synergistic outcome can be reached. Berry and his associates (1990 & 1997) have also offered comprehensive explanatory systems. Dawson, Crano, and Burgon (1996), Nagata (1969) and Taft (1988), Benson (1978) and De Vos (1990) have studied and offered further models of adaptation. The models included in this review of literature are chosen on the criteria of their contribution to the cross-cultural communication field and theoretical consensus among them.

The adaptation to a new culture is a life-style all its own; it forms a culture in itself. That is why, in order to understand the process, we need to take our understanding beyond the current models and structures of cross-cultural adaptation or biculturation. How does it work for the people who actually go through it? What keeps them moving forward? What do they value most during the process and after they become bicultural? This study is an attempt to describe a "biculturation" portrait as the settlers live it.

2. METHOD

My approach to ethnography for this study is informed by Wolcott (1990, 1994, & 1999) and, in particular, his book *Ethnography: A way of seeing* (1999). "From the

many sources collected, the ethnographer analyses the data for a description of a culture sharing group" (Wolcott, 1999). The data analyses as advanced by Wolcott (1994b) include: description, analyses, and interpretation of the culture sharing group. Description is "the foundation upon which qualitative research is built", the analysis is the search for patterned regularities in the data, and the interpretation goes beyond the data-base and probes to "what is to be made of them" (Wolcott, 1994b). Also, in order to use my own cross-cultural adaptation experience for the study, I consulted *The ethnographic it: A methodological novel about Autoethnography* by Ellis, C. (2004), an approach that allows the researcher to provide cultural perspective on his/her own experience.

I collected the data primarily through the observations of "longitudinal participants" (Agar, 1996). The people involved were international students and immigrants living in the Northern Colorado area from 1998 to 2009. International students with whom I was involved and, therefore, observed were from all over the world, representing nearly every country of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, South America, and Europe. The desire to be active, help, and write led me to take advantage of the opportunity. I collected notes and become further informed in order to benefit from this excellent research situation (Reimer, 1977). From the beginning, I was involved in activities with students, but I did not start keeping notes until the spring of 2001. At that time I had a part-time job assisting graduate international students and their families with their cultural adaptation process. This included an introductory welcome interview and regular follow up to see about their integration to university life and the broader community. I knew the participants well enough to approach them directly. Quite often the notes were kept unplanned as students often approached me asking for assistance with various academic and social tasks.

There is a gap period of three years out of the field. From 2005-2008, I left the area due to family obligations. When I returned, however, I reconnected with most of the participants in person, a few online as they had returned to their country of origin. I took advantage of this return, and it made it possible for me to observe, interview, and collect data from a fresh perspective. Furthermore, for the purpose of my own graduate studies in communication, I conducted in-depth, unstructured interviews with international students at their homes, on campus, or in public spaces. These interviews focused on cross-cultural communication and varied topics from a cross-cultural perspective.

Non-student immigrants were mostly from South America, Eastern Europe, and India. A few were from the Middle East. I was involved with them more actively during my first two years when I moved to Loveland, Colorado, in 1998.Once I started working with international students, I no longer had daily contact or opportunities to observe the settlers. I meet with them monthly to catch up and assist them with their paperwork. They needed a trustworthy English speaker who would not question what they were saying. I heard so many stories of how they came to the states, why they came, and what they planned to do with their lives. Of course, I wrote down only what they thought was "appropriate" for paperwork purposes. I was one of them (Adler & Adler, 1987). Initially, I kept brief notes. This was for my personal interests as I thought this would help me go through my own cross-cultural adaptation process.

My notes include nearly one-hundred pages of observations and more than sixty pages of interviews (single space). I coded data chronologically and according to topics of interest, gradually forming categories (Charmaz, 1983) and looking for patterned regularities in the data (Wolcott, 1994b) by comparing, evaluating, and drawing connections with larger theoretical framework. The analyses generated themes, which chronologically presented the experiences of the participants and my own, that describe a portrait of becoming bicultural. The interpretation of these themes goes beyond the data (Wolcott, 1994b), raises questions, and enhances the cross-cultural research with the participants' authentic views and the author's own experience (Ellis, 2004).

