

ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERPRETATION OF CULTURAL IMMERSION  
IN STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

by

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(Under the Direction of Linda Harklau)

ABSTRACT

Large and small institutions of higher education across the US are allocating increasing resources to promote study abroad (SA) and international education, and more American college students go abroad every year. Using a socio-cultural theoretical perspective, this year-long study examined how four groups of US undergraduates experienced and made sense of their cultural and linguistic immersion as part of a SA program sponsored by a US state university and located in two Spanish coastal cities. Employing an ethnographic case study approach, data consisted of a) semi-structured interviews with case study student participants as well as SA professors, SA program staff, and local community members; b) class observations; c) participant observations; d) and written material related to the SA program and context, including case study students' academic artifacts and personal journals. Additionally, retrospective interviews were conducted with case study students and local community members after the end of the sojourn abroad.

The major findings of this study are summarized as follows: 1) SA students went through significantly different socio-cognitive experiences and processes abroad that were determined by an interface of context, social practices, and individual agency; 2) Racial and ethnic identity, class, and gender played a crucial role in case study students' interactions and experiences with the host community, and affected their opportunities for language and culture learning; 3) The

spread of globalization, capitalism, and the global supermarket affected the way case study students viewed SA, including the academic component of the program; 4) Case study students' various forms and interpretations of cultural immersion and language socialization abroad were often conflictive and a site of struggle; 5) Case study students' cultural artifacts and expectations inexorably clashed abroad; 6) Case study students tended to retreat into a feeling of national superiority when faced with cultural conflicts and misunderstandings, or episodes of antagonism against the US and the American people, while their engagement in local communities gradually eclipsed.

**INDEX WORDS:** Ethnography, social constructivist, socio-cultural theory, Vygotsky, study abroad, international education, race, ethnicity, class, gender, globalization, capitalism, cultural immersion, linguistic immersion, cultural clash, second language acquisition, Spanish, Spain, Spaniards

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my two families, the one in Italy, and the one that I have acquired in the US. A special thought goes to my grandparents whom I still miss every day. They are no longer with me in body, but they will always be in my memories and by my side in spirit. All these people have supported me, encouraged me, loved me, cheered me, and made me smile every step of the way. They have given me that stability and strength necessary to accomplish challenging tasks like pursuing a Ph.D. I would not have succeeded without you all. I cannot thank you all enough for what you have done and still do for me every day.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CI	cultural immersion
LI	linguistic immersion
C2	target culture
L1	first language
L2	second language
SA	study abroad
SCT	socio-cultural theory
ZPD	zone of proximal development

## LIST OF PSEUDONYMS

Nalat	home city of most US SA group members (South East of the US)
Sonet	university town where most US SA group members go to school (South East)
Gareg	home university sponsoring the US SA program (South East)
Colovo	Spanish city hosting the US SA program (Levantine Coast)
Ucevo	Spanish host university (Levantine Coast)
Zadic	Spanish city hosting the US SA program (Atlantic Coast)
Uzid	Spanish host university (Atlantic Coast)
Leveso	another Spanish city hosting the US SA program (South of Spain)

## PREFACE

In order to navigate this dissertation, it is important to see it as divided into two parts. While the first half follows a traditional dissertation format (introduction and research questions, theoretical framework and literature review, and research methodology chapters), the second half does not. In other words, the fourth chapter, which marks the transition from the first to the second half of this study, introduces three subsequent finding chapters that can be seen as stand alone and discrete units. Each of these three finding chapters narrates the story of a case study student whose study abroad experience has been a site of struggle and cultural conflicts. Each finding chapter will conclude with specific implications that I will discuss more broadly in the final chapter of the dissertation, where I summarize the findings and bring together the strands I have woven throughout the manuscript. A final note pertains to the quotes included in this study. Some participant comments in emails, which are used as quotes to support the arguments in this study, may contain mistakes (mostly spelling errors) that are purposely not corrected. I hope you will enjoy the reading.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Study

##### *Study Abroad and International Education*

Large and small institutions of higher education across the US are allocating increasing resources to promote study abroad (SA) and international education, and more American college students go abroad every year. A review of the latest statistics and the new demographics of US study abroad by the Institute for International Education's *Open Doors* report (2008) indicates the rapidity with which SA is growing, and the complexity of the phenomenon. For example, the number of US undergraduates studying abroad in the past decade increased nearly by 150%, going from under 100,000 in 1996/97 to nearly a quarter of a million (241,791) in 2006/07. In the 2006/07 academic year the number of US college students who studied abroad increased by 8% compared to the previous year.

Numerous efforts on a national level have been made to highlight the value and significance of SA. For example, the US Senate passed a resolution (Senate Resolution 308, November 2005) with unanimous consent proclaiming 2006 The Year of Study Abroad. The Congressional Resolution 308 2006 stated that "To educate students internationally is an important way to share values, to create goodwill for the United States around the world, to work toward a peaceful global society" (p. 3). Likewise, the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Report (2005) declared that "Study abroad is one of the major means



of producing foreign language speakers and enhancing foreign language learning. In today's world, study abroad is simply essential to the nation's security" (p. vi).

*SA at a National Level.* Yet, scholars such as Gore (2005) and Kinginger (2008a; 2008d) warn that SA continues to be a marginalized and isolated phenomenon in the United States. Additionally, Kinginger (2008a) pointed out that there is an emphasis on quantity over quality of SA participation at a national level. US SA students' active involvement in local host society is at risk, as much as the importance of foreign language studying. Sojourns have become significantly shorter than they used to be - typically a semester or less, and the tendency is to downplay foreign language and culture learning as one of the main goals of this international experience. According to the "Fast Facts" included in the *Open Doors* report developed by the Institute of International Education (2008), the top three major disciplines of Americans studying abroad are the social sciences (21.4% of those studying abroad in 2006/07), business and management (19.1%), and humanities (13.2%). The leading destinations remain Anglophone countries such as United Kingdom (14.6%) and Australia (4.8%), and Europe with Italy at the top of the list (12.5%). SA remains a gendered phenomenon with 65.1% female and 34.9% male participants in 2006/07.

*Prejudicial Attitudes towards SA and International Education.* Efforts have been made to highlight the advantages of international education, and to increase college students' global awareness. Additional efforts need to be directed towards changing what Gore (2005) calls "dominant beliefs" about SA, beliefs that have coalesced to form an episteme held by the U.S. higher education community (p. 23). One of these dominant beliefs is that SA is a break from serious and committed academic learning; that courses and programs offered abroad are academically weak and not as rigorous and demanding as the ones at home; and that the best

professors are found in the US. Another dominant discourse is that SA is a vacation in the “Grand Tour” tradition. Students have the opportunity to go abroad, hop from country to country, hit a different capital every weekend, and travel in big groups of US compatriots where the dominant language spoken is English. Stories of excessive shopping, partying and alcohol consumption away from the supervision of their parents seem to characterize many US undergraduates’ accounts.

However, Gore (2005) also indentified an alternative discourse that had started to gain ground, particularly after 9/11. There are many US students who approach SA with bright hope and view it as a valuable experience from an academic, professional, and human standpoint by way of the liberal curriculum. Some students believe that having part of their education abroad contributes to their global awareness and is a unique opportunity to become better informed citizens of the world in the pursuit of civic action, social justice, and world peace. Such students are not afraid of facing hardship and challenges, and having to deal with potential intercultural misunderstandings or episodes of miscommunication for the sake of learning and living experiences that are unavailable in their home country. Moreover, many are convinced that studying abroad is more beneficial than studying domestically for developing specific language skills such as oral proficiency as well as conversational, pragmatic, and grammatical competence.

*Sheltered SA Program Designs.* SA programs sponsored by US colleges and universities typically act *in loco parentis*. These programs provide 24/7 supervision, organize part of students’ social time, assist them, and guarantee their physical, emotional, and psychological safety and well being. US undergraduates in such programs go abroad in cohort groups. They are all placed in the same classes, and take home university credit-bearing courses taught by host-

and home-university instructors who work, or at least are familiar, with American classroom norms, the US educational framework, and US grading systems. While abroad, such US cohorts tend to express strong solidarity and build cohesive bonds. Scholars (Isabelli-García, 2006; Twombly, 1995; Kline, 1998; 1993) suggest that such strong group cohesion can have deleterious effects in the sense that it takes individual members away from acquiring the second language (L2) and venturing out to explore new territories and establish contacts with local people. Faced with what Agar (1994) calls “rich points” - episodes of cross-cultural differences, clashes, intercultural miscommunication and misunderstandings - SA group participants typically shy away from locals and withdraw from involvement in and interaction with the host society. Students tend to retreat into the protective environment represented by the SA group where everybody feels at home and has access to social, emotional, and psychological support. It is clear that the US peer group functions as a powerful unifying element, a refuge to confirm and reinforce national identity and/or superiority, and a place where students can share experiences and emotions and don't feel like outsiders. A possible consequence of this situation is the development of enhanced egocentrism, as discussed by Feinberg (2002). When interviewed and asked what they have learned after living and studying abroad, it is not uncommon for US students to answer “I learned a lot about myself,” “the journey brought me face to face with myself,” “I know that I can overcome any obstacle now,” “I have developed a great appreciation for my own culture.”

*The Impact of Globalization and Capitalism on Communicative Practice and Ways of Thinking.* Globalization and capitalism seem to strongly affect foreign language learning and teaching. Block and Cameron (2002) warned that the ease of mobility and immediate access to communications technology make it possible for learners to participate in non-local networks,

where geographical proximity or distance no longer matter. As a result, a good number of SA participants shy away from the pursuit of direct target language and culture learning, as well as face to face interactions with native speakers in their local communities. Kinginger (2008b) found that the nature of learners' cultural and linguistic immersion experiences inside and outside of the classroom are interspersed with, and highly affected by, emails, Facebook, Myspace, international cell phones, SMS, Skype, iPod, Youtube, and Wikipedia. For example, in the case of Deirdre, a student in Kinginger's study (2008b), we see a young woman in France retreating from all social interactions with French people in favor of online interactions with family and friends in the US. Such an "electronic umbilical cord" (Kinging, 2008d) keeps learners away from socializing with the host society and from being exposed to multiple manifestations of the local culture, including local media resources and libraries. Kinginger (2008b) also pointed out that students spend hours of their time on line engaging in long conversations with people at home in English. They are visited by friends and/or parents, which further distracts them from learning L2 and getting immersed in the culture.

The predominance of English as the official language for global communication is widespread, and SA participants may have to face situations in which interlocutors prefer to interact with them in English rather than in their first language in order to practice and gain competence in English. This may diminish the importance of learning foreign languages, as Kubota (2002) suggested, and lead learners to believe that the role and significance of foreign language study is still marginal, a situation which does not play in favor of multilingualism and SA participation.

Moreover, the dominance of the United States as the most powerful country in the world is not always seen in a positive light abroad. Falk and Kanach (2000) argued that it is not

uncommon for US students to see their national identity challenged locally, and to experience harsh criticism of American politics, particularly foreign policy. These experiences can be shocking and disorienting for some students who, frustrated and offended, drastically withdraw from individual and collective interactions with locals. Needless to say, this development has crucial implications in the students' opportunities for authentic cultural and linguistic immersion.

Finally, Block and Cameron (2002) warned about the profound impact of capitalism and consumerism on international education and SA participants' habits of thought. Many US college students view the experience of a global culture and education abroad as a purchasable commodity, instead of as an investment in interaction and participation in L2-mediated activities with the host society. They picture the world as a big shopping center - the "cultural supermarket" in Mathews' terms (2000), where they can satisfy most of their desires and fantasies.

#### Statement of the Problem

Prior foreign language and SA research has shown that studying abroad is more beneficial than studying domestically for developing specific language skills such as oral proficiency and conversational competence (Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey, 2004; Brecht, Davinson, and Ginsberg, 1991; 1995; Freed, 1995b; Lafford, 1995), as well as pragmatic use of language (Barron, 2003). A few studies have investigated the impact of duration of stay (Allen & Herron, 2003; Coleman, 1996), whereas other researchers has analyzed the relationship between language learning and the nature of the host country language programs (Brecht et al., 1995), and the student language support and strategy inventory for SA (Ife, 2000; Pellegrino, 1998).

Recent work (see, e.g., Dufon & Churchill, 2006; Byram & Feng, 2006) demonstrates that SA research has become a very multi-disciplinary field. Theoretical perspectives,

methodological approaches, and research designs employed are very broad, and the languages studied range from commonly to less commonly taught languages (Spanish and French but also Japanese, Chinese, German, and Indonesian). Emerging research suggests that SA and cultural and linguistic immersion depends on more than individual students' personality traits and attributes, motivation, and willingness to invest in target language speakers and L2-mediated activities within the host community. It also depends on the individual students' social dynamics, interactional and contextual experiences, how they are welcomed by the target language community, and the opportunities they are offered locally to become immersed in the L2 culture. Another important discovery related to SA is that the individual differences among students are very broad (Kinginger, 2008b; Huebner, 1995) and therefore, it is hard to assess overall SA outcomes. Each learner brings a unique lifestory in which aspects such as race, gender, ethnicity, age, and socio-economic class play a crucial role and affect the nature and degree of their perceptions. Freed (1995a) points out that students' experiences with, and exposure to, the target language and culture can vary enormously. Additionally, their interaction with native speakers is not always intense and frequent, and thus, does not necessarily lead to a total immersion, significant language gains, and increased cultural awareness.

As a result, scholars are increasingly aware that SA research needs to reach a better understanding of the characteristics and specificities of individual learners' accounts and stories, and of the cultural resources and ideologies that students use to make sense of their experiences. In response, this study is an ethnographic interpretation of SA as a cultural and immersive event. It used a case study approach to dig deeper into the specifics of individual learner's accounts, in particular those of three specific case study students, and the cultural tools that they use to interpret and understand their experiences. It focused on their language and culture learning

process abroad and on their perceptions and emotional evolution while they were in contact with the L2 community and while they were exposed to various manifestations of L2 culture, practices, and perspectives. Building on the individual stories of three specific case study student participants, my study explored themes and qualities pertaining to the entire SA group. It also investigated the SA phenomenon within its socio-cultural, economical, historical, and political context, including the effects of globalization and capitalism, and the predominance of English and US economic power spreading all over the world.

This study makes a significant contribution to SA research and international education. The rationale is both theoretical and methodological. From a theoretical standpoint, SA research has not considered how US students' culturally-mediated values and worldviews affect their SA experiences and perceptions, their target language and culture learning process, and how they are perceived in the host culture. From a methodological standpoint, much SA research focuses only on the SA students' perspectives. In this study I collected multiple perspectives and told the stories through the lens of the US students as much as other SA participants, such as Spanish professors and SA program staff, as well as host community members. The contrastive points of view (i.e., comparing the students' perspectives against what locals have to say) makes this study novel and represents a valuable contribution to this field considering the short shrift that has been given to multiple perspectives in the existing literature. The representation of multiple voices draws the attention on additional perspectives and allows for richer and multilayered understanding of events occurred abroad that otherwise would be viewed from the sole lens of the students. Such representation thus develops a more comprehensive picture of the stories, accounts, and feelings, and analyzed cross-cultural differences and clashes from both perspectives. Finally, this ethnographic study adopted a longitudinal approach - I followed SA

students and other participants during four consecutive semesters abroad and a year and a half after the end of the program. The value of longitudinal research projects is high, as advocated by numerous scholars in the field of education and second language acquisition (Harklau, 2008; Ortega & Byrnes, 2008).

This study can benefit students, teachers, and SA directors and coordinators.

Understanding what SA and cultural immersion means to different individuals, and what teachers and program directors want learners to gain from this experience, can have an impact on curriculum planning and development. This study also aims to shed light on how US students understand and perceive cultural immersion abroad, and how they interact with native speakers within the host culture. This is in line with the current trend of most US institutions and universities promoting SA and international exchanges, enhancing cross-cultural communication, and fostering cultural understanding, awareness, and appreciation in our global, multilingual, and multicultural societies.

### Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions:

#### Guiding question

- How do three specific case study students' social background variables such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender, affect their SA experiences inside and outside of the classroom?

#### Sub-questions

- How are these variables viewed by the host society? How are they taken up and interpreted?



- How do these variables affect an American student's individual and collective interactions with the host society?
- What are the implications for an American student's opportunities for linguistic and cultural immersion?
- What are the implications for an American student's identity negotiation and reconstruction?
- What are the underlying values and socio-cultural resources that an American student uses for interpreting and making sense of their experiences and interactions in class and outside of class?
- How do a Spanish teacher and an American student negotiate the meaning and content of cultural immersion in SA classrooms?

#### Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter Two sets forth the theoretical framework and literature review. Chapter Three explains the research methodology that guided the study. Chapter Four illustrates the rationale for selecting the three case study participants protagonists of the subsequent chapters within the backdrop of the overall SA experience. The next three chapters discuss the findings. Chapter Five explores how race, ethnicity, and class shape the students' SA experiences. Chapter Six provides an example of how US undergraduates interpret the academic component of SA based on their socio-cultural identity and background, how this impacts their sojourn, and how they are perceived in the host culture. Chapter Seven reveals how SA can be a gendered experience, and how notions of gender equity and respect can impact students' perceptions of the host culture and people. Finally, Chapter Eight summarizes the

findings of the study and their implications, suggests the contributions of the study to research and theory on SA and foreign language education, and offers directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2  
LITERATURE REVIEW  
Theoretical Perspective

*Constructionist Epistemological Stance*

I approach this research from a constructionist epistemological stance (Crotty, 1998), and from a constructivist paradigm (Lather, 1994). For Hruby (2001) constructionism is a sociological description of knowledge and deals with knowledge formation between participants in social relationship since knowledge is constructed by, for, and between members of a discursively mediated community. For Crotty, constructionism is “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). In other words, there exists a plurality of realities that continually shift and that are constructed through human perception and practice. Therefore, as Guba and Lincoln (1994) also emphasize, the constant engagement of human identity with the objects in our world, society, and culture plays a crucial role in the construction of meaning and reality.

Constructivism, grounded under the umbrella of a constructionist epistemology, as Crotty (1998), Hruby (2002; 2001) and Patton (2002) agree, is a theoretical perspective that focuses on understanding and interpreting the nature and significance of individuals’ experiences as they engage in a process (see also Lather’s paradigms of post-positivist inquiry, 1994). This discussion focuses on the form of constructivism termed *social constructivism*, and it emphasizes

the role played by the socio-cultural contexts and settings in the development of human processes. Therefore, I believe that social constructivism is the most appropriate paradigm to adopt in my study as it aims at understanding the significance of American undergraduates' experiences abroad as they engage in their language socialization and cultural immersion process within the L2 culture and community. Additionally, social constructivism appears to be particularly beneficial in this instance since it allows an organic observation of learners immersed in, and highly influenced by, the socio-cultural, historical, and institutional environment where they live, act, and interact. Scholars such as Crotty, Hruby, and Patton, discuss *social constructivism* in relation to *social constructionism*, although the definitions and boundaries between the two are complex and at times problematic, and still generate a great deal of confusion. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to attempt to resolve the differences between social constructivism and social constructionism. However, as it is generally accepted among scholars who write about theoretical foundations of research, I understand social constructivism as being a sub-category of a constructionist theory of knowledge. I also understand social constructivism as being a more appropriate approach than social constructionism in my particular study of American college students living and studying the Spanish language and culture abroad because it emphasizes and privileges the notion of construction of knowledge within (the mind of) the individual (i.e., each of my case study students). Each individual is interpreted as an active and dynamic agent, rather than the construction of meaning within the community or social group where (s)he interacts. I want to stress here the powerful socio-cultural, historical, political, and institutional forces and influences acting on the individual and strongly affecting his/her personal construction of knowledge, meaningful realities, and learning process. In this regard, my case study participants' learning

and meaning-making process abroad occurs *intrapersonally*, and it is affected by their personality traits and attributes, motivation, and willingness to invest in the target language and people. Their knowledge formation and learning process also occurs *interpersonally*, and it depends on the degree and nature of interactions, encounters, and social dynamics that they experience abroad, how they are welcomed by the target language community and people, the opportunities that they are given to become immersed and integrated, and how contextual and situational factors and forces shift over time. Hruby (2002) also argues that social constructionism emphasizes the crucial role of language in human development, particularly in literacy and language education and SLA research, which applies to my study of focal students abroad: “Social constructivism notes? that private thought is always articulated in a particular language drawn from the community” (p. 586).

In addition to the epistemological stance and theoretical perspective where my study is grounded, another assumption informing my research is the concept of culture: human beings exist within a meaningful cultural world; they define culture and are defined by it. Crotty (1998) considers culture as a system of significant symbols and by that he means that culture is an indispensable guide to human behavior and thought. Geertz (1973) espouses the concept of culture as semiotic one and believes that human beings are animals suspended in webs of significance and meaning that they themselves have spun. He writes, “I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning” (p. 5).

## Human Development and Language Learning: Vygotsky's Theories

The theory of human mental process development and language learning that informs my study is the socio-cultural theory (SCT) as articulated by Vygotsky (1987; 1986; 1978) and Wertsch (2002; 1998; 1991). This theory is particularly suitable for my study because it emphasizes the interconnectedness between the language and culture learning process, and its socio-cultural, historical, political, and institutional contexts (see also Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The guiding concepts and notions deriving from the socio-cultural theory are as follows:

- Learning and development are a social process (Vygotsky, 1978): Learning and development take place in interaction with others in a social context, where language and culture play a major role. Thus, at first such processes appear on the social level (interpsychological process) and then on the individual level (intrapyschological process).
- Tools and signs: Every human activity, action, and development (thinking, speaking, learning, writing, reading, counting, and remembering) is mediated through the use of tools, both physical and psychological. Physical tools change our physical world, while we use physiological tools (or signs) to transform ourselves. Language is the most important psychological tool.
- Cultural artifacts: Humans inherit, change, and pass on to future generations cultural artifacts (way of thinking, behaving, feeling, expressing ourselves). These artifacts mediate all our activities and actions. Language is a cultural artifact that changes and evolves over generations and is based on the needs of a specific cultural community that uses it.

- History: Cultural artifacts need to be viewed and analyzed within their historical and cultural context because they have their own socio-historical development.
- Zone of proximal development (ZPD): A situation in which a learner works with an expert, a more knowledgeable person, or more skilled peers to solve a problem or carry out a goal-directed task is the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1978) defined it as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). In their ZPD, subjects are assisted in carrying out tasks and functions beyond what they can complete alone but can still accomplish as a result of the participation of the more expert other or others.
- Students’ resourcefulness and purposefulness in learning: Individuals are seen as active participants in their own development and language and culture learning, in their purposeful pursuit of learning from other people, and in their dialogic engagement in society. If L2 learning is one of their goals, these individuals must be strongly and genuinely committed to learning the language in a profound, consistent, structured, and durable way. Language learning is not effortless and does not happen solely within the individual isolated from his/her surroundings. It is the result of constant and dynamic interactions within the social group where that language is used, and within a specific socio-cultural environment.

Vygotsky’s observations about L2 learning (1986) are also applicable to this study.

- The mediating role of the first language (L1) in learning L2: L1 plays a mediating role in L2 learning. Vygotsky (1986) argued that “While learning a foreign language, we use

word meanings that are already well developed in the native language and only translate them” (p.159). Thus, for Vygotsky, L2 words do not point directly to their object in the real world. They first point to their counterpart in the L1. Based on this observation, we would expect that while learning about the target culture (C2) we use meanings that have been solidly fixated and consolidated in our own culture, which function as reference points, and that will affect, positively or negatively, our C2 learning.

Wertsch’s observations about collective memories and narrative tools (2002) are also relevant to this study. His work is helpful for investigating how US undergraduates abroad interpret their experiences, including the episodes of clashes in cultural expectations that they are exposed to, and what cultural tools and artifacts they have acquired and use for this purpose. Wertsch analyzed the processes by which societies construct and circulate “collective memories” of historical events. He argued that remembering, like other human activities, is a process mediated by cultural tools. The tools involved in remembering and talking about the past reflect the perspectives and narratives (or discourses) of others who have previously used such resources. In a given society then, people share representations of past events because they share the same narratives and discourses that they inherit by growing up in that particular collectivity. For Wertsch narratives play a central role in collective memories. Many aspects of our activities (thinking, speaking, writing, feeling) are inevitably shaped by these narratives.

Such observations are relevant to the SA context because the narrative (or discursive) tools circulating in US society about SA programs are salient in the student participants’ understanding and meaning-making process of their experiences. The discourses that students use in their interpretation of events abroad are essentially based on their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977), a set of acquired patterns (or dispositions) of thought, behaviors, and beliefs resulting



from their experience as young, generally middle-class Americans who have been exposed to naturalized ideologies of SA, of US higher education, language learning in general, and of the images associated with host country and people in particular. Of particular interest in this study are the *dominant* and *alternative* discourses of SA explored by Gore (2005) that I have briefly discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation.

Several concepts from the SCT perspective can be applied to the situation of US undergraduates spending an academic semester abroad to learn L2 and C2. First, SA students learn best when they have opportunities to interact with others. The concept of learners having and working within a ZPD is pertinent to this study with learners immersed in academic settings abroad because studying abroad create multiple opportunities for students to work and interact with more capable others (i.e., natives from the host society, their advisors, tutors, teachers) in solving learning situations or linguistic challenges. Secondly, since learning is mediated through signs and psychological tools such as language, SA students' acquisition of L2 impacts their learning about C2, as the use of L2 will shape their perception of C2. Thirdly, SA learners are studying in an environment that is different to that in which they grew up. Thus, they may have acquired cultural artifacts that may not be prevalent within the host society, which could lead to episodes of cross-cultural misunderstanding, miscommunication, or clashes in expectations. SA students' own cultural artifacts (such as different epistemologies or different perspectives on culture and cultural practices) may facilitate or impede their learning in the new context, or profoundly impact their appropriation of L2 and C2 concepts. Finally, the fact that learning takes place in a social environment in which language and culture play a key role, and the fact that it is our social interaction with others in our environment that generates internal development are directly relevant.

These key concepts of socio-cultural theory make the rationale for employing a social constructivist perspective grounded in a constructionist epistemology even stronger, and bring into sharper focus the idea that (language and culture) learning and meaning-making processes take place within the individual as much as they are socially and contextually situated. In this process the subjects' agency plays a crucial role. The key concepts of socio-cultural theory lay also the foundations for a research methodology based on case study. Case study students and their histories abroad show broad individual differences both in terms of academic and SA outcomes, and in terms of the nature of CI experiences within the target language community. A case study methodology is therefore appropriate to account for these experiences in great detail, and to document the changes in students' intrapersonal and interpersonal development within the host community occurring over time.

In the literature review that follows, I draw on other areas of research: from studies that discuss what culture is, and cultural immersion and linguistic immersion abroad mean; from studies that explore the nature of cultural and linguistic immersion experiences in SA programs and the quality of students' interaction in the target language within the host society; from studies that focus on the value of adopting qualitative research methods in SA when the goal is to dig deep into the quality and specifics of individual students' interactions, experiences, and lifestories, the goal that I have intended to pursue in this study. By drawing on various areas of scholarship, I hope not only to provide a background for my study, but also to highlight the complexities of the SA phenomenon.

## What Is Culture?

### What Is Cultural Immersion?

In this chapter I define ‘culture’ and ‘immersion.’ I understand that there exist various, and at times contentious, definitions of culture and immersion depending on the focus, interpretation, or theoretical orientation that they reflect. It is not the purpose of this discussion to try to resolve this debate. Rather, it is useful to outline some underpinnings of culture and immersion that are specific to the context of an SA program. In the remaining part of this chapter I discuss the importance and benefits of integrating culture meaningfully into SA programs and of elevating it to the core of the FL curriculum domestically as much as abroad.

#### *The Definition of Culture*

The American ethnologist Goodenough (1957) emphasizes the social dimension of culture and describes it as consisting of “whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members” (p. 176). These knowledge and beliefs are not innate but the result of a learning process that takes place in contact and interaction with the members of a specific social community. Geertz (1993) stresses the role of language in shaping culture, and interprets language as one of the powerful “symbolic forms” that individuals use to communicate, learn, and grow. For Geertz, culture “denotes an historical transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitude toward life” (p. 89). I agree with Kramsch (1998) that the language used by the members of a particular society in a specific time frame in history expresses, embodies, and symbolizes the cultural reality and identity of that unique context and community of people.

The inextricable connection and inherent relationship between language and culture is uncontested in various disciplines (Walker, 2000; Cole, 1996; Seelye, 1993), and it is proclaimed by the notion of “languaculture” (Agar, 1994). Agar's coinage emphasizes how the two concepts are mutually constitutive, closely intertwined and interwoven, and therefore inseparable. It also stresses the way we build mental “frames” to organize our expectations and beliefs. For Agar, culture, as much as language, is as tangible and fluid as daily life. Sapir (1921) also claims that language cannot exist without culture and vice versa; language is a crucial element present in all practices, beliefs, and perspectives and is part of the cultural manifestations of a particular group of people. If the goal is to understand culture, the starting point is the analysis of language and its vast repertoire of meanings and significances. Finally, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) emphasize the fundamental role that language and culture play in the negotiation and construction of identity. For them “language is a primary vehicle by which cultural ideologies circulate, it is a central site of social practice, and it is a crucial means for producing socio-cultural identities” (p. 492). These ideologies are socially, historically, politically, and institutionally grounded, and they are situated in a precise contextual and interactional setting and practice.

For a further discussion of culture and language learning, the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1999) discussed the 5 Cs: Connection, Comparison, Culture, Communication, and Community, where culture is the driving force. There are two main types of culture: the big C culture (institutionalized culture such as art and literature), and the little c culture (daily practices, individual beliefs and perspectives). The fact that culture is viewed as composed of various segments appears very clearly in the framework of the “Three Ps” (perspectives, products, and practices) advocated by the National Standards. Tang (2006) claims that it is more sensible to view culture as comprising two elements: cultural mind (i.e., the

cultural perspectives in the tripartite model of the *National Standards*), and the cultural manifestations (i.e., the cultural products and practices, and all other cultural phenomena including emotions, logical reasoning, and personality traits). Tang argues that this conceptualization of culture is particularly beneficial because a) it reduces the components of culture from three to two composite parts; b) it combines together and emphasizes the connection and similarity between practices and products; c) it highlights the hierarchical relationship between the two components: cultural minds have control over and shape cultural manifestations which are simply the different expressions of these overarching cultural paradigms.

Moran (2001) takes the frameworks of the “Three Ps” and of the “Two Ms” and elaborates and expands his own definition of culture adding two more interrelated dimensions: 1) Communities - specific groups of the culture and social contexts in which members carry out cultural practices; and 2) Persons - individuals who embody the culture. For Moran,

Culture is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts. (p. 24)

A good way to describe culture in terms of what students need to do in order to learn it is offered by Moran and his “cultural knowings framework” (p. 15). Based on this framework, the cultural experience consists of four interrelated learning interactions: Knowing about facts, data, products, practices, and perspectives (or cultural information); Knowing how to behave, act, do, or say things (cultural practices); Knowing the reason why for certain beliefs, perceptions, values, and attitudes (cultural perspectives); and Knowing oneself as a learner and their own values, feelings, reactions, ideas, and opinions (cultural awareness). In sum, I find Moran’s definition of culture particularly useful and fruitful because it is easily applicable to the context of an SA program where participants are exposed to various and continual manifestations and

performances of the target language and culture. Culture is not an impalpable concept and entity but it is inside individuals; it is part of them. Individuals generate culture and they are generated by culture in an endless process. To understand culture is to be able to access the meanings of perspectives, products, and practices that have been internalized and naturalized by its community members, and to be able to perform, function, and navigate accordingly and effectively in that culture as informed and educated interlocutors.

#### *The Definition of Immersion in the Context of Study Abroad*

Basing their work on empirical data, Engle and Engle (2004; 2003; 1999) discuss ‘cultural immersion’ in an SA program as a combination of three interrelated components: consistent use of the target language inside and outside of academic settings; extensive exposure to different manifestations of the target culture and language both in the classroom and within the target community; and guided cultural reflection and analysis sessions. These sessions work as regular debriefing moments when students are prompted to make deep considerations about their experiences and perceptions, link direct experience and abstract understanding, and “enrich and extend authentic cultural experience through reflection, personal articulation, and practical advice” (Engle & Engle, 1999, p. 46). The goal is to analyze the dynamic relationship between hidden cultural values and assumptions, and the visible characteristics of culture and society, and therefore encourage overall intellectual development through rigorous and frequent written and in-class analysis and feedback. I interpret the “authentic cultural experience” that Engle and Engle are talking about here as a form of intensive and extensive *exposure* to the host community and *contact/interaction* with native speakers of the target language. The exposure to, and contact with, the host community are intended to capture and authentically represent the experiences and perspectives of the people living in a particular cultural and social setting. Creating opportunities

for students to live an authentic cultural immersion abroad is therefore about finding a way to make sure that they actively participate in various situations, and that their experiences and perceptions are grounded and contextualized in real settings.