3. THE CULTURE DESCRIPTION

3.1 What We Found

We, the community of internationals and settlers, found Northern Colorado, especially the Fort Collins-Loveland area, growing economically. People from different parts of Colorado and other states of the country were moving in. The good climate, open space, friendly people, a broad range of job opportunities, including high tech, were drawing in immigrants; and great universities were admitting international students, as well. The area was changing significantly and our cross-cultural adaptation stories contributed to the exciting changes and growth taking place within this community. People from the neighborhood, local churches, new restaurants and shops, schools, dental clinics and more, were all inviting and genuinely inclusive. New residential areas were being built; computers and high tech companies were investing; plus, the real estate market was blooming as a wave of people from California were buying new houses. Simply said, it was the time and the place to be in Northern Colorado. Nothing could demonstrate the hospitality and tolerance of Fort Collins towards the newcomers and foreign settlers than this fact: The day after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Fort Collins community and churches, at the break of dawn, placed bouquets of flowers at the two mosques in the area.

3.2 What We Brought With Us

What we brought with us was complex and varied significantly from our original countries and cultures. The

motives for moving in the area categorized us into two groups: temporary sojourners for international students and permanent settlers for emigrants. Our backgrounds, together with our expectations, initialized the direction of the cross-cultural journey. For me, having grown up in communism, studying and living in the United States meant experiencing the way of life of a country leader within the free world and seeing up close what Albania missed during its fifty years of isolation and ideological madness. Many international graduate students were elite representatives of their original cultures from the academic, economic, and socio-cultural perspective. They had high expectations and could not just survive; it was essential for them to thrive. The majority of these students had come to study with the plan to return and influence. For immigrants as long term settlers in the area, the need to work and feel economically established was of greater importance than cultural adaptation. For a Vietnamese family living in this area, it was a great opportunity for them to feel safe and to provide their son with a better life. For the majority of settlers from Mexico and some from Eastern Europe, living in the United States afforded them the opportunity for a better life for themselves and a better future for their children. For several students from Western Europe, coming to Colorado was to experience the possibility of moving on without needing the right connections to be successful. For students from Brazil, it was to experience freedom and individual potential, to learn new technology and media. For students and their families from Saudi Arabia, it was to experience a new way of life with more choices and less restrictions.

4. BICULTURATING PATTERNS

4.1 Acculturation

4.1.1 Learning the Basics Again—What an Accomplishment!

The first stage of the adaptation focus is acculturation, relearning the basics and understanding how life works in the new country. What is wanted from life, at that point, is how to function: to work, to study, to buy groceries, to deal with the landlord, to be accurate when using English, to acquire the needed information. When trying to squeeze into a whole new way of life, there is no room for depth or ambition; learning the basics again is quite an accomplishment. There was no problem when we were seen as a foreigner because we were foreigners. The basics the newcomers were trying to learn for daily survival did not leave room for other concerns. The need to get into a routine and the desire to be able to survive without help ruled life at the beginning of the adaptation process. We did not look for an element of individuality among the host culture members. For the newcomers represented each time the host culture, and whatever they said or did and how they said or did something contributed to the initial host cultural picture created in us. A student from Jordan who previously had spent some time in Russia and Turkey once said, "At least I know, after six months here, people do tell you the truth, even if you do not like it. I can go in public places without having the feeling of being watched like, or none would raise the price of the merchandise just because I am from another country."

During the newcomers' gatherings and meetings, the greatest accomplishment was passing the language barrier. Language is so much more than simply words. Language is the context that comes with words; it is the history of the people and the culture together. Language entails understanding the people who use it. No matter how proficient a newcomer's results are on an English test prior to arrival, language is always a barrier when first crossing cultures. People seem to talk too quickly to understand them, and the newcomer ends up saying something that means something different. Understanding what is said comes first. Being understood takes longer. I personally felt uncomfortable when people used nonverbal communication. I felt so incapable, despite the fact that I was knowledgeable about the subject.

Another aspect of learning the language in context, it is knowing the limits. What does the culture view as appropriate? What is something that needs to be said? What is a sensitive issue or word? Examples include asking people their age or telling someone he or she looks fat. In Albania people tell their age without hesitation; I made a few people uncomfortable until I realized it was not polite to ask about age in the states. A student from Ukraine once said in our meeting: "Here in United States, people do not like discussing their financial situation, while in my country it is quite common. Important it is to have money, not to tell about it." During this time, the mispronunciation of words is also common. I found myself pronouncing "born" as "burn" and "Texas" for "taxes."

One time we needed a plumber for our kitchen. I called a friend to ask for help. He said that his friend could fix it and that he would give him a call. After an hour our friend called me back letting me know that the plumber was on his way. "He is good at fixing that stuff, even though he himself is such a skunk," he said.

When the plumber was almost done fixing the sink, I felt obligated from my tradition to ask him if he would like a coffee. I asked politely, "Skunk, do you need a coffee?" thinking that his name was Skunk. He turned quickly and faced me, wondering if I was talking to him. I was smiling and ready to give him coffee. He stopped for a moment and said, "That's what Norman called me, didn't he? My name is not Skunk, and I hate it when Norman calls me that." I apologized and he left I checked the dictionary to find out what skunk really meant.

Understanding the jokes is the level necessary to overcoming the language barrier; it opens the door to comprehending the context, the language and the

situation. Comprehending the context is a big boost for the adaptation process. Written skills are always a challenge for international students. Jokes go beyond words; they imply the context and people involved. Once you understand them you understand the context and the situation at its whole.

4.1.2 Being With People Like Us—Other Newcomers

Being with other newcomers was a needed break and created a sense of stability. We all had a main theme in common: we left home to try something new. We all had great expectations; and soon after our arrival, we discovered that it was not easy to start life from "scratch."A doctoral student from South Korea said, "I was so relieved when I heard at a university activity that other international students and immigrants are feeling the same as me. Because I had started thinking that I am not going to make it. Knowing we could succeed from people who have gone through the process before was so helpful." For myself, it was a significant relief when I heard people ask about the same things I wanted to ask for.

Staying too long with the newcomers group does not help the adaptation process. I know people who stayed in these groups and always identified themselves within the group. Crossing cultures is so stressful, and we were leaning on each other for survival. They knew already how hard it is to start anew. Some of them had simply chosen to remain at that stage. The adaptation process requires ongoing change—moving through the next step with the realization that there is another step beyond that. Some did not want to do that. Once they got the basics, they would just "take it easy" and relax. This was a significant difference between the students and the non-students. Students had to study. They were involved in activities at the university designed for them. For the majority of non-students, they had to put everything on hold until their immigration papers went through. An immigrant from Venezuela said, "All what you are saying I could do, it all luxury for me. I am fine staying where I am. I need to learn the language better and finalize my case. That's what I need, that's what I want."

Being a student was difficult financially, but the reward was much greater because of the immersion into intercultural educated environments. Also, students had much higher ambitions and did not let immediate issues weigh them down. For the immigrants the immediate issues meant more to them, and it was more difficult for them to put things into perspective before they would finalize their immigration status.

The longer anyone remains in a similar group the more difficult it becomes to move on. There came a time when the decision between going native or staying with the group needed be made. As necessary as it was at the beginning, most newcomers did not stay with the group or gradually limited meeting with the group. Majority of the newcomers became ready to move, at some point along the process, finding the energy needed to keep making the next step and next step and so on. Immersing into the host culture becomes necessity for long time settlers. Gradually, only "new" newcomers would attend the activities and meetings regularly. The "old" newcomers were studying or working, meeting other challenges in their life's objectives. Furthermore, that was the only way to become adjusted and gain a chance to experience life with all its pitfalls and comes back as they happen in the new culture.

Learning the new culture's practices and passing the language barrier concluded the participant's acculturation.