Engle and Engle (2004; 2003; 1999) claim that an authentic cross-cultural immersion abroad is attainable through the combination of the following seven variables:

1. Extensive duration abroad (a semester or a full year).
2. High intermediate/advanced entry target-language level competence.
3. Target language used in both curricular and extracurricular activities.
4. Individual home stay.
5. Frequent participation in cultural integration activities and programs such as volunteer work, service learning, personal interest activity (bike club, soccer team, guitar or cooking lessons), language exchange sessions with local students, and internships.
6. Orientation programs, mentoring, tutoring, reflective writing and research.
7. Authentic academic work context following local norms with local professors and through complete direct enrollment.

The Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) (1999) created an IES Abroad MAP (Model Assessment Practice), a practical educational tool for planning and evaluating SA programs. Here, they insist on the importance of internships, as well as field study and trips, field placement and work, workshops, and tutoring. It is equally important for SA students to access local educational and cultural institutions, agencies, and research centers such as libraries. Here special collections, database, internet, audio-visual material, and digital resources can be consulted to collect information for term papers or oral performances. The IES

MAP Academic Council considers these to be ways of facilitating life long-learning, supporting students' immersion in the host culture, and helping students develop intercultural, interpersonal, and cognitive skills.

However, the nature and degree of students' cultural immersion not only depends upon specific program design features but also, and most importantly, upon individuals' personality traits and attributes, as well as the kind of social dynamics, interactions, and encounters that they experience abroad in contact with the target language speakers and culture. Therefore, aspects such as the learner's disposition for language learning and investment in the host community and target language people play a crucial role in their degree of cultural immersion. Other crucial aspects to be taken into consideration are how SA participants are welcomed by the host community, and the opportunities that they are offered, and that they take advantage of, to access the socio-cultural fabric and networks, and establish durable relationships with locals.

#### *The Importance of Integrating Culture Meaningfully into SA Programs*

Cammarata and Oda (2008) emphasized the value of infusing culture in the classroom and making it the core of the FL curriculum, a concept that is very relevant and applicable to SA and international exchange programs. While abroad it is fundamental to foster language and culture learning among students and promote a plurality of educational experiences inside as much as outside of the classroom. In fact, sojourning in another country provides unlimited opportunities for being exposed to various cultural manifestations and getting actively engaged in them. Cammarata and Oda argue that our modern societies are becoming increasingly more linguistically and culturally diverse, which has a strong impact on the notion of bi- or multilingualism. Individuals are considered as bi- or multilingual when they have developed a



deep sensitivity and understanding of the reality and the socio-cultural contexts associated with the language that they speak:

Being bilingual or multilingual encompasses more than the simple mastery of linguistic patterns. Rather, the idea of being bi- or multilingual means that one has acquired sufficient knowledge to become sensitive to the way reality is perceived through the particular historical and cultural lens associated with the acquired target language. (Tedick & Cammarata, in press)

For Reagan & Osborn (2002),

in studying languages other than our own, we are seeking to understand (and, indeed, in at least a weak sense, to become) the Other—we are, in short, attempting to enter into realities that have, to some degree, been constructed by others and which many of the fundamental assumptions about the nature of knowledge and society may be different from our own. We are, in fact, creating new selves in an important sense. (p.13)

The American Council on the teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (1996) also stressed the value and significance of integrating language, culture, and content: “In order to communicate successfully in another language, students must develop facility with the language, familiarity with the cultures that use these languages, and an awareness of how language and culture interact in societies” (p. 39). Along these lines, Tedick & Cammarata (in press) urge for a variety of educational experiences that are associated to the learners’ world and their experience and perception of it. They also call for a meaningful integration of culture, interpreted as the exploration of not only products and practices but also perspectives, a concept that is neglected in the majority of the language curricula and commercial textbooks available right now on the market for K-12 and higher education. In other words, textbook curricula tend to lack critical depth and rarely engage in a sustained treatment of all dimensions of culture, from the more tangible to the more invisible ones. Therefore, it is imperative to develop strong academic components and curricula both domestically and abroad that help learners ask “why” and “how” questions, and develop a deeper understanding and awareness of cultural perspectives.

## Background Studies on Students' Cultural Immersion and Engagement Abroad

Research investigating what affects participants' cultural and linguistic immersion abroad have adopted a wide variety of theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches and have revealed important intrapersonal and interpersonal insights. The research by Freed et al. (2004) and Dewey (2004b) suggests that what fosters learning is not necessarily the context (at home or abroad) but rather the students' attitudes and motivation, as well as the nature and degree of interactions, communication, and integration within the host environment. Frank (1997) and Rivers (1998) analyzed the nature of homestay, while Wilkinson (2000; 1998a; 1998b), Freed (1990), and Yager (1998) focused on interactional experiences, motivation, and levels of adaptation, acculturation, and integration abroad. Allen and Herron (2003) and Isabelli-García (2006) also argue that SA only translates into cross-cultural understanding, acknowledgement, and appreciation of cultural differences if participants invest in establishing extensive connections with the target language speakers, and participating with them in L2-mediated activities. Finally, Kinginger (2008c) emphasizes that CI and LI are not effortless; students need to be agentive and show a strong investment and commitment to language and culture learning in a profound and durable way.

### *Cultural Immersion Is a Matter of Choice, and a Site of Struggle*

Freed (1995a) argued that second language acquisition research has analyzed similarities and differences in acquisition between those students who learned the language in the traditional classroom or immersion setting in their home country versus those students who experienced the second language and culture in the target environment within an immersion setting. However, Freed and other scholars (Huebner, 1995; Marriot, 1995) points out that there are significant

individual differences and variations within SA experiences, and therefore it is difficult to generalize about the quality, degree, and nature of immersion and integration, and the extent of cultural and linguistic interaction of the students within the host community and with the native speakers. Freed explains that it has been long assumed that the combination of immersion in the target community and contact with native speakers, together with formal classroom instruction, will automatically create the best learning environment and is conducive to increased proficiency and fluency levels in the use of the language of study. However, Freed argues that research has failed to examine which combination of experiences and activities are the most valuable, effective, and suitable for learners in order to maximize their experience and immersion abroad both from a linguistic standpoint and from a cultural and personal perspective.

In the following section I analyze studies that explore the impact of SA and immersion experiences for foreign language adult students. Research by Freed et al. (2004) and by Dewey (2004b) suggests that what fosters learning is not the context (at home or abroad) but students' attitudes and motivation, as well as the nature and degree of interactions, communication, and integration within the host environment. Frank (1997) and Rivers (1998) analyze the nature of homestay, while Wilkinson (2000; 1998a; 1998b), Freed (1990), and Yager (1998) focus on interactional experiences, motivation, and levels of adaptation, acculturation, and integration abroad. Allen and Herron (2003) and Isabelli-García (2006) also argue that SA only translates into cross-cultural understanding, acknowledgement, and appreciation of cultural differences if participants establishing extensive connections with the native speakers, using the target language, immersing themselves into the host environment, and participating in exchange initiatives (for example, help with English in exchange for help with Spanish), joining special

interest groups and clubs (biking, soccer, or tennis clubs) or taking special courses (cooking, guitar, or art classes).

Recent research (Freed et al., 2004) has discriminated between formal language classrooms at home, an intensive summer immersion program in the home institution, and an SA setting, and makes a three-way comparison focusing on various aspects of the acquisition of oral fluency of 28 students of French. The researchers discover that the immersion group made the most significant gains in oral performance in terms of rate, quantity, and smoothness of speech – that is speech devoid of silent and filled pauses and intrusive repetitions. The SA group did outperform the at-home group in several features of oral fluidity but findings reveal that the SA students used more English than French in out-of-class activities than the immersion group, where learners spoke and wrote French considerably more hours per week than the other two groups. This is opposite the trend seen in another study by Dewey (2004a) where he investigated the role of context in reading development. He compared the SA and the immersion learning contexts of Japanese and discovered greater interaction in the target language by the 15 students abroad than the 15 students in the immersion program. In conclusion, Freed et al. (2004) acknowledged,

it is not the context per se that promotes various types of learning but rather [...] the nature of the interactions, the quality of the experiences, and the efforts made to use the L2 that render the context superior to another with respect to language gain. (p. 298)

Frank (1997) and Rivers (1998) had already come to a similar conclusion comparing a homestay experience in Russia with a dormitory environment and the impact on students' language gain. Their results run counter to the common intuition and expectation that homestay means continuous immersion and contact with native speakers, greater authentic target language input, and therefore greater language gains than dorm-stay. Frank (1997) argues that “being at

home” is not enough if the quality of interaction with the native Russian hosts is limited to a basic set of daily conversation topics and television watching, and if students spend most of their time doing homework or in “linguistic isolation” due to feelings of frustration that both participants and hosts expressed regarding the difficulty of communicating in Russian (see also Brecht & Robinson, 1993 for an additional discussion on hostile environments at home and restricted opportunities for practice and immersion if students do not build useful communicative partnerships with their hosts).

Rivers (1998) argues that homestay is “a mixed blessing” (p. 497) and the results of her studies with the Russian language interestingly indicate that homestay is a negative predictor for speaking gain, has no significant effect on listening proficiency, and is a positive predictor for reading gain. Rivers explains that these findings require a careful consideration of the nature of the homestay experience as well as the traits and attitudes of the homestay participants. Finally, she suggests a series of interventions to render the homestay context more linguistically and culturally rich: pre-program and in-program learner-based interventions that foster better self-managed language learning and encourage students to engage in linguistically and culturally productive behaviors; development of relationships with native speakers and peers of the target language and their inclusion in daily activities; getting learners out of their rooms, away from the family television set, out of the linguistic and cultural safe havens within their close-knit ex-pat enclaves. However, the success of the homestay does not fall only to the students. Yager (1998) and Allen and Herron (2003) suggest that the SA program directors, coordinators, and teachers have the responsibility to promote and assign to students independent and individualized projects based on ethnographic and cross-cultural research and interviews with native speakers, and

encourage participation of students in special interest groups, clubs, and classes such as soccer teams or cooking classes.

Similarly, Wilkinson (1998b) points out that significant linguistic gains and deep cultural understanding are not inevitable or guaranteed in the SA setting but they depend on the individual student's personality traits and behaviors, the nature of the immersion program, and the length of the stay. Wilkinson focused her study on the out-of-class interactional experiences of four American summer study-abroad students in Valcourt, France. Heather, one of the participants, commented on her host family situations, and although she loved her French family, she admitted that "you really are on your own... It was like I was a tenant. I had a key; I had my own room; I had all my own stuff. I could eat dinner with them if I liked, but I didn't have to" (p. 33). Ashley, another participant, remarked that "I was so surprised that you could be in France for a month and... really do not speak French that often" (p. 33). Finally, Paige expressed her frustration in these terms: "I'd hang around in town - sometimes I would just sit in town and read or something - and there is people around you, but it is not that easy... to meet someone who's French" (p. 33).

In a similar study on the nature of immersion during SA and participants' perspectives, Wilkinson (1998a) found that the process of adapting to the target linguistic and cultural norms and habits does not always linearly progress towards fluency and deep cultural awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation. Instead, some of the participants' perspectives and interpretations of cultural differences in France led them to negative stereotyping of their hosts and to increased congregation among themselves. Faced with cultural differences that Ashley was experiencing abroad, she reacted defensively through denigration and erection of social barriers to build/create? some distance from those cultural differences ("French people are so obstinate!")

(p. 134). On the other hand, Molise found the Cambodian-American lifestyle of her uprooted family as “some sort of strange mixture” (p. 134). These feelings of otherness and strangeness make it difficult to accommodate American students’ speech and behaviors to host-culture norms, and learners may feel threatened as a cultural and linguistic outsider (see also Papatsiba, 2006 for a discussion on the feeling of insuperable cultural differences).

Freed (1990) and Yager (1998) agree that there is a strong connection between the amount and nature of interactive contact between students abroad and native speakers and the language gain. In their studies they found that greater non-interactive language contact (reading books, watching television, listening to radio and music) correlated to less language gain, especially for beginning students of a second language, although it provided students with “more opportunities to reflect on L2 input without having to worry about providing the immediate response that is usually necessary in interactive contact” (p. 907). Another interesting point discussed in Yager is the correlation between L2 acquisition and students’ positive attitudes, emotions, and motivation toward the Mexican Spanish (for example, the importance of accurate Spanish pronunciation, the enjoyment in observing Mexicans, the attempt to speak and sound like them), and toward the Mexican culture and people (positive reactions toward Mexicans). For Yager, greater integrative motivation - defined by Garner and Lambert (1972) as the student’s willingness not only to learn the language rules but also to adopt appropriate features of behaviors typical of members of the target culture - and less instrumental motivation - defined as utilitarian value placed on language study, such as anticipated professional usefulness of the language - seem to benefit acquisition of more native-like Spanish where contact with L2 is available.

Similarly, Allen and Herron (2003) urge for an increased and authentic contact with target culture members in order to stimulate attitudinal changes as well as linguistic gain. What emerged from the analyses of their interviews and program evaluation by 25 college French students supports Wilkinson's findings (2000; 1998b): studying abroad and living with host families does not necessarily translate into cross-cultural understandings. Instead, it can generate negative experiences and cause cultural misunderstanding. Allen and Herron noticed that the participants of their study faced two sources of language anxiety while abroad: linguistic insecurity and cultural differences. Participants did not appear to invest much of their out-of-class time in establishing contacts with native speakers and immersing themselves into the host culture. However, many experiences of language anxiety involved interaction with native speakers and fear of negative evaluation, and negative emotional reaction aroused when using the target language. Linguistic insecurities were also exacerbated by cultural differences and not understanding the rules of behavior and interpersonal relationships.

In her study Isabelli-García (2006) argues that there is a strong connection between motivation and language gains in informal, out-of-class contact abroad, which is interaction in social networks and immersion and integration within the host culture. Jennifer, Sam, Stan, and Tom spent five months in Argentina and showed important individual differences in their acculturation process and acknowledgement of possible differences between native and host cultures. As Isabelli-García explained, "[t]he difference in learner progress through these states of cultural awareness is linked to their experiences, motivation, personalities and abilities to handle difficult situations" (p. 254). Sam and Jennifer preserved the feeling of hegemony of their native culture, maintained a negative behavior toward the host culture, and chose to interact mostly with Americans. Instead, Stan and Tom showed high motivation, established extensive



connections with Argentines, and integrated themselves into the host social fabric, networks, and people of the target language. As a result of the opportunities that Stan and Tom created for interaction and immersion, they recognized, understood, and accepted cultural differences. These experiences also increased their language gains through scaffolding strategies, such as interventions and strategies made for the students to optimize their experience abroad.

Finally, Kinginger (2008b) analyzed six detailed case histories in France (Liza, Louis, Bill, and Beatrice, Deidre, Ailis) that illustrated broad diversity in student experience. The themes that these stories represent are related to the contemporary SA experience for American students and show the extent to which language and culture immersion in SA today is a matter of choice, and maybe of struggle. The cases of Liza and of Louis showed the beneficial effects of cosmopolitanism upon students' ability to cope with the vagaries of SA. Liza had strong aspirations for multilingualism and a career in diplomacy, backed up by considerable travel and work experience. Louis had undertaken the study of French primarily to access and fully appreciate the Francophone literature. Bill belonged to the class of students whose motives were related to efforts at international understanding and general humanism, and he approached SA emphasizing the value and quality of personal relationships and the importance of intercultural awareness.

Instead, the case study of Beatrice demonstrated how a highly motivated and accomplished classroom language learner can nonetheless complete a sojourn abroad without having developed significant intercultural awareness or acknowledgement of its value. Beatrice progressively developed a deep sense of alienation from her left-leaning French Tunisian host family following dinnertime conflict about the US-led invasion of Iraq, and she felt that her national identity was challenged in unanticipated ways. The case of Deirdre, a consumerist

approach to SA characterized by an ‘electronic umbilical cord’, is a story of frustration, loneliness, and alienation, partly attributable to gender-related incidents and leading to rejection of France, the French, and their language from the beginning of the sojourn abroad. Deirdre’s case illustrates how easy it is for today’s SA participants to take refuge in computer-mediated communication, and neglect any connection or interaction with local people. Finally, Ailis interpreted SA as an occasion for personal growth through extensive travel with her US friends and consumption of global culture. She was eager to collect memories of distant places, hop from one shopping outlet to the next, and rarely was she in touch with her host community.

Kinging (2008c) concluded that the most successful L2 learners tend to be those who persistently seek out worlds of difference and who are willing to suspend judgment for the sake of learning and gaining access to the practices and perspectives of others. Students whose achievements tend to be more modest and limited in breath and depth are those who find themselves incapable or unwilling to overcome the challenges and vagaries posed by a globalized SA experience.