4.2 Biculturating

4.2.1 Feeling Free to be Whatever We Felt Like—a New Chance

Once we are acculturated, crossing cultures becomes a free haven for everyone, whether this is conscious or unconscious. The old culture constraints or rules do not apply anymore, and there is no need to practice them anyway. This time is the perfect time to create a new identity. We had the chance to be whatever we might have been. The new environment makes this possible. This is the time when we started enjoying being here and feeling that this is a great place to be. "People accept you for who you are, and you can be whatever you want to be." This became the common theme among the newcomers and the not so newcomers at this stage of adaptation. A couple from Western Europe (France and Spain) commented, "Here you can be successful for what you are and not for whom you know. We wish we could stay." A student from India said, "It is great even to be sick here. They treat you like a queen in the hospital. I wish I could have a baby now." A permanent settler from Egypt could not understand what, in Colorado, is called discrimination. Another from India thought that discrimination, unfortunately, is a way of survival and life in many countries.

Even though this phase of the adaptation was euphoric and we liked creating the new "us" in the new environment, everyone still missed home and wished there was this possibility to be "free" back to the original home. We were aware we were living in the most democratic country as can be, and everyone felt privileged to take advantage of expressing our potential. Using old ways just does not seem appropriate; furthermore the new ways let us recreate our new "expanded" identities. Many of the settlers decided to go back to school and those with illegal immigration issues were hopeful that they could find space to be free and respected. Among students, those self-supported felt free and connected more to the host culture. The students who were financially supported by their home states or other organizational institutions were responsible to a third party and had additional legal requirements to follow. Immersing to the new culture meant taking chances and taking "cultural" risks, and those who had less to "loose" were more courageous.

4.2.2 Friendships and Their Meanings

Because this was a new place in a new culture with new opportunities, it was easy for us to be euphoric after being acculturated. Yet, we needed more to complete our lives. No matter what goes on, no matter what job you have (immigrants), no matter how successful you are in school (students) friendships with natives are essential to cross the main culture's stream in order to feel and connect with the new culture. Without native friends I could not experience the flow and rhythm of the new place. Adapting to a new culture does not happen without trusting the host culture members. Making a friend meant growing new roots in the new land. Without friends there is no natural connection. Before I made friends, everything I did reminded me of back home, of old friends and of how much I wished they were here with me. Everything would have been more enjoyable. Before making friends, everything that happened was evaluated based on what it would have been like if my friends from the country of origin were there as well. The more native friends one had, the more one feels connected and settled. We all needed friends to share our successes and our failures.

How we treat our friends is deeply cultural, and often there are significant cultural differences and limitations within our friendships. Friendships are complex and the most rewarding. A true friend creates the connection with the new land. This is a great country with great people which I love, and they love me back.

4.2.3 Mountains Our Second Home

Having true friends makes the connection necessary for adaptation. I was able to be completely myself. I knew I did not have to try to be perfect because nobody is. I felt close to people. I started believing that God had brought me here for a reason, and I wanted to realize it. When our friends let us use their cabin in the mountains, it was the best thing that happened to us. We grew up in the mountains in Albania. We have been in the foothills of Northern Colorado for two years but had never had a chance to travel to the mountains. I was so excited; I found a home after all. I never thought I could love another land besides my old land, but in our house in the mountains I felt completely at home. My husband laughed at me when at night I would look at the stars and talk to all the people whom I thought had lived here before me or the ones who had traveled through: Native Americans who had been here since the beginning of time and later on Europeans. I would cry out and say, "I see why you liked it here. I get it, and I am one of you." This was the moment when I felt that I could thrive here. I liked it, I loved it, and it would always be part of me. Lisi, our firstborn was going to kindergarten that year and learning how to read. She selected books about the history of this country, and I loved that. I had studied American history in school. Now I was learning not to pass a test but to understand the people of this new land. What a difference.

This period of our lives, for students and settlers was fruitful and hopeful, and perhaps rather naive. The students usually got to this time of their cultural journey once they were accomplished academically, and when they had a level of confidence for further success in the future. The long time settlers reached this time after they were established at work and home, and when their children were thriving in school. Those with illegal immigration issues were more complex and had more concerns. One immigrant from Asia wrote to his friends back home, "Here is the Promised Land, but the immigration officers are not God's people". Negative experiences with people were considered isolated incidences; they did not represent the whole. A couple from Western Europe said during the interview, "we love it here, we like open spaces, and open people. We can't stand the prejudices that are in our old Europe". At times I myself was so critical of aspects of my own original culture, probably more critical than I should have been. The students and immigrants were so proud of ourselves for surviving in the new land, but we were not aware of this pride. We liked everything here. We had gone "native," and I felt that this was our destiny. I felt I could make it here better than back home for sure.