### *Conclusions*

In summary, SA is rapidly increasing, and while more and more students are sent abroad to study the target language and live within the host culture, a growing body of literature mirrors the complexity of this experience yielding insightful but sometimes ambiguous conclusions. The section above discussed studies that explore the impact of SA and immersion experiences for foreign language adult students exposed to various manifestations and practices of the target language and host community while living and studying in contact with native speakers. Although SA appears to be superior to domestic study in terms of language gain, it is argued that the context alone does not consistently or inevitably lead to language and culture learning.

Rather, it is the combination of the program design features, the students' personality traits, attitudes, and motivation, and the nature of their investment in, and social interactions within, the host community that make the difference. In other words, cross-cultural understanding, acknowledgement, and appreciation of cultural differences occur to the extent that learners are offered, and take advantage of, the opportunities to interact with native speakers, establish meaningful connections within the host community, and reflect on their various practices and perspectives in a critical and constructive way.

#### The Impact of Study Abroad Programs for Adult Learners:

##### An Analysis of Qualitative Research Methods

The studies that have investigated the impact of SA programs for adult learners who study a foreign language cover a wide range of methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative. Brecht and Robinson (1993) argued that qualitative research can give an enormous contribution to the findings of certain research studies, particularly in the SA environment where an interpretive approach seems to be highly beneficial and effective. Such an approach can account for the complexity of the process of SLA abroad and help researchers to understand the meaning of the experiences that people are exposed to during their sojourn abroad. Specifically, the ethnographic case study methodology is a valid and powerful approach to gain insight into the individual students' specifics and qualities and the complex process and dynamics characterizing their stories and experiences abroad.

In this section I will explore a few qualitative studies dating from 1983 to 2006 that investigate the impact of SA programs for adult learners who study a foreign language. These studies were selected because they specifically focus on the cultural and linguistic immersion experiences the participants experienced. I argue that qualitative methods in the field of

education, study abroad and second language acquisition offer an insightful and powerful mode of conducting research. This is particularly true when the goal of the research is to describe, understand, and interpret the meaning of the experiences and events that shape individual students' life and perception of the host country and target language speakers. In the rest of this section, I will review studies whose research methodologies are ethnography and case studies. I will also briefly define these qualitative methods citing some of the most influential researchers in each area. Finally, I will discuss how the different kinds of qualitative methods contributed to the findings of the studies presented, including their main strengths and shortcomings.

### *Qualitative Research Methods: Ethnography*

Ethnography is a behavioral science that traditionally comes from sociology and cultural/social anthropology (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Atkinson, 1994; Heath, 1982; Hymes, 1974; Geertz, 1973). Ethnographers, like anthropologists, collect their primary data by immersing themselves in the culture, which they are analyzing, over an extended period of time. They do so through participant observation, field notes, interviews, interaction and informal conversations with informants, and collection of documentation and artifacts. Their main objective is to develop an in-depth understanding of the meanings of behaviors and attitudes within a specific community of people at a particular time and compose a thorough description of their experiences in writing. Brewer (2000) defines ethnography as follows:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally. (p. 9)

Within ethnography Geertz (1973) talks about well developed descriptions that illuminate individuals' background activities that an ordinary visitor might not observe. Therefore, ethnographers must be able to grasp what is behind the action, and explain the action through

their insight into the field, environment, and culture that they have developed after living for an extended period of time in that specific context and in contact with that particular community of people.

Tedlock (2000) explains that ethnography combines research design, fieldwork, and various methods of inquiry to produce culturally, socially, and personally situated descriptions and interpretations of human lives and their culture from the emic perspective of the ethnographer. DeMarrais and Lapan (2004) and Patton (2002) also stress the importance of culture in ethnography and consider ethnography as the study of the culture of a group, usually as that culture is revealed through the course of naturally ongoing events.

The four studies that I will present in this section (Burnett & Gardner, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Brecht & Robinson, 1993; Fitch & Hopper, 1983) illustrate several aspects of how to conduct an ethnographic study. In particular, they show how ethnographers participate, overtly and covertly, in people's daily lives over an extended period of time; how they observe what happens; how they analyze what is said; how they ask questions; how they collect all available data that may shed light on the phenomenon under study; and how they discern and explain their observations.

*Language-Switching Events.* The ethnographic study by Fitch and Hooper (1983) revealed context, language attitudes, behaviors of students in a private multilingual school in Spain, and the language code they chose for communication and interaction. Forty-five students from 16 different countries were observed and interviewed over a period of one year, and the results that emerged were that language choice was a powerful strategy to include or exclude participants in a conversation. Moreover, attitudes toward code-switching appeared to cluster around national, political, and linguistic stereotypes. French speakers displayed considerable

pride in, and preference for, speaking French, even when some individuals were excluded and offended. English speakers had to bear pre-existing associations with English-American stereotypes and politico-economical overtones based on tenets of colonialism and capitalism. German students were framed for speaking Spanish in nearly all situations, and for their excellent multilingual skills. This stereotype about the Germans was so pervasive “that any foreigner who spoke mostly Spanish was assumed to be German” (p. 121). Foreign students from other nationalities and backgrounds were not always as engaged in practicing the language as the Germans. Such foreign students tended to hang out with people who spoke their same native language since they did not feel comfortable enough about their Spanish to employ it with Spaniards except for basic conversations. This situation resulted in limited contact and interaction with locals, and a low degree of cultural and linguistic immersion.

*The ACTR/NFLC Project.* The American Council of Teachers of Russia (ACTR) and National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) undertook a three-year research on the process of SLA in SA. Brecht and Robinson (1993) reported on the ethnographic study of the student language-learning behaviors, attitudes, and experiences abroad, and cover five semesters in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The participants were undergraduate American students of Russian and the data collection instruments were self-report (students’ diaries, narrative, journals, and notebooks), participant observation, and interviews. Ethnographic qualitative analysis was particularly valuable to provide insight into reasons why men tend to be more successful than women in listening to and speaking Russian. Male and female learners spent their free time similarly, mostly hanging out with friends. However, Jessica, Sally, Agatha, and Gwen showed that they had fewer and qualitatively different opportunities than American males to speak in a mixed-gender setting. Jessica and Sally felt that they had less conversation practice, especially if

the topic was intellectual or political. Gwen narrated ambivalent experiences with encouraging and discouraging male Russian caretakers who reacted differently to her errors in Russian. She noticed some manifestations of gender incidents, such as being positioned as an incompetent speaker in interactions involving men. It was during the follow-up interviews when she was prompted to make deeper considerations on the different approaches to error correction by her two male Russian acquaintances and on the impact of these approaches on her language learning. The authors concluded that women might feel more at ease receiving feedback on their Russian in a female-only situation which they perceive encouraging and supportive, despite the fact that not all Russian men are necessarily negative caretakers.

*Ethnographic Pedagogy and Evaluation.* Jackson (2006) conducted an ethnographic study of a five-week SA program in UK for a group of 15 Hong Kong students. She focused on the students' language and cultural learning process to explore which factors affected their attitudes and behaviors toward the target language and culture. She collected data through participant observations, diary entries, open-ended surveys, interviews, informal discussions, and students' artifacts. Jackson adopted an ethnographic, culturally-oriented model of narrative analysis, and she noticed an interesting evolution in students' experience. Before departure they expressed their aspirations to learn more about British people and culture, their apprehension about the need to communicate entirely in English, and the necessity to cope with an unfamiliar environment. Early in the sojourn, the participants experienced understandable cultural shock. They missed the Hong Kong cuisine, were reluctant to try British foods, and had a hard time adjusting to unfamiliar schedules and a slower pace of life. However, the students gradually became more confident with their new surroundings, and they merged more into the host

community, initiated conversations with locals, and started to show appreciation of cultural differences.

Jackson also conducted an evaluative ethnographic investigation, suggested direction for program revision, and she highlighted important issues that would not have been easily identifiable with quantitative methods. In particular, she discussed the students' difficulties with adhering to the 'English only' policy; the need for carefully designed pre-departure preparation sessions; continual support abroad; and credit-bearing courses in intercultural communication that address typical problems that Hong Kong students may experience in the UK.

*Chinese Students in UK.* Burnett and Gardner (2006) investigated a similar context to Jackson's study and focused on the experience of Chinese students at a University in the UK. In terms of ethnographic methods, they used interviews and developed an innovative approach based on the analysis of spontaneous drawings produced by a group of four long-term female students of Chinese. This approach helped the researchers gain access and insight into the "meaning-endowing capacities [of the interviewee] and produce rich deep data" (Brewer, 2000, p. 66), especially on students' perspectives on, and experiences of, acculturation in UK. The drawing session required the students to sketch visual representations in diagrams and color of their experiences over the course of their studies, since the researchers thought that their verbal accounts may be inhibited for language competence issues. The common theme that emerged in the drawings of three of the four students highlighted the fact that their experiences abroad had not been linear progressions; rather their experiences had been characterized by a collection of positive and negative elements that were represented in the sketch by undulating lines. Another common theme was the "dissonance" (Burnett & Gardner, 2006, p. 84) between the students' high expectations early in the sojourn and the challenge of getting adjusted to a new unfamiliar



culture. All three students made an effort to be more active rather than passive; they managed to cope with initial difficulties; and they achieved a sense of emotional stability which allowed them to enjoy the latter part of their stay. In contrast, the fourth student did not seem to have a feeling of unrealized expectations and achieved a deep understanding of the host culture. To express a positive experience she drew an aspect of the local life at the park by the university where she liked go to relax and watch people enjoying their free time. Although her primary motivation for going to UK was academic, she confessed that she recognized wider values. What the fourth student shared with the other three was their common struggle with the target language early in the sojourn and their attempt to interact with the host culture.

#### *Qualitative Research Methods: Case Studies*

Within ethnography, ethnographic case studies provide an accurate and in-depth picture of experiences and processes of language and culture learning, and permit the analysis of individual students' specifics and qualities affecting the nature of their cultural immersion abroad. van Lier (2005) argued that a case study approach is particularly advantageous for its close focus on context and culture and mainly because it "zeros in on a particular case (an individual, a group, or a situation) in great detail, within its natural context of situation, and tries to probe into its characteristics, dynamics, and purpose" (p. 195). Stake (2000) distinguished between three types of case studies: intrinsic case studies (the researcher is intrinsically interested in a specific case); instrumental case studies (they give insight into an issue where the case is not of primary importance); and collective case studies (that is instrumental case studies extended to several cases). In this section I will analyze three examples of intrinsic case studies by Siegal (1995), Wilkinson (2000; 1998a; 1998b), and Norton Peirce (2000; 1995) in three SA contexts: France, Japan, and Canada. These articles are of particular interest not only for details

and issues involved in them but also for the kind of conversational analysis that the researchers carried out.

*In France.* Wilkinson (2000; 1998a; 1998b) argued that significant linguistic acquisitions and deep cultural understanding are not guaranteed in SA, but rather depend on each student's personality traits and attitudes, the nature of the immersion program, and the length of the stay. Wilkinson focused on the out-of-class interactional experiences of four American students (Heather, Paige, Molise, and Ashley). They were involved in ethnographic forms of data gathering (surveys, questionnaires, interviews, observations, students' artifact and document analysis). Heather, Paige, and Ashley commented on their host family situation and experience abroad, and admitted that "you really are on your own... It was like I was a tenant. I had a key; I had my own room [...]. I could eat dinner with them if I liked, but I didn't have to"; "I was so surprised that you could be in France for a month and... really do not speak French that often"; "I'd hang around in town - sometimes I would just sit in town and read or something - and there is people around you, but it is not that easy... to meet someone who's French" (1998b, p. 33). Wilkinson (1998a) found that the process of adapting to the target language and cultural norms does not always linearly progress toward fluency and deep cultural awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation. Instead, some of the participants' perspectives of cultural differences in France led them to negatively stereotype their hosts and increase camaraderie among themselves. Faced with cultural differences, Ashley reacted defensively as she faced social barriers. On the other hand, Molise found the Cambodian-American lifestyle of her uprooted family as "some sort of strange mixture" (p. 134). These feelings of otherness and strangeness make it difficult to accommodate American students' speech and behaviors to host-culture norms, and learners' position as a cultural and linguistic outsider may cause them to feel threatened.

*In Japan.* For over 18 months, Siegal (1995) investigated the acquisition of politeness and pragmatic and stylistic competence in Japan with the purpose of exploring individual differences between two white western upper middle-class women. Her data came from journals, interviews, observations, audio tapes of participants' naturally occurring interactions, interviews with a Japanese, and articles dealing with issues that foreigners face in Japan. The data revealed that both participants (Mary and Arina) shared a strong awareness of their image in Japanese society, which derived from their linguistic and stylistic abilities; the desire to be polite; and the importance of using honorifics in Japanese culture. Both women misused honorifics which resulted in pragmatic complications. Mary wanted to speak politely and competently during meetings with her professor, and she wished to maintain her image as a mature scholar. However, instead of using honorifics, she employed the verbal auxiliary modal *deshoo*, which is pragmatically inappropriate if used with a professor because it could be offending and face-threatening. Similarly, Arina avoided honorifics, for most of her experience in Japan, and she thought that women's speech was too humble and also that shifting style was inconvenient for her. Thus, she kept using the polite *desu/masu* form. However, she realized that honorifics were necessary when she was invited as a foreign ambassador to give a formal speech in important public events. Then she started to gain respect for the concept of a shifting self, and that was reflected in her register variation and incorporation of honorifics. The conversation analysis, conducted by Siegal, revealed that Arina could not totally master certain expressions, and her knowledge of the social nature of Japanese was still incomplete. The researcher concluded that it is necessary to take into consideration the sometimes ambivalent and (un)conscious desire of individuals to maintain their image and the language employed - despite local norms and motivation to understand individual differences in sociolinguistic competency.

*In Canada.* Drawing on a longitudinal ethnographic case study of five immigrant women, who studied English and lived and worked in Canada, Norton Peirce (2000; 1995) investigated the relationship between the learners' shifting identities, their process of language learning, and the socio-cultural context where they lived in relation to the target language and native speakers. The author elaborated on the learners' social identity and investment in the target language and people and argued that "power relations play a crucial role in social interactions between language learners and target language speakers" (1995, p. 12). For her, investing in L2 regards the individual subjects and their psychological and social dimension in relation to the host culture, society, and people. Thus, language learners have a highly complex social identity to be understood not as a fixed personality trait but with reference to larger social structures reproduced in day-to-day social interactions. If learners invest in their foreign language, they feel they will acquire a wider range of resources (language, education, friends, money, and goods) and expect a return on that investment which is commensurate with the effort spent in learning that foreign language. By speaking English, Eva and Martina not only exchanged information with target language speakers but also constantly reorganized a sense of who they were and how they related to their social world. Their investment in English was a *de facto* investment in their own shifting social identities. For example, Eva evolved from an "illegitimate" speaker of English to a "multicultural citizen with the power to impose reception" (1995, p. 24). She created opportunities to practice English in her workplace; claimed spaces in conversations; and gained confidence. Martina was also an immigrant, a mother, a wife, the first caregiver of her family, and a language learner who took on all her roles and responsibilities, resisted marginalization, overcame her fear to speak up, and claimed the right to speak.

*Qualitative Methods and Their Appropriateness in SA Research*

SA is a very complex phenomenon because of the plurality of events that occur in real-life contexts, including aspects such as program design features, host society, students' personality, and social dynamics and encounters which affect the nature of the participants' experiences abroad. Although interest in SA is growing and research orientations have broadened, there is still a need to develop deeper understanding of the notion of *immersion* abroad and what it means for SA participants.

The important topic that has been addressed here is the use and appropriateness of qualitative research methods for the examination of SA programs for language learners. I argue that qualitative research methodologies are a valuable, powerful, and a highly effective approach for the critical analysis of SA to capture the meanings that participants attribute to it, and investigate factors beneath the surface that can affect individuals' language and culture learning process as well as the shifts in their perceptions, practices, and attitudes. The qualitative methods used in each of the studies presented above effectively contributed to the results discussed. For instance, the qualitative data analysis conducted by Jackson (2006) and Burnett and Gardner (2006) revealed important individual variations and perspectives toward progress among students, and shifting degrees of immersion, adjustment, acculturation, and integration. Fitch and Hooper (1983) highlighted how international students differ in their language choice and attitudes, feelings, and perceptions toward code switching, including pre-existing national and linguistic stereotypes and politico-economical overtones based upon concepts of colonialism and capitalism. In Brecht and Robinson (1993) the ethnographic qualitative analysis of interviews with SA participants was very beneficial for the investigation of why male students were apparently more successful than female students in practicing Russian, and the impact that

certain gender incidents, such as not being positioned as competent speakers while interacting with men, had an impact on their language and culture learning processes.

Qualitative methodologies, particularly case studies, are unique for their exhaustive descriptions, the attention devoted to the socio-cultural context, and the richness of the data on each individual participant over time. For example, the longitudinal case studies by Norton Peirce (2000; 1995) showed how five immigrant women living in Canada functioned in their setting and real-life context, and how their identity and investment in the target language, culture, and people shifted with the changing social world. Wilkinson (2000; 1998a; 1998b) analyzed, in-depth, the struggle that SA participants experienced during their adjustment and acculturation process, and their growing feelings of otherness, strangeness, and alienation from the host community - due to episodes of intercultural differences and misunderstanding. Siegal (1995) conducted a careful conversation analysis of the interactions of the two main participants, which revealed their ambivalent feelings and desire to maintain their image in Japanese society despite local norms, and the respect that they progressively gained for the idea of a shifting self reflected in the register variation and incorporation of honorifics.

Despite the usefulness and appropriateness of ethnographic case study in the SA research field, this qualitative form of inquiry presents apparent drawbacks. Researchers living in close contact with participants for extended time periods face a rapport-building task that is psychologically and emotionally challenging. Qualitative researchers need to effectively perform a plurality of tasks, such as being good field note-takers; acute observation of participants; skillful interviewing; competence in linguistic scholarship; and expertise as a language analyst. Furthermore, qualitative methods have been harshly criticized for being highly subjective and personally biased, as Lambert (1991) claims, and for not holding reliability or validity due to the

continual researcher's personal inferences, the restriction of the setting, and the limited number of subjects, or the specificity of case studies. However, the main point in research in human science is to work with analytical rigor, and not to generalize the validity of the experiences narrated. What is key here is to deepen our understanding of a specific phenomenon under study by digging into the complexities of individual subjects' identity and lifestories, perceptions and feelings.

Finally, qualitative methods are not as simple and uncomplicated as they may appear. Qualitative researchers are required to possess sensitivity and depth of thought, adequate personal and professional abilities to relate to people, the natural talent to inspire confidence, and the skills to gather information using several instruments. They need to have in-depth knowledge of the coherent theoretical framework for the specific study they are conducting in order not to end up with just a string of isolated and disconnected narratives.

The scholarly contributions of qualitative forms of inquiry, particularly ethnographic case study as illustrated here, are particularly significant in SA research and in the field of international education. This collection of research can benefit students, teachers, and SA directors and coordinators by highlighting SA as a language and culture learning context in our global societies; what we wish students to learn from this international experience and how we want to go about it, the changes that can be implemented; and finally how we can better prepare participants to live abroad and enhance their cross-cultural communication, awareness, and appreciation of other societies.

Finally, I believe that an ethnographic case study approach is the most suitable one for answering the research questions of my project because of the specific epistemological and theoretical assumptions grounding my study and informing precise methodological choices.

First, if social constructivism suggests that reality depends upon human perception and practice in a specific socio-cultural setting, then in this study I must create space for my participants' voices to be heard, and privilege an emic (insider) perspective before an etic (outsider or researcher) one for my participants to construct their own SA reality. At the same time I must give a voice to the other SA participants, i.e., community members, SA director and coordinators, and professors, for them to construct their own experiences and perceptions.

Second, if my analysis of the SA as a cultural and immersion event is an interpretative one, and if the research questions focus on meaning and understanding of the multiple facets, specifics, and development of SA and its actors, then the methodological approach to be adopted is qualitative. Therefore, the specific data collection and analysis methods chosen for this study cannot be but ethnographic in nature and aim at shedding light on the process of knowledge development, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral change and the learning process.

### Summary

In the above literature review, I have explored various fields of research: for the theoretical framework I have drawn on the theories of Vygotsky and Wertsch. To give an in-depth picture of the experience of US SA undergraduates, I have drawn on studies of cultural and linguistic immersion abroad, studies that present the issues faced by US undergraduates, and studies that investigate the value of qualitative research methods to dig deep into individual students' experiences. These theoretical perspectives and research support our understanding of the challenges US SA undergraduates face when living abroad during an academic semester.



CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY  
Research Questions

To restate the questions guiding this research:

Guiding question

- How do three specific case study students' social background variables such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender, affect their SA experiences inside and outside of the classroom?

Sub-questions

- How are these variables viewed by the host society? How are they taken up and interpreted?
- How do these variables affect an American student's individual and collective interactions with the host society?
- What are the implications for an American student's opportunities for linguistic and cultural immersion?
- What are the implications for an American student's identity negotiation and reconstruction?
- What are the underlying values and socio-cultural resources that an American student uses for interpreting and making sense of their experiences and interactions in class and outside of class?

- How do a Spanish teacher and an American student negotiate the meaning and content of cultural immersion in SA classrooms?

#### Theory of Inquiry Guiding Data Collection and Analysis

This analysis was informed by a social constructivist perspective. The overall theory of inquiry that guided data collection and analysis is socio-cultural theory. Socio-cultural theory focuses on the connection between language learning and other human activities in a specific socio-cultural, historical, and institutional context (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Wertsch, 1991; 1998; Vygotsky, 1987; 1986; 1978). The guiding principles of socio-cultural theory are highlighted below:

- Learning and human development are fundamentally social processes and take place in a social environment in interaction with others. In this process, language and culture play a key role.
- The meaning of, and purpose for, a specific action, practice, and emotion are determined by the perspectives, objectives, and interests of participants and by the socio-cultural contexts and settings within which such action, practice, and emotion occurs and evolves. Therefore, the individual participant, in this case the SA participant, constructs her or his reality and meaning according to personal understandings, cultural tools, and ideologies developed through interactive social processes inside and outside the classroom setting, at home as much as abroad.
- The way in which SA participants act, behave, and perceive is determined by individual characteristics as much as by the socio-cultural context in which they live and interact in contact with their interlocutors. Therefore, all experiences that SA participants are

exposed to are unique, distinctive, and can only be fully understood when they are highly contextualized in a specific socio-cultural setting.

- Actual learning, including second language learning in an SA program, occurs in situations in which SA students work on goal-oriented tasks with an expert or a more capable peer, i.e., their advisors, tutors, professors, and target language speakers, within their zone of proximal development (ZPD).
- Learners must be active, not passive, and need to have a sense of agency when they engage in social interactions and exchanges. They have to invest in the host language and culture, and be committed to language learning in a durable way.

#### Ethnographic Case Study

Following the tradition of ethnographic and case study approaches in SA research (Kinging, 2008b; Burnett & Gardner, 2006; Churchill, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Norton Peirce, 2000; Wilkinson, 2000; 1998a; 1998b; Siegal, 1995; Brecht and Robinson, 1993; Fitch & Hooper, 1983), my project is an ethnographic case study. As an employee and participant observer in the SA program, I spent two summer semesters in Zadic, Spain and Fall and Spring in Colovo, Spain, during the 2007-2008 years. There, I lived in close contact with undergraduate English-L1 students of Spanish. I participated in the students' daily life, activities, and field trips; I observed and analyzed what was done and what was said; I examined how individual students functioned in the context where they were living, studying, socializing, and interacting; I studied their processes and strategies to immerse themselves into the host culture and environment, and how they used both native language and target language. I took pictures; I interviewed them formally and informally; and I requested that the student participants create a self-reflection journal and a photo journal as well. I also collected students' artifacts that helped me understand

the sojourn experience from the learners' perspectives. Finally, I interviewed students' host families and teachers abroad, and the SA program team. I examined the specific program design features, particularly the in-class and out-of-class activities that students participated in and took advantage of. The goal was to understand students' perceptions of SA as a cultural and immersion event, and how aspects of identity such as race, gender, age, and socio-economic class affected their experiences, practices and perceptions, SA outcomes, and future decisions.

My approach is in line with recent work on case histories and journeys of US college students and students from Asia studying abroad (see e.g., Kinginger, 2008b, and Jackson, 2008). In particular, Kinginger used a case study approach to dig deeper into the qualities and specifics of individual students' experiences in France, and the resources they used to make sense of their SA sojourn and to interpret the activities and events to which they were exposed. Her goal was to shed light on the complex process of language and culture learning abroad, as well as to document specific SA and academic outcomes. Kinginger documented changes in the individual learners' attitudes, feelings, and perceptions as they progressed through the program abroad, and gained an insider's perspective on their experiences. Six case histories were selected based on two main criteria: a) They illustrated broad individual diversity in terms of students' achievements as well as type of experiences; b) They also delved into a number of general themes pertinent to the entire SA group. These themes are related to the contemporary SA experience for US college students and show how language and culture immersion in an SA program is more and more a matter of choice, a site of struggle, a challenging but rewarding adventure.

The premises for selecting a case study methodology to guide my research were laid out at the beginning of this work while discussing the theoretical grounding and epistemological

stance that inspired my research. As I pointed out earlier, the two fundamental theoretical assumptions that derive from a constructionist epistemology and that informed my research are as follows:

- Meaning and reality are socially constructed, contextually situated, and depend upon human perception and practice;
- Human beings are agentic and construct knowledge dynamically within a specific cultural world.

These two guiding theoretical assumptions underlie precise methodological choices that I made for my study:

- Privilege a qualitative approach, an interpretative and explanatory form of inquiry, a methodology that allows me to dig deeper into the complex human meaning-making process;
- Privilege an emic rather than etic perspective and let the SA participants construct their own individual meaning and reality;
- Privilege a naturalistic investigation of individual SA participants' accounts and stories, their conceptual world, and interpretative resources.

The professional literature in the field of qualitative research further informed my decision to adopt a case study approach for my project. Yin (2003) maintains that case study is appropriate for addressing research questions that ask “what happened” (descriptive) or “how or why” (explanatory) something happened. Patton (2002) emphasizes that case study is a pivotal approach in qualitative, interpretative, and ethnographic inquiries. Stake (2000) points out that case study and a constructionist epistemology match well since they share the fundamental principle that knowledge, meaning, and reality are contingent upon human practices, they are

socially constructed, contextually situated, and significantly affected by the continual interactions between human beings and their socio-interactive and contextual environment. van Lier (2005) describes case studies as a contextual form of research emphasizing socio-cultural and interactional context, development and change over time. Duff (2008) points out that case study is a suitable approach for organic, naturalistic, and extensive investigation within, and interaction with, selected research participants while they make sense of their activities and experience abroad in a particular content. Finally, case study “can furnish the dimensions of time and history to the study of social life, thereby enabling the investigator to examine continuity and change in lifeworld patterns” (Feagin et al., 1991, p. 7). I personally think of a case study as a case, or a story with its character(s) and real-life context of situation, that is of special interest or concern for its uniqueness and at the same time for its commonality, and that is worth investigating, understanding, explaining, and sharing with other people.

A last word goes to longitudinal approaches. The value of adopting a longitudinal approach in case study and qualitative inquiry is evidenced in the recent work of influential scholars in the field of education and second language acquisition (Harklau, 2008; Ortega & Byrnes, 2008). They followed individual research participants over an extended period of time to document the development of their experiences, feelings, and perceptions.

In keeping with ethnographic case study approaches (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002), I collected data for my project primarily through interviews, observations, and written documents. Additionally, data were analyzed inductively and recursively as the study progressed. Data collection and analysis extended over a period of 18 months. This allowed me to gain insight into how selected case study participants change and develop upon return to the United States months after the end of the SA program.

Stake (2005; 1995) defines case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances.” (p. xi). Stake explains that the selection of specific cases is motivated by their uniqueness as well as by more common themes, elements, and aspects that emerge in them and that can be extended to other people or situations. Based on Stake’s typology, my project is an instrumental case study and a multiple case study. It is an instrumental case study in that it explores the US SA students immersed the host environment and culture where they lived, the SA program design features, and the SA participants’ subjective and interactional experiences and practices, including the host community members’. The goal was to use the participants’ accounts and perceptions to shed light on how they carried out and made sense of specific actions, practices, and activities during their experience in Spain. I asked my case study participants to describe in depth their daily activities, practices, interactions, and feelings. I collected rich descriptions on how students functioned in the context where they lived, studied, and socialized, and what their language socialization processes and strategies were. I examined what specific activities and opportunities were offered within the host environment that the students took advantage of; how participants differed in their reactions to cultural events and program design features; and what their experiences and perspectives were. I listened to the participants’ own words and let them express what the SA experiences meant to them. Efforts were made on my part to suspend judgment, analyze participants’ experiences and perceptions with fresh eyes, examine their accounts and perspectives in all their entirety and complexity, and strongly privilege an emic rather than etic perspective.

Finally, my research is a multiple case study (see Stake’s typology, 1995) in that it investigated 37 case study students who volunteered to be focal participants, tell their stories and

share their perceptions inside and outside of the classroom, and be interviewed at least once during the SA program in Spain and upon their return to the United States. For Borman et al. (2006) multiple cases are beneficial because they allow cross-case analysis, the observation of common themes and patterns, and therefore greater opportunity to compare and contrast experiences across several representations of the phenomena under study. Out of these 37 case study participants I then selected a smaller sub-sample of case studies based on the incidents of cultural clashes that they lived abroad, i.e., compelling and unique stories for one thing, and for another thing stories that delved well into a number of general topics pertinent to the entire SA group. In this instance, the common patterns and experiences were related to the way young American male and female students interpret and live their SA sojourn.

Data representation was critical in influencing my selection of the three specific case study students who then became the protagonists of the three finding chapters of this study. What I mean is that as a way of representing data for analysis, I started to draw two-column tables for each of the case study participants whose accounts, perceptions, and experiences clashed with those of other SA participants, mostly Spanish professors and host society members. While in the column on the left I typed the case study participant's perspectives on a specific issue or situation, on the right column I typed those of other participants. By so doing, it was easier to visualize and compare the contrastive points of view, i.e., the American perspective versus the Spanish one.

#### *Ethnographic Case Study as the Most Suitable Approach*

I believe that an ethnographic case study approach is the most suitable methodology for this dissertation - a naturalistic and interpretative investigation of cultural and linguistic immersion experiences of selected groups of individual foreign language learners - because (a) it



enables me to answer the research questions; (b) it allows me to privilege an emic (insider's) perspective before an etic (outsider or researcher) one; (c) it suits the social constructivist theoretical perspective that I articulated in chapter 2; and (d) it gives me the necessary flexibility and openness for exploring possible themes, meaning, and reality within the data.

First, as I discussed in the previous chapter, social constructivism suggests that reality depends upon human perception and practice in a specific socio-cultural setting. Thus, in this study I created space for my participants' voices to be heard, and for them to construct the reality of the SA program and experience to comply with the necessity of an emic (insider) perspective before an etic (outsider or researcher) one. At the same time considerable efforts were also made to try to present the insights and perspectives of other SA participants such as community members, SA director and coordinators, and professors. Then, I presented an account, description, and interpretation of their perceptions with the goal of "gaining access to the conceptual world in which [...] subjects live so that we [researchers] can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them" (Geertz, 1973, p. 24). In the process of constructing "actor-oriented descriptions" (Geertz, p. 15), collaboration is indispensable. Thus, the reality of the SA program event is constructed by the participants and by the researcher.

Second, my analysis of the SA as a cultural and immersion event is an interpretative and naturalistic one, and the researcher's task, as Geertz (1973) suggests, is to seek meaning, understanding, and clarification of what goes on in all its multiple aspects and components. Thus, the methodological approach to be adopted in this study is qualitative. Schensul (1999) points out that a process-oriented form of analysis concerns the systematic observation and study of what goes on in the life of the participants and in the environments where they interact. Therefore, the specific data collection and analysis methods chosen for the study were

ethnographic in nature and aimed at enhancing my understanding of the process of knowledge development, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral change and the learning process. In this instance, case study (Duff, 2008; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Borman, Clarke, Cotner, and Lee, 2006; Stakes, 2005; 2000; 1995; van Lier, 2005; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg, 1991) seemed to be a very appropriate methodology because it involves intensive and naturalistic research on site, a reliance on ethnographic data collection and data analysis methods. Case study allowed me to understand in depth what SA is as a cultural and immersive event for its participants, and document the significant differences emerging in each one of my case study students, both in terms of their individual academic outcomes and in the nature and significance of cultural immersion (CI) and linguistic immersion (LI) experiences with the host community.