4.2.4 Appreciating the Old Tradition, Enjoying the New

Gaining confidence from having adapted to the new land and culture did not mean forgetting the old traditions. As the students and settlers learned how life worked in Colorado, naturally the urge to let friends and people know about the original old tradition became evident. Traditions taken for granted or that did not mean anything when back to old home were celebrated with deeper empathy and love by most of students and longtime settlers. Brazilian students were the ones who always organized their meetings with Brazilian food, Brazilian music and dance. Unknowingly there was a silent competition to show the culture of origins at its whole, food, living, art, and even in politics. Even though eastern Europeans despised communism, we still made fun of the ways that regime had made us live. A student from Bulgaria said to everybody at an activity "communism made us be proud of our poverty". An immigrant from China said to his South American friend, "we do have something significant in common, both countries and both cultures like dictators". After that pivotal point for my adaptation, I just knew I would thrive here.

Organizing parties to celebrate our national holidays and special days that have meaning to our history and culture was our need to feel and keep the old culture present, our need to feel as wholesome as we could. I realized how passionate I was to show the roots of my Albanian identity. When back home, I thought line dancing was lame, and I always tried to avoid participating in it at parties or weddings. Now, here I was dancing exactly how my grandmother had danced

with the sounds she made and acting it out as if the world depended on it. It took me coming over here to appreciate this cultural tradition and to try passing it on to others, explaining why every move was made and the reason for each sound throughout. At the end, when I was trying to imitate my grandmother, as she used the handkerchief to wipe her forehead to signal the finale, I realized I was actually sweating and the wiping of the forehead was necessary to do.

4.2.5 Going to Visit Home—What a Disappointment

There was a difference in the adaptation process when returning home is possible and when it is not. Those who do not go back, like immigrants, forever wonder what it would be like. They learn how to get along well here, but going back home becomes a sensitive aspect of their lives that they often choose not to discuss. I great friend to every international student at SCU had never been back home. When he told me, it had already been sixteen years, and I know he has not been back yet. He said that he thinks of back home as a precious place he cannot touch again. "I am good here. My kids were born here, and that's all they know. Things have changed there. I like to remember that time, but unfortunately I cannot imagine how it would be to go back. It is painful that I can't go, but that is the price I have to pay for deciding to stay here. People don't know that and it hurts when they question my American identity."

Among immigrants and settlers going back to the country of origin is major event, and a major test to their biculturation. The concerns of not being able to "fitting" back in were for most of us. The experience of crossing cultures was life changing for most of them; it did not matter if in our countries of origin we were seen as social "rebels" or social "models". Those of us who return back to Colorado described their experience as disappointing. We forgot that as we acculturated to a new place, we had changed and we failed to count that life back home had changed as well. The time when we had left home first had become the present, a result of all ups and downs that we had missed. A student wife from Jordan explained, "I don't understand, we were back to our home and everything seemed to work against us. I wondered how my children will do when we go back permanently". An immigrant from Eastern Europe when asked if he had a good experience back home, he replied, "once you have experienced a new culture of doing things, and you have succeeded, you just cannot go back to one only old way, that used to be. Unfortunately there is only one way. I am afraid I disappointed them as well".

It took time for us to read just to life back home for myself as well. Lisi was five at that time, and she understood why I had trouble enjoying my visit back home. "Mom, I see you are worried about your friends and family not understanding you completely. That's fine. I understand you, and I can be your friend forever." She had said almost the same thing to me when I had trouble adjusting in America three years ago when she had just turned two. "Mom, I can be your mom, just like you are mine, so try not to miss your family." And she was right. I knew my family and friends would do anything for me. It is just that you have to have been there to understand what has happened. Lisi was there. We had gone through everything together, and the rest of the family could only imagine it. Understanding more, getting less.