Third, my choice of selecting three specific and case study students and their individual stories of cross-cultural clashes abroad further became justified during data representation. As I was exploring possible ways to represent data for analysis, I started to draw two-column tables for each of the case study participants whose first person accounts and experiences (represented in the left column of the tables) clashed with those of Spanish professors and coordinators, or host society members (represented in the right column of the tables). In these tables it was interesting to me to compare the contrastive points of view. Such a data representation influenced my selection of the case studies and shaped a substantial part of this dissertation.

#### Path of inference

In this section I will articulate the journey that I took to find out what I ended up focusing on in this dissertation. A salient experience that influenced the shape of my dissertation has been the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) conference that I attended in

Washington in March 2008. This conference was critical for me not so much for the opportunity that I had to present part of my data collection and analysis. More importantly, I went to the presentation given by Celeste Kinginger, one of the most influential scholars on SA, international education, and applied linguistics. I also had the chance to introduce myself and talk to her at the end of her presentation. It was then when she asked me if I was interested in working with her and other doctoral students on a project that she was leading. For such a project she was collecting “rich points” (Agar, 1994), i.e., compelling stories of cross-cultural clashes that US-college students actually lived abroad. The purpose was to create a website for future SA students, expose them to some of the conflictive experiences and incidents that previous SA students lived, and give them some tools to cope with potential difficulties and challenges arising abroad. I immediately agreed to collaborate with Dr. Kinginger. From that moment on I started to look at my data from a specific angle: the “rich point” perspective. A couple of months after the AAAL conference I sent Dr. Kinginger a few stories of intercultural conflicts that the SA students that I was observing experienced between Colovo and Zadic. She found that some of those accounts were particularly powerful, I thought that too. Therefore, I focused more and more on them, I collected more data from the student protagonists themselves, as well as I interviewed other SA participants to hear both sides of the story. Three of these rich points turned out to become the three finding chapters of this dissertation.

#### Subjectivity of Researcher

I approach this study as a white, middleclass female graduate student. I am pursuing my doctoral studies to satisfy a strong desire to acquire knowledge and gain experience, to improve myself and thus become a better, more tolerant, educated, open-minded, and well-informed

individual. Traveling and coming in contact with other people, languages, cultures, and societies is part of this goal.

I am an international student from Italy at the University of Georgia. Since I was 17 years old, when I went to England from Italy by myself for the first time to improve my English in the summer, I have traveled, studied, worked, and taught languages in a number of environments abroad. I am a native speaker of Italian and besides my mother tongue I speak and write five additional languages at an advanced level, including English, French, Spanish, German, and Portuguese.

From an academic standpoint, my first experience that influences and relates to the present study was my first scholarship to go study in Aix-en-Provence, France for one academic semester. I was 22, and I was a second-year student in the Department of Modern Languages for Translators and Interpreters of the University of Trieste, Italy. My major was translation and interpretation in Italian, French, English, and German. In France I immersed myself into the host culture and target language. I took French language and culture classes at the University of Aix-en-Provence, and my classmates were native speakers of French. I took the same exams that they took and the credits that I earned in France were transferred to my home university in Trieste, Italy. In Aix-en-Provence I shared a room with a female student from the French Canton in Switzerland. Together we stayed in one of the several residence halls on campus. Finally, I participated in the student life sharing experiences with the big community of learners on campus. Upon my return to Italy from France, I immediately applied for other scholarships and opportunities to study abroad offered by the University of Trieste. After France, I spent one semester in London, England; the following academic semester I was in Saarbrücken, Germany; the following academic year I went to Besançon, France.

Throughout my life I spent a significant part of my education abroad. As soon as I graduated from the University of Trieste I went to the United States to work as a teaching assistant of Italian at Bard College, New York. The year after that, I came to the University of Georgia where I have been teaching Italian and Spanish while pursuing my graduate studies in foreign language education.

Another salient experience that influences and ties me to the present study is the three summers spent in Italy (2000-2003) when I taught Italian at the University of Georgia Art Study Abroad Program in Cortona, where I also served as Faculty-in-Residence. I lived in the residence hall with over 80 international students enrolled in the program for the duration of the program (from June to August). In Cortona, US and international students were offered art, culture, and language courses at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels, along with opportunities for scholarships, internships, and close interaction with the host community.

This particular experience in Cortona helped me gain skills in leadership, management, and organization. When Dr. David Reinking and Dr. Beverly Payne, two former faculty members from the UGA Reading Department in the College of Education, contacted me in 1999 about starting up a study abroad program in Italy for their elementary-education students, I played a crucial role in helping them set up and run the Maymester program in my birth place, Carpi (in the province of Modena), Italy. The program, currently directed by Dr. Reinking from Clemson University, has now been successfully functioning for nine years. Finally, I did all the groundwork needed to develop a language study abroad program in Carpi, Italy in collaboration with the Romance Languages Department and the Reading Education Department at UGA. However, the university decided not to launch the program after all. I also served as a SA counselor in the UGA program in Costa Rica in 2002 when I offered my assistance and previous

experience in the field to develop a Spanish language component to the already existing SA program in ecology.

These experiences abroad as student first, and then as SA faculty, coordinator, and advisor influence the interpretations of what I find in my research and therefore, my interpretation of the data and findings. I understand that there are things that I might miss or overlook, or be less disposed to notice, because of my own study abroad multicultural background and experience. For example, the fact that I am a polyglot, that I have grown up in Europe where many people are multilingual, and that I have traveled a lot inside and outside Europe and Latin America, may make me take that knowledge, experience, drive, and maturity for granted. Other people in study abroad might approach study abroad with a different attitude than I did and might not take full advantage of this momentous opportunity. As a result of my multicultural background and previous experiences it might be possible for me to overlook situations or details that are significant and meaningful for an individual who leaves the country for the first time, but that are very familiar to me. This means that I will have to be careful not to unconsciously assume that most study abroad participants will necessarily know how to behave in certain circumstances, or that they will have the mindset of a well-traveled person.

Also, study abroad often attracts more students of privilege and fewer students who come from less privileged families. Socioeconomic issues might affect how I view, and respond to, some of these learners studying abroad. When I went abroad I was either on a scholarship or I worked to support myself. I understand study abroad as a genuinely and creatively challenging but rewarding experience, deprived of much of that “comfort zone” that certain program structures and designs now guarantee to paying students abroad instead of continually placing them in a linguistically and culturally demanding interface within their host community.

As a student abroad I have always traveled independently, ventured out, and explored people and places by myself. I was eager to speak the target language, and I was aware of my linguistic limitations and of the risks that I was taking as a female student in a foreign country. Neither my home university nor my host university created conditions that enhanced my comfort or responded to my cultural and material needs and expectations abroad. A profound sense of cultural and linguistic differences, and at times of prolonged distress, remained for me a living reality abroad. In US study abroad programs, however, it seems to me now that these unsettling experiences abroad are often softened by the presence and intervention of program coordinators, assistants, and mentors, and that study abroad tends to be a short stay (a short semester or a few weeks) compared to a prolonged sojourn of nine months like those I experienced (see also Gore, 2005). I feel that it is much easier for US study abroad students to spend almost their entire sojourn experience together as a group, speaking their native language to each other, and living in a comfortably superficial relationship within their host community and culture, choosing the attractions of tourism or the safety of their iPod, Skype, and Facebook over a meaningful and durable form of investment in the local environment.

As a teacher and coordinator abroad, I have always felt the importance of my mission as an educator, together with my commitment of guaranteeing students' academic success, physical and mental safety and health. For me study abroad is about finding a good balance between giving too much to students and giving too little. This means that to leave students totally by themselves so that they can experience and explore the host culture and native people alone is probably not the ideal situation abroad. On the other hand, to take students by the hand—to assist them, nurture them, do things for them all the time, and to treat them as infants—is not the answer either. It is crucial to teach students to become astute and critical observers, to spark their

interest, stimulate their curiosity, and provide them with the necessary resources to become independent, confident, and linguistically and culturally mature enough to venture out by themselves and be analytical, reflective, and critical about what they see. I position myself as a facilitator of learning, a guide, a mentor, a resource for my students. I am available whenever they need assistance, support, and advice in making informed decisions about their academic, professional, and social life. I strive to adapt my teaching and mentoring practices to be accessible and meaningful to the diverse population of students that I encounter, and I highly value the numerous insights offered by my colleagues and by the professional literature. My quest for excellence in teaching, educating, and mentoring is a never-ending search. I believe in the value of guided cultural reflection and analysis sessions where students can discuss their experiences, impressions, and thoughts while they are prompted to make deep considerations about their perceptions and perspectives. It is fundamental to link real life experiences and abstract understanding and to stimulate students' intellectual and cross-cultural development through frequent feedback. It is fundamental to provide students with lots of examples from every day life so that they see how to welcome interlocutors with an attitude of empathy, solidarity, and interest in the practices and perspectives of others, and with willingness to suspend judgment in the interest of learning. This is a way to educate translingually and transculturally competent (MLA report, 2007), open minded, and tolerant individuals who will become sensitive citizens of our multicultural, multilingual, multiethnic, and globalized societies in the common pursuit of civic action, social justice, and world peace.

### *Bracketing*

Gadamer (2002) discusses bracketing in terms of remaining open and sensitive to the meaning of the other text, person, situation, or event. This openness does not mean that we have



to erase all our own fore-meanings and ideas, nor does it involve neutrality. Instead, it requires that we situate the other meaning “in relation to the whole of our meanings or ourselves in relation to it” (p. 268), and that we show sensitivity to the text’s and people’s alterity. Such openness also requires that we question meanings, things, and people, and remain critical of them while always being conscious of our own bias and prejudices.

As the researcher, I understand that I need to bracket my own subjectivities, previous experiences as an SA student first and then as faculty/coordinator, and preconceived ideas and assumptions about the whole event, the participants, the US institution sponsoring the program, and the host country and community. Bracketing is not easy but I made an effort to make sure that my data collection, analysis, and dissertation write-up accounted for my subjectivities. I tried to dive into the culture and its participants, and observe them with open, new, fresh, and curious eyes. Methodologically speaking, I kept a journal that included a self-disclosure of biases where I mainly focused on stepping back and questioning myself and my perceptions. I looked for words in my journal entries that might have indicated certain (un)aware) prejudices or preconceptions of mine. I interrogated my sources as well as myself, and paid attention to where they/I came from. I was guided by a leading question: “What do I know about myself that might influence how I view what is going on?” Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest that researchers need to reflect on what is missing in how they do their analysis in ways that they will account for their subjectivities. Gadamer (2002) argues that,

A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently as stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagine sit to be. (p. 269)

An important step that I took in this direction was to be actively involved in a writing/reading group, i.e., sounding board or support group of colleagues and fellow graduate students. They

talked with me (unfortunately mostly over email due to geographical distance), and helped me work through some of the subjectivities issues. If the goal is to see things with fresh eyes, I understand that it is necessary to continue to do whatever I can to remove my prejudices. I also understand that this takes continual work throughout my research, at the beginning as much as toward the end.

### Study Sites

#### *Colovo and Zadic, Two Coastal Cities in Spain*

The US-university directed SA programs where this study was conducted are located in Colovo and Zadic, Spain. I chose these two Spanish cities as sites for my research because Gareg offered me an assistantship to work and conduct my study there. Both programs are designed for intermediate/advanced adult English-speaking students of Spanish (fourth and fifth-year Spanish). The study covered four consecutive semesters abroad: Summer 2007 in Zadic (7 weeks), Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 in Colovo (13 weeks each), Summer 2008 in Zadic (7 weeks).

*Colovo.* Colovo is the third largest city in Spain (about 800,000 inhabitants) and it is located on the Levantine Coast. Colovo is the capital of the region where it is located. The city hosts a large University that dates back to the 15th century and has a population of over 45,000 between Spanish, European, and international students. The SA students who participated in this project lived in the historic district in a recently renovated 17<sup>th</sup> century residence hall that is owned by the Ucevo. Classes were taught by home- as well as host-university faculty members in the foreign language department at the Ucevo. They were offered in Spanish and were home-university credit-bearing courses. These courses included conversation and composition in Spanish, to business Spanish, Spanish/Latin American literature, Spanish/Latin American

cinema, and modern history of Spain. The students enrolled in the spring semester program in Colovo were required to take four courses and visit the cities of Madrid and Barcelona as part of the academic component.

*Zadic.* Zadic, a city located on the Atlantic Ocean, is much smaller than Colovo (about 140,000 inhabitants). It is among the oldest settlements in Spain, and serves as one of the country's main ports. Zadic has one of the highest unemployment rates in Spain and Europe. As a consequence of this, young people tend to leave the city and look for a job in nearby cities. The students enrolled in the summer semester program in Zadic lived and ate their meals with local Spanish families. The courses in Zadic were taught by host university faculty members in a private centrally-located building rented by the local SA provider, and students earned home-university credits. These courses ranged from conversation and composition in Spanish, to Spanish culture, and introduction to Spanish linguistics. The students enrolled in the summer semester program in Zadic were required to take two courses and visit the cities of Madrid and Granada as part of the academic component. Seville was also a mandatory excursion during Summer semester 2007.

For a more concise description of the study sites as well as characteristics of the SA programs, see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Study Sites and Characteristics of the SA Programs

	Colovo	Zadic
Location in Spain	Levantine Coast	Atlantic Coast
Academic semester	Fall 2007 + Spring 2008	Summer 2007 + 2008
Semester length	13 weeks	7 weeks
Level of courses offered	4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> year Spanish	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> year Spanish
Number of courses required for each student	4	2
Faculty	From home + host university	From host university only
Mandatory excursions	To Madrid and Barcelona	To Madrid and Granada (to Seville in Summer '07)
Housing	Residence hall	Host families

### My Relationships with the Sites and the Participants

My role and position in these SA programs as well as in their US sponsoring university inevitably affected the nature of data collected and my interpretation. I was a doctoral student at Gareg, so I shared this important aspect with the US SA student participants. I was also part of the SA team and worked as assistant, mentor, and activity coordinator at both sites abroad. My responsibilities included guaranteeing the SA students' safety, physical and psychological well-being, as well as their academic success. I was responsible for organizing optional cultural and leisure activities for the students in the afternoons and on weekends. I was on call 24/7 in case of emergency (see Appendix A for a detailed description of my responsibilities). Therefore, I gradually developed a professional yet friendly relationship with study participants and a strong insider's perspective as a result of spending so much time with students and program staff on a daily basis, and from living in contact with the local community members. Likewise, I am fluent in Spanish and had previous experience living in the program cities, so I was able to act as a resource for students. During the semester of Spring 2008 I lived in the same university dorms in Colovo as SA participants, and we saw each other daily in common spaces such as the dining hall, coffee shop, lobby, court yard, and gym.

#### *Logistical Challenges*

The logistical challenges of doing ethnographic research on an SA program are several and cumbersome. SA programs are rarely more than a semester in length, and often shorter. That doesn't give the researcher much time to negotiate site access. Some researchers are turned away by institutions and people abroad who may not share Americans' notions or conventions about research and access. I experienced some problems with site access in Colovo when I was collecting data for this study. Local University authorities initially gave me permission to

observe classes and interview professors within the Department of International Relations of the Ucevo. However, soon after I arrived on site and introduced myself to the local professors who were teaching the US SA students, the same local University authorities denied me permission to observe classes and interview the host-university professors face-to-face in a formal setting. The reasons for denial were never fully disclosed to me, or to the SA program director of the sponsoring university, as she reported in the following personal communication:

I still do not understand how this problem arose. It strikes me as a case of a cross-cultural misunderstanding that led to a misconception of your research project. This, unfortunately, is a risk that individuals conducting innovative research projects often incur.

In addition, local University authorities later denied my request to obtain a Ucevo ID student card to check out books from the library, and to audit a doctoral course on data analysis (*Técnica de análisis de datos*) taught by a host-university professor in the college of Education at the Ucevo.

### Participants

I invited the participation of the entire SA student group, the SA program team, as well as professors/instructors and local community members such as host families in Zadic and dorm staff/community in Colovo. Their real names have been replaced by pseudonyms.

#### *SA Student Cohorts*

Students were the primary source of information for this research study. They consisted of undergraduate American university students. Most participants were from one Southeastern public university and they were studying Spanish as a second language. Their level of Spanish was intermediate/pre-advanced. The total number of students observed in the study during four consecutive semesters abroad was 131:

- 44 students in Zadic in Summer 2007 (pilot study, participant observations were the only data collected);
- 8 students in Colovo in Fall 2007;
- 37 students in Colovo in Spring 2008;
- 42 students in Zadic in Summer 2008;

None of the students enrolled in the SA program stayed for longer than one semester. Their age ranged from 19 to 26 years old, and most of them were from suburban areas of a major Southeastern city in the US. Of these students, 22 had at least one parent from outside of the US, including Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Finland, Ireland, Bosnia, Bulgaria Brazil, Iran, and Japan.