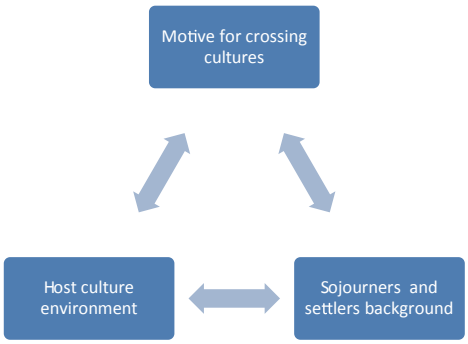
4.3 Bicultural and Thriving Coming Back—Being Critical and Having Two Options

Coming back to Colorado was not that difficult. We had realized that our life was not going to be the same as we knew four years ago. We knew now the impact of all that we had gone through had had on us. Our viewpoints and our lives were more complex and more interesting than most people's; and gradually, without knowing, we had immersed into another culture and place. We could feel our new selves, our new identities. All that was left to do was to let time do its part; let us be aware of it. At this time, I started evaluating the process I had gone through. I wanted to be back in touch with the newcomers I socialized with at the beginning, and we all appreciated what we had gone through. We accepted we had a new identity, which is larger than what we use to have and much easier to shift in any direction.

I realized what had happened. I was more down to earth and saw life as something you go through no matter what. I did need time and energy to get back up to speed with the new place. I was reluctant for just about anything. I needed time, more than before, to think before any decision. Now, I would think, well it is not enough just to do something; I should choose the best option. The only thing I did not think twice about after I came back was cooking. I had enjoying eating back home, and I kept cooking the same dishes here until the new way of life took over again. Once routine settled in, I started choosing what was convenient to do. I often regretted that I did not have the energy to challenge what didn't seem to be the right choice. It is a little depressing to accept the double identity, even though there are great advantages to it. Sometimes it is hard to decide where I belong. I feel in between the two currents all the time. I understand them both, but I can never completely go back again to either one of them. It is this super identity of being bi-cultural—feeling a part of it and, at the same time, feeling apart from it. It is the need to evaluate everything that does not let bi-cultural people live life the same way ever again because they know better than anybody: There is more than one way. There is much more than what we can see and touch at the local level.

5. INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSIONS

Biculturation could not be studied in models. The patterns of biculturation are as complex and unique as the life experiences of the people who go through it. The outcome is a combination of the background of the sojourner, the motives of crossing cultures, and the host culture environment, where the motive is the driving wheel.



Acculturation is the first pattern of biculturating. A sojourner might be acculturated but might not become bi-cultural. Becoming bi-cultural is more than learning the culture. Bicultural is a person who chooses to use both cultures, appreciating the new as much as the original, and certainly one who is inspired to the same degree by both cultures. Sojourners might well be adapted to the new culture and place but might choose not to use this larger frame of reference. In some cases they might even dislike it. Acculturation is what happens mostly with the temporary sojourners: in this study with the international students who spent a few years in Colorado and several permanent settlers for whom living their origins' way of life is more important than living in both cultures. The motives for crossing cultures signify if the outcome will be simply acculturation or biculturation.

The initial experiences of adaptation set the rhythm of the process. From the cross-cultural communication perspective, the Wolcott's definition of ethnography, a way of seeing, is accurate, inclusive and exclusive at the same time, just like being bi-cultural. What I see in the new cultural environment deviates from what I used to see in the original culture. What I experienced at the beginning set the ground of what I see or choose to see in the future. The initial phase of adaptation points the direction. The persons I met and interacted with at the start opened certain doors and guided certain perspectives of the host culture and the cross-cultural process of adaptation. Knowing the impact of the initial phase to the adaptation helps institutions, communities, and newcomers to be aware of what is coming in the future. It is what we choose to see in this phase. There is no "honeymoon" stage (Oberg, 1960; Chang, 1973) for any of the newcomers, either student or permanent settlers.