#### *Case Study Participants*

37 students out of the SA student cohort volunteered to be case study participants. It happened as soon as I met with the entire group at the beginning of the program and I explained to them that I needed a few students willing to be interviewed one to three times and to share with me their experiences abroad, to maintain a journal and blog, and to turn in their class material. Below is the number of case study students per semester:

- 8 in Zadic 2007 (pilot study; interviews were not recorded);
- 8 in Colovo 2007;
- 12 in Colovo 2008;
- 9 in Zadic 2008.

#### *SA Program Team: Directors, Coordinators, and Teaching Assistants*

The SA program directors of the Zadic and Colovo programs, two coordinators, and one teaching assistant (besides me) were contacted during the sojourn. I kept in contact with these

individuals following the SA experience in order to their explore feelings and sensations, how they developed over time, and how they looked at their experiences weeks and months after the end their journey abroad. As part of the staff, I worked with them in coordinating the activities and logistics of the program. The SA program coordinator in Colovo was also assigned to teach one course. Their age ranged approximately from 31 to 44 years old. The two program coordinators were natives of Spain. The directors and teaching assistant were Americans. The director was a faculty member at Gareg. The rest of the team members had been language instructors and graduate students for 3-6 years where they got their Master degrees. They were asked to comment on their role in the SA students' level of CI and LI and, and on the role of the classes, the activities offered during the semester, critical incidents, and the interactions between students and host community members.

#### *Professors/Instructors*

All professors (three males and 10 females) were originally from Spain, and their age ranged approximately from 30 to 60. Two were Gareg instructors from the US and the rest were local professors from a major public university in Spain. Three female instructors were graduate students from the University of Valencia, Seville, and Castilla la Mancha. All the professors and instructors were contacted in person during the sojourn. Following the SA experience I kept in touch with them by email and by phone in order to maintain the dialogue open about SA and international education, and to discuss specific topics related to their SA experience and their students' once my study had acquired more definition.

#### *Local Community Members*

Local community members were mostly host families in Zadic and dorm staff and dorm community in Colovo and other people affiliated with the SA program, such as former and

current SA program team members, and Spanish service providers. In Zadic, all 22 host families were originally from the city, lived in the downtown area, and hosted two female or two male US SA students for six weeks. Some families were older couples with grown-up children who did not live at their house anymore, while other host families were younger and had small children or children, or children of the same age as the US students. Therefore, it is also important to expand the list of local community members to children and relatives who came in contact with the US students and at times played an important role in their socialization and language/culture learning process. US students usually ate three meals a day at home, and had their laundry washed and room cleaned once a week as part of the SA housing arrangements. These host families were recruited with the help of a Spanish service provider that the US university sponsoring the SA program was working with. This service provider provided a list of Spanish families having years of experience hosting American and international students for short and long periods of time. Some of these families distinguished themselves over the years for providing not only room and boarding to the foreign students, i.e., the “duties” they were formally assigned. More importantly, they welcomed students to their house as an additional member of their family, and engaged them in various family-oriented activities and other social events that made the students’ sojourn enviable and unforgettable. Such hospitality and warmth was a characteristic that the US sponsoring university was looking and longing for in selecting the host families for their SA students.

In Colovo dorm staff included cleaning ladies, security guards, secretaries, administrative and maintenance people, and employees from the bar/cafeteria, kitchen, and dining hall. The dorm staff working in the Ucevo residence hall came in direct contact with US students while they resided there for 12 weeks sharing a room with a US roommate from the same SA group.



US students ate all their meals at the dorm. It also provided a cable internet connection in each room, laundry rooms, game room, music room, and TV room. This Ucevo residence hall also hosted another 150-200 Colovo, Spanish, and international students - mostly from Europe, Latin America, and Canada - whom the US students met and became friends with.

During the Spring semester of 2008 in Colovo, I also lived in the residence hall. It was an excellent opportunity for me to engage in frequent conversations with SA students, other residence hall students from Spain and outside of Spain, and with dorm staff. It provided an easy access to life and culture in Colovo through the lens of the host community members.

While dorm staff and student dorm residents enrolled at the Ucid Leveso never came in direct contact with the US students living with host families, I lived in the residence hall. The dorm members played an important role in my research as crucial cultural informants about life, perspectives, and cultural practices in Zadic and Spain.

A summary of all participants is in Table 2.

Table 2: Participants

SA group	-131 students -US male and female undergraduates -from one Southeastern public university -students of L2 Spanish -age: 19-26 -residence: suburban area of a major Southeastern city in the US
Case study students	37 students: -8 in Zadic '07 -8 in Colovo '07 -12 in Colovo '08 -9 in Zadic '08
SA program team	-5 members (1 director, 2 coordinators, 2 teaching assistants, including me) -age: 31-44 approx. -nationality: director and one assistant are American; two coordinators are Spanish; I am Italian -academic affiliation: US institution sponsoring the SA program
Faculty	-13 members (3 men + 10 women) -age: 30-60 approx.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-nationality: Spanish</li> <li>-home- and host- university faculty members</li> </ul>
Dorm staff and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cleaning ladies, security guards, secretaries, administrative and maintenance people, employees from the bar/cafeteria, kitchen, and dining hall + approx. 150-200 Spanish and international resident students</li> <li>-services provided: 3 meals/day, cable internet, laundry rooms, game room, music room, TV room</li> </ul>
Host families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-22 families</li> <li>-age: older and younger couples</li> <li>-with and without children living at home</li> <li>-nationality: Spanish</li> <li>-residence: downtown Zadic</li> <li>-hosting 2 US SA students each</li> <li>-services provided: 3 meals/day, laundry, cleaning of the room</li> </ul>

### Data Collection

Data for this study were collected primarily through interviews, observations, and written documents. Data collection formally started in March, 2007 and ended in February, 2009. The different methods of data collection that I will discuss below were guided by a common grand tour question “What is happening?” “Can you tell me about it?” Remaining open to every possible meaning and reality emerging from the events/situations analyzed and the data collected was a necessary approach since this study started out with little definition. My main goal was to follow the data wherever they would take me (see appendices B and C for interview protocols, and appendix D for a table displaying all data collected and their purpose).

#### *Interviews with Case Study Participants*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted and audio-recorded with case study participants and lasted between 18 and 143 minutes. Some interviews were conducted in English while others in Spanish. The location for the interviews varied: the SA office, my dorm room, or a public space such as a classroom, a park, a restaurant, or an internet access point. Zadic summer 2007 served as a pilot study: interviews were not audio-recorded - I was still waiting for the IRB formal approval to conduct this study - but copious notes were taken, and they were

expanded once the interview was over. The interviews were scheduled in the following way. For the two semesters in Zadic 2007 + 2008 (7 weeks each):

- One cycle of interviews took place in the second half of the program;
- One final focus group interview took place during the last week of the program (the focus group interview was not recorded but copious notes were taken).

For the two semesters in Colovo 2007 + 2008 (13 weeks each):

- A first cycle of interviews took place during the third/fourth week of the program;
- A second cycle took place during the tenth/eleventh week;
- One final focus group interview took place in Colovo 2007 during the last week of the program.

At each initial interview case study students were asked to recount stories, feelings, critical incidents, and experiences of CI and LI that shaped their sojourn abroad. For the second cycle of interviews I prepared follow-up questions as I reviewed the case study students' previous interviews, my observations in and outside of classrooms, their journals, their schoolwork and home assignments, as well as the interviews with professors, SA program team, and community members. The follow-up questions focused on digging deeper into the individual issues, perceptions, and stories that the participants raised and articulated during the first interview. Some case study students were interviewed individually, others in pairs, and others in groups of three students.

*Interviews with Other SA Program Participants (Professors/Instructors, SA Program Team, and Local Community Members)*

Participation of SA program professors/instructors and the SA program team from both home and host institutions, as well as community members was solicited. They were contacted in

person and asked to comment on the SA group and their experiences with (extra)curricular activities. Interviews ranged from approximately 10-15 minutes (informal conversations) to 50 minutes (audio-recorded interviews) and took place in a host family's house, in the dorms, and/or in the SA office located in the dorm in Colovo. I kept in touch with informants throughout the semester abroad and following the sojourn in order to maintain the dialogue open with them about how they looked at the experience months after the end their journey abroad. I dogged deeper the students' experiences, attitudes, and language/culture learning process over time, as well as I probed for additional information on themes I thought were emerging from a more in-depth analysis of the data collected. Faculty, SA program team members, and local community members were interviewed individually.

#### *Counts of Interviews*

I conducted 9 interviews in Zadic 2007, all of which were conducted in Spanish:

- 8 interviews with case study students, including a focus group of 7 students;
- 1 interview with one instructor.

In Zadic 2008, I conducted 8 interviews:

- 5 interviews in English with case study students;
- 2 interviews in Spanish with professors;
- 1 interview in Spanish with home institution academic coordinator.

I conducted 16 interviews in Colovo 2007. All but one were conducted in Spanish. The interviews included:

- 12 interviews in Spanish with case study students;
- a focus group interview in Spanish with the whole group of 8 participants;

- 2 interviews with SA program coordinator/instructor in Spanish;
- 2 interviews with another instructor, the first in Spanish and the second in English).

In Colovo 2008, I conducted 22 interviews in English:

- 19 interviews with case study students
- 2 interviews with SA program coordinator/instructor, who also answered followed-up questions by email;
- 1 interview with another instructor.

A summary of the counts of interviews is in Table 3.

Table 3: Counts of Interviews

	Total number of interviews	Breakdown of interviews	Language of the interview
Zadic 2007	9	-8 with case study students (including a focus group of 7); -1 with instructor	-Spanish -Spanish
Zadic 2008	8	-5 with case study students; -2 with instructors -1 with home-institution academic coordinator	-English -Spanish -Spanish
Colovo 2007	16	-11 with case study students (including a focus group of 8); -1 with case study students; -2 with SA program coordinator/instructor -2 with instructor	-Spanish -English -Spanish - English

Colovo 2008	22	-19 with case study students;  -2 with SA program coordinator/instructor (who also answered followed-up questions by email)  -1 with instructor	-English  -English  -English
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### *Class Observations*

I approached each class observation with curiosity. As I stated above, the leading questions that guided all class observations was the grand tour question “What is happening?” and “What is the role of this class (and/or professor) in the students’ cultural and linguistic immersion experience?” My main objective was to remain open to any meaning emerging from the class dynamics observed. Therefore, some of the aspects that I was observing were the overall class dynamics, teacher/student or student/student interactions, students’ participation and reactions, subject matter, and language use.

Classes were observed one to two times a semester at the beginning and toward the end of the term. Class observations generally lasted the entire class period of 1.5 hours. They were not recorded but copious notes were taken and expanded following the class observation. All classes were given in Spanish by local as well as home-institution professors and instructors who were native speakers of Spanish.

*Zadic 2007*. All observations took place in the middle of the semester (early/mid June 07). These included 7 class observations of 1.5 hour each (including two classes where I was the substitute instructor) for approximately 10.5 hours of classroom observation:

- Two observations in an intermediate Spanish conversation and composition class and one observation in an advanced Spanish conversation and composition class;

- Two Spanish conversation and composition classes were where I served as a substitute teacher;
- One observation in a culture class;
- One observation in an introduction to Spanish linguistics class.

*Colovo 2007.* Observations took place at the beginning (late September 07) and at the end of the term (late November 07), when students performed their final oral presentations. These included 6 class observations of 1.5 hour each, or approximately 9 hours of classroom observation:

- Two observations in a history of Spanish class;
- Two observations in a history of Latin American cinema class;
- One observation in a culture class;
- One observation in a business Spanish class at the beginning of the term.

*Colovo 2008.* All observations took place at the end of the term (late April 08) when students performed their final oral presentations. These included 4 class observations of 1.5 hour each, or approximately 6 hours of classroom observation:

- One observation in a history of Spain class;
- One observation in a Spanish cinema class;
- One observation in a Latin American literature class;
- One observation in a business Spanish class.

*Zadic 2008.* All observations took place at the end of the semester (late June 08). These included 3 class observations of 1.5 hour each, or approximately 4.5 hours of classroom observation:

- One observation in a conversation and composition (intermediate level);
- One observation in a culture class;
- One observation in a conversation and composition class (advanced level).

As I noted earlier, my access to classes offered by local university faculty was limited later on in the study.

### *Field Notes*

Field notes were an important part of the data. I took copious notes in my multiple roles as assistant, mentor, and activity coordinator at both sites abroad. I was noting everything that was happening during the day involving the SA program, students, and other SA participants. I was recording everything, even what could have appeared to be the most insignificant event, situation, comment, or feeling that I witnessed or perceived. I felt that with time even the most irrelevant detail might have acquired some meaning and relevance for my study. During Spring semester 2008 in Colovo I also lived in the same dorms as the SA participants where we often had breakfast, lunch, and dinner together. My notes reflect an insider's perspective that I developed both from being close to students and SA staff on a daily basis, and from living in contact with the local community members.

The counts of observation hours and field notes for this project that I present below included students' outside-of-class interactions, attitudes, and experiences during daily activities and field trips. Copious field notes were consistently taken.

- *In Zadic 2007*: I spent approximately 50 hours of observation in addition to 9 full days spent with the SA students during group trips to Madrid, Toledo, Granada, and Seville when I was on call 24/7;



- *in Colovo 2007*: I spent approximately 100 hours of observation in addition to 7 full days spent with the SA students during group trips to Madrid, Toledo, and Barcelona when I was on call 24/7;
- *In Colovo 2008*: I spent approximately 100 hours of observation in addition 5 full days spent with the SA students during group trips to Madrid and Barcelona when I was on call 24/7;
- *In Zadic 2008*: I spent approximately 50 hours of observation in addition to 5 full days spent with the SA students during group trips to Madrid and Granada when I was on call 24/7.

*Artifacts and Other Written Documents.* These included:

- Students' class material (textbooks/course packages, syllabi, handouts, essays, tests, note packets, homework). Only three students from Colovo 2007 finally did it and turned the material in; only three students from Zadic 2007; and only three students from Zadic 2008. This material was useful to determine what topics students were covering in class, how they were working, and what they were expected from them from an academic standpoint;
- Case study participants' weekly journal entries and blogs (I gave directions to students for some journal entries and blogs; for example, choose and comment on a picture that they took representing cultural and linguistic immersion; talk about an episode of cross-cultural obstacles, differences, and misunderstandings that they experienced abroad; express an opinion about a site or statement; say what they would do or say in specific situations; or discuss what they had understood and learned about the target language people, culture, and society). Only three students from Colovo 2008 completed weekly

journals entries and blogs; no students in other semesters completed them. These journal entries and blogs allowed me to dig deeper into their personal and individual experiences inside and outside of class. For the students they were an additional tool to express themselves and to tell stories that they did not feel comfortable to share face to face during the interviews but that they were willing to write about.

- Students' personal diary. One student from Colovo 2008 provided me with her diary, together with two additional students from Zadic 2008. Along the same line as the journals and blogs (see above), the students' personal diaries provided information about the students' individual stories and perceptions;
- Pictures that SA students took while abroad and uploaded on Facebook. These proved to be a good source of information to determine where students went, with whom, and what they did;
- The *VALE* magazine (written each term in Spanish and/or English by US students who participated in the Colovo programs). Articles included topics such as students' daily routine in Colovo; life in the dorms; Spanish fashion and hair styles; good food and bad food; places to get cheap food; places where local and international students usually hang out; cultural differences; festivals and celebrations; highlights of the city; and recommended trips within Spain and Europe. This magazine was crucial to get the overall flavor of the journey through the eyes of the students, and compare and contrast their experiences and accounts across several semesters;
- Students' end of the semester course evaluations. They helped me understand how the students perceived and assessed their classes and instructors abroad;

- Students' end of the semester SA program evaluations (i.e., the standard evaluations used at the US institution sponsoring the SA program) and open ended questions that I created myself and that I appended to the SA evaluations. They were submitted to the SA group from Colovo 2008 and Zadic 2008 during the last week of the program. The end of the semester SA program evaluation elicited students' comments on usefulness of orientation programs and materials; quality of health care abroad; safety of program locations, excursions, and activities; academic quality; comfort and appropriateness of housing; quality of meals; opportunities to learn about and interact with host culture; effectiveness of program staff; overall quality of the program. The open ended questions elicited students' feelings, reflections, and comments on their language and culture learning experiences abroad. Such evaluations were indicative of how the students perceived and assessed the different aspects and components of the program, and their overall impact on the journey;
- The SA program daily journal. It was a means that the SA program team in Spain used to inform and update the SA director and administrators at home. This was co-written in Spanish (Colovo 2007+2008) and in English (Zadic 2007+ 2008) by the SA program team (including me) working on site. This proved to be a crucial data source. Crucial incidents and major issues related to the SA students and the logistics of the program were reported in the journal, together with the strategies adopted by the SA program team to deal with issues that emerged. Students' personal and academic issues, physical and psychological health and well-being, as well as attitudes, behaviors, and interactions at school, during out-of-class activities, and with the host parents/community members were also recorded in the SA program journal.