Also, the rhythm and the outcome of adaptation are reflective of the motivation towards the process. The motivation comes from the reason of crossing cultures in the first place. Strangers respond to each stressful experience by "drawing back," which in turn activates adaptive energy to help them reorganize themselves and "leap forward" (Kim, 2001). The process goes on as long as there are new challenges to be met, and this adaptive energy comes from motivation. As seen from my story and the stories of others, the difference in the process of adaptation between the immigrants and international students is significant. The immigrants, as permanent settlers, had a greater initial challenge. Their motivation led them to look for adaptation for a long-term normal life, while their internal conditions kept a distance from the host culture. International students had a different story because their motivation was different. For most, they are here temporarily, and they are purposely searching the culture. The "leap forward" towards adaptation and growth often has a different direction depending on the sojourner's needs.

The host culture environment is a definite force that can push the adaptation process in any direction. The host culture environment is a sum of time—historical events that take place during biculturation—and of space, geography and climacteric resemblance. The historic and public events raise the awareness and intercultural sensitivity because they "alter" the context of adaptation and cause more stress to settlers and sometimes "deviate" the host culture receptivity towards the settler. The resemblance in climate with the host culture environment is a boost for adaptation. The obstacles in the way of adaptation are smaller—the more climactic similarities, the more like home the new place will become. People might speak a different language and have a different lifestyle; yet when the geography of the place is familiar; it has a calming effect compared to the contradictions and difficulties that must be passed.

By recognizing the underlying cognitive orientation toward culture difference, predictions about behavior and attitude can be made, yielding a powerful tool for personal assessment (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Cross-cultural adaptation is a two-direction process. The host members need to go through it as well. They will not go through it the same way as the newcomer; but as they learn about the newcomer and the newcomer's culture, they learn to accept it. The cross-cultural adaptation process will happen only when the host culture "let's you in." How intercultural sensitive the new environment is will impact the process significantly. That's why making friends is what makes the process complete. When true friendships develop, the real connection with the new culture occurs.

The importance here is to emphasize that settlers do not lose their cultural identity in any case. They chose to act more from one cultural perspective than from the other based on the situation. A significant scholar that

continues to contribute to intercultural research calls for an alteration model which posits that sojourners do not lose their original culture identity (Kim, M.S., 2007, p.229). The participants of this study, including myself, did not lose their original cultural identity. Their cultural frame of reference (Bennett, 1993) expanded, and they have the control of choice. Simply said, bicultural persons have more options to choose from—what works better or what seems more convenient in any given situation.

The significant contribution of this auto-ethnographic approach is that biculturation happens when this culturally "expanded" persona combines or uses the new and original culture identity naturally in any context. A bicultural person is not one who understands two cultures, but one who uses two or more cultures to think, work, and evaluate situations and contexts as if they are one. Becoming bicultural cannot follow a set pattern. It is unique and often different for each settler. It is influenced, first, by the background and motives for crossing cultures and, second, by the sensitivity of the new culture host and the environment. The biculturation is as unique as our lives, as unique as each story, as wholesome as any life changing journey.

Suggestions for future research include studying the shock of the process of adaptation on the dependents. This is tremendous because they are seen as secondary in the process. It is their lives that fall apart unnoticed. Research should address this issue, especially when children are involved. Children feel uprooted sooner than adults do. Because children are still in the enculturation process, they are more emotionally charged and don't know where to stand. What makes their transition worse is seeing their parents in crises. A qualitative approach to research would help to facilitate the study of dependents.

Also, another suggestion for future research would be that the research on cross-cultural adaptation be conducted by more bi-cultural individuals. These "150 percent persons" have experienced cross-cultural adaptation and should have that multicultural mindset for an unbiased point of view. Also, these individuals could serve as facilitators or mediators for cross-cultural conflicts and/or misunderstandings.

One limitation of this study might be that for the majority of the data gathering process I was one with the participants, so there was no distance between the researcher and the participants. Considering the length of time and the abundant opportunities and interaction with participants from all over the globe, often with significant differences on the original cultures, I feel this limitation did not influence the interpretation and conclusions.

Naturally, the adaptation has an irreversible and life-changing effect on the sojourner. Nothing is simply one way anymore. What you are doing is just one way of doing it. It is not assimilation; it is a new culturally "rich" identity. When I crossed cultures, I crossed the (main) stream. When I reached the other side, I was a new person and could never go back to what I used to be. Biculturating is as challenging as a night storm and as rewarding and hopeful as the sunrise.

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