- Emails and notices sent out to the main SA listserv by the program team to students.

They complemented the function of the SA program daily journal.

*Phone and Email after the End of the SA Program*

I kept in touch with some of the students (mostly the case study participants), SA program team members, professors, and other SA participants such as host community members over the phone and through email when the program was over. Communication took place at semi-regular intervals up until February, 2009. Such phone and email conversations allowed me to collect and explore in depth feelings, attitudes, and reflections of SA participants, how they developed over time, and how they looked at their experiences abroad weeks and months after the end their sojourn. In Zadic 2007, the counts of email exchanges are as follows:

- 4 case study students out of 9 replied to my email 6 months after the end of the SA program, and 3 students replied to my email one year after the end of the program. I engaged in one time email conversations with them on their SA experience. One SA student participant replied to my email a year and a half after the end of the program and met with me to be interviewed twice.

In Colovo 2007, the counts of email exchanges are as follows:

- 3 case study students out of 8 replied to my email 3 months after the end of the SA program. I engaged in one-time email conversations with them on their SA experience.

In Colovo 2008, the counts of email exchanges are as follows:

- 9 case study students and one professor were contacted by email and/or by phone at the end of the programs at different intervals. Out of these 9 contacts, 6 additional interviews with 7 students were scheduled and recorded. Approximately 7 hours and 25 minutes of

interviews were recorded then. Two out of the 9 students answered my questions by email. Two students expanded their thoughts in two additional emails.

In Zadic 2008, the counts of email exchanges are as follows:

- 1 case study student out of 2 replied to my email two months after the end of the program. I engaged in semi-regular email conversations with them on their SA experience.

### *Informal Conversations*

Informal and/or unexpected conversations with various SA participants and host community members were documented in my field notes. At times what emerged from such conversations was, I thought, particularly interesting comments, or strange topics, or unexpected observations of my interlocutors' that were worth recording for the meaning around SA and its participants that they may have disclosed over time.

I have summarized all data collected for this study in Table 4.

Table 4: Data Collected

Interviews w/ case study participants	-18-143 min / interview -semi-structured -tape recorded - location: SA office, my dorm room, public spaces (classroom, park, restaurant, internet point) -languages: English, Spanish
Interviews w/ the rest of participants	-10-50 min / interview -semi-structured -tape recorded - location: in host family houses, SA office, dorm facilities -languages: English, Spanish
Class observations	-1 or 2/semester -90 min/class -at the start and the end of the semester
Class observations	-observations reflecting an insider's perspective
Documents and artifacts	-class material -weekly journal entries and blogging -students' personal diaries -students' pictures

	- <i>VALE</i> magazine -students' course and program evaluations - SA program daily journal -emails to the listserv
Phone and email conversations	-with case study participants, SA program team, professors, and other SA participants and community members
Informal conversations	with various SA participants and host community members

To sum up, data collected for this study include:

- Approximately 47 hours of formal audio-recorded interviews;
- Approximately 30 hours of class observations when copious notes were taken;
- Approximately 300 hours of observations as participant observer when copious field notes were taken + 26 days spent with the SA students during group trips around Spain when I was on call 24/7;
- Over 30 email exchanges where SA student participants replied to my inquiry and/or answered my questions;
- Approximately 20 additional email exchanges with SA program team members and host community members after the end of the programs;
- 280 days of daily journal entries.

In the following table, I present the total counts of data collected:

Table 5: Total Counts of Data Collected

Audio-recorded interviews	47 h
Class observations	30 h
Observations outside of class	300 h + 26 days spent with the students during excursions
Email exchanges	30 with students + 20 with SA program team and host community members
SA program journal entries and field notes	280

The amount of data collected for this study may appear overwhelming. In fact, I have to admit that it was so much data that it was disorienting at times, and it worked against me.

However, in the end I only included part of my data analysis in this study. I mainly focused on

interviews, participant observations, email exchanges, and the SA program journal, data that were the most critical for writing the finding chapters 4-7.

### Data Analysis

In keeping with ethnographic methods, data were analyzed inductively and recursively as the study progressed (see, e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

#### *Coding, Comparing, and Category Writing*

I used line by line coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to focus on the data, the participants' perspectives, and emergent themes. To facilitate coding, I used the 'insert a comment' feature of Word so that all codes would be listed on the right margin. I also color-coded them using the 'highlighter' feature of Word in order to see how they were distributed throughout the data.

I compared SA participants' perspectives and comments, for example case study students', with those of other participants, for example other SA group members, program coordinators, and host families; I compared interview transcripts with audio-recordings, field notes, and documents; and I compared interviews with the same participant across time to see how their perspectives evolved.

While comparing such data, I started to write categories in the margins (see below for bulleted list of categories drawn from SCT). I created word documents separate from field notes and interview transcripts where I copied and pasted open codes, categories, and key quotes from the data.

As is typical in ethnographic research and approaches, the descriptions and observations here are an interpretation, and the interpretative lens privileged the students' perspective, although I set up contrastive points of view whenever possible based on the data collected from other SA participants. Below I describe in more details the process of data reduction and

analysis, and how I made apparent the theoretical framework used to analyze the data for this study.

The appropriate unit of analysis for studying the development of human consciousness and meaning-making processes deriving from SCT is 1) a cultural artifacts-mediated action which is taking place in specific historical and cultural settings in dialogic interactions with others, 2) volitional, and 3) goal directed. Therefore, the main categories that I used for this project are as follows:

- *Cultural artifacts*: I looked at participants' ways of thinking, behaving, feeling, expressing themselves (i.e., their cultural artifacts) and how these activities shaped their understanding. An example of cultural artifacts that my participants inherited is what they learned throughout school. In other words, in the US they acquired the idea that teachers are expected to treat all students the same way and show no preference regardless of their students' academic performance and abilities, socio-cultural background, religious, political, or sexual orientation, and physical appearance.
- *Historical and cultural setting*: I looked at the socio-cultural and historical context of the artifacts my participants acquired and the events they were exposed to, and I analyzed their development over time. For example, phenomena such as globalization, capitalism, consumerism, and communications technology deeply impacted the way the participants of this study learned and were taught foreign languages and cultures.
- *Social interactions*: I looked at the people the participants of this study interacted with, and how such interaction shaped their understanding and learning process. For example, it precisely while interacting with Spaniards of different ages and backgrounds that the student participants of this study realized to what extent globalization and capitalism can



be interpreted with skepticism and mistrust abroad, as well as how the American people can be viewed with antagonism and resentment for their presumed economic, political, and military superiority.

- *Learning*: I looked at the opportunities that participants had for individual and collective learning.
- *Purpose*: I also looked at the goal-directed activities they took advantage of to optimize learning. As an example, some participants highly enjoyed the tutorials that we organized during the semester to address any problem or concern related to the Spanish language and culture. Specifically, they found it beneficial to jointly go over their written assignments and compositions and discuss individual mistakes.
- *Resourcefulness*: I looked at how active the participants of this study were, and how they went about learning the target language and culture. An example of how resourceful some students were when it came down to learning the target language and getting immersed in the culture was to look for a Spanish conversation partner, to volunteer at a local community service center, and to join a local soccer team or a Bible-reading group at a nearby church.

Once codes, categories, and themes were laid out for each case study participant's SA experience, I tried to develop an argument around their individual stories and illustrate a new way of looking at the data. Finally, I went back to the existing literature and added it in ways that helped me build and prune the data into the argument that I was making.

### *Two-Column Tables*

As a way of representing data for analysis, I drew a two-column table for each of those case study participants whose accounts, perceptions, and experiences clashed with those of other

SA participants, mostly host society members. In the left column of this table I typed the case study participant's perspectives while on the right column I typed those of other participants. By so doing, it was easy to visualize the contrastive points of view. This kind of data-representation exercise influenced my decision of selecting three specific case study students - who then became the protagonists of my three finding chapters - for the compelling stories of cultural clashes that they lived.

### *Analytic Memoing*

Analytic memoing took place throughout the study. Writing comments about people, issues, and situations helped me think more critically, and to take the first steps towards the write-up. Analytic memoing forced me to work with notions and concepts rather than with raw data and served as a reflection of analytic thought. I found it a beneficial tool to record ideas, impressions, and observations that might have revealed valuable at some point even if at first sight they might have appeared superficial and superfluous notes. I believe that writing about the phenomenon under study, for example writing about an issue, an event, an incident, a person, or a situation, fundamentally helps the writer to articulate more elaborated thoughts about it, and affects the way (s)he views it.

### What Follows

In the rest of this dissertation, I present compelling stories involving three individual case study participants who draw on the categories outlined above in unique ways. Chapter Four illustrates why such case study participants were selected among the entire SA group, and to what extent their experiences both emblemize common themes seen across the group and unique and distinctive individual details, qualities, and specifics. Chapter Five explores how race, ethnicity, and class can shape SA experiences. Chapter Six analyzes how US

undergraduates interpret the academic component of SA based on their socio-cultural identity and background, how this impacts their sojourn, and how they are perceived in the host culture. Chapter Seven shows how SA can be a gendered experience, and how notions of gender equity and respect can impact students' perceptions of the host culture and people.

## CHAPTER 4

### THREE SPECIFIC STORIES OF CULTURAL CLASHES

#### WITHIN THE BACKDROP OF THE OVERALL STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

In the introductory chapter I discussed how the trend in SA programs for small and large institutions across the US is to offer short-term sojourns, to emphasize quantity over quality of SA participation, and to downplay the importance of language learning and engagement in the local communities (Ogden, 2007; Coleman, 1997). This trend seems to be the same regardless of what view of SA the university subscribes to, i.e., the dominant view of SA within US higher education or the alternative view as articulated by Gore (2005), and as discussed in the introductory chapter. In this chapter I will illustrate how the SA program that I observed reflects, at least in part, this trend. I will discuss general findings relating to the entire SA group that participated in my study, and I will portray the overall flavor of the SA students' experience. Then, I will select three specific stories of cross cultural clashes in an attempt to dig deeper into the nature of the experience of three individual learners and the impact that SA had on their own language and culture process, and identity construction.

#### General Trends

##### *The Program Cultural Isolation and Cohesion*

In terms of SA and the program design, the US undergraduates I observed in Spain formed a close and cohesive cohort of students. While they certainly had several opportunities to benefit from both classroom and naturalistic language and culture learning abroad, they did not generally abandon an US educational framework and academic support. I also discovered that

the US students tended to rely on each other and on the SA program staff for social and psychological support. This cohort effect was particularly strong when students had to face incidents of cultural shock and clashes in expectations. US colleges and the SA program staff tended to act as *in loco parentis* on behalf of the student participants, and they took full responsibility for SA students' "safety and health abroad" as stated in the orientations sessions in which I assisted before departure (see also Matthews, 1997). In fact, part of the SA package that US students pay for includes service from their home institutions related to their physical, mental, and emotional health, their personal comfort, and their safety. For example, numerous times the SA program staff, including myself, assisted students to accomplish simple tasks such as purchasing a cell phone, having their digital camera repaired at the local store, or calling an airline or hotel to inquire about missing belongings. The SA program daily journal, a means for the SA program staff to report events, issues, and incidents involving the participants, reported numerous instances like these. Such in-group solidarity resulted at times in minimal engagement in local communities and social networks. Students seemed to systematically remove themselves from linguistically and culturally challenging activities, opting to avoid local people or places where Spanish and international students would conglomerate, such as the university coffee shop in Colovo located in the same building where classes took place.

#### *Globalization and Communication*

In terms of globalization, individual experiences, and students' cultural and linguistic immersion, the US student participants that I followed hardly considered themselves to be distanced from home. Thanks to information and communications technology, some of them spent significant amounts of time online and in interaction with their families and friends in the US on Skype and Facebook, by cell phone and messenger. Some students received multiple and

lengthy visits from their parents whose presence distracted their children from studying the Spanish language and culture and prevented them from interacting with locals during their short stay. In addition, it reinforced the idea that English is spoken everywhere, and it is considered as the *lingua mundi*. This idea was reinforced by the fact that English was the preferred means of communication not only within the US cohort but also among international students. I noticed that two of our US students in Colovo spoke Spanish to some of their Spanish dorm friends who consistently replied in English. When I inquired about it, I found out that these friends wanted to practice their English. In addition, an SA program team member recollected that the previous semester three US students in her SA group lived in Colovo for three months and “barely said ‘hola’, ‘gracias’ and ‘adiós’ (*hey, thank you, good bye*) during their whole stay.”

#### *Negative Perceptions of Americans Abroad*

In terms of findings related to the image of the US abroad, in some parts of Spain globalization is interpreted as an American bid for economic and cultural domination. Based on my interviews and informal conversations with the local community, both in Colovo and Zadic, the US seemed to be viewed either with much admiration and awe or with mistrust. On the one hand, two US SA female students in Zadic told me that they became very close to their host family, particularly to their host brothers who showed a strong interest in their country and language, and a passion for the American music and culture. On the other hand, two US SA students in Colovo told me that at *O'hara*, a local bar where university dorm students used to congregate, they occasionally discussed US foreign policy issues and how unpopular the Bush administration was among locals. Additionally, I interviewed a US student who told me a story of disdain and antagonism against Americans that he experienced first hand with a US friend of his while sitting at a bar and conversing with a Spanish older man who deeply mistrusted and

harshly criticized the US. Finally, a US female student in Colovo had to admit that her brother, a pilot of commercial planes, suggested to her to introduce herself as a Canadian, not as an American, when she would travel and meet people because “they hate Americans abroad,” she said.

Yet, even though US students realized that the US might have been viewed unfavorably abroad, they did not necessarily understand how deeply this negative image of their country could impact their personal experiences, as well as their individual and collective interactions, with host families and host society members. Such students are not always academically, emotionally, and mentally prepared to face episodes of criticism and hostility against their own country and policy, and to have their national identity and culture challenged abroad. Faced with this hostility, students quickly expressed ethnocentric views of the world, reacted defensively, and recoiled into national superiority. In fact, I heard more than one student say “I will never go back to Spain.”

Additional findings among the whole US SA group relate to episodes of aggressive and sexually harassing behavior towards US students, particularly female students. From the existing literature it seems that everywhere they go US female undergraduates are targets of foreign men. For instance, they are harassed in Russia (Polanyi, 1995), Argentina (Isabelli-García, 2006), France (Kline, 1998), Spain (Talbot & Stewart, 1999), and Costa Rica (Twombly, 1995). However, several of the Spaniards I interviewed stated that some US female students actually invite Spanish men to harass them because of the way they act and behave in public, although I doubt that the US women that I observed did so consciously. Such male aggressive behavior towards US women in Spain may also be a manifestation of hostility, disdain, and resentment

against the US and US policy in general, particularly during the Bush presidency when this study took place.

Stories of Successful Immersion in the Host Society  
and Stories of Cross-Cultural Conflicts

Overall, in the four US SA cohorts that I observed from May 2007 to May 2009 there were several stories of students who were able to integrate and adapt with the host community despite the short duration of the semester abroad (13 weeks in the Fall and Spring, 7 weeks in the Summer). Just to mention a few examples, in Colovo and Zadic I followed four male and female students who found Spanish boyfriends or girlfriends and through them entered a wide network of local contacts (both family and friends). Other successful stories of cultural immersion come from Colovo where two students who decided to stay after the end of the SA program found jobs at a local restaurant for another semester or a year. Another student returned to Colovo a year later but this time as SA staff working as teaching assistant for the program. Another student joined the female soccer team of the university dorm where she was living and participated in all games of the league. Another student in Colovo cultivated her passion for dance. She signed up not only for a flamenco dance course but also became part of a numerous group of Spanish and Latin American young people who met on a regular basis to go salsa dancing. In addition, I observed two students who started to attend a religious organization that was affiliated with their home church, and as a result participated in various activities and excursions organized locally. Being part of that community allowed them to meet many people of all ages not only from Spain but from other Spanish-speaking countries. Finally, other students have kept in touch with their host families in Zadic, and in their Facebook and emails they talk about plans to go back to Spain to visit them. One of them also volunteered to speak during the SA pre-departure orientation



sessions addressing other students going abroad. The goal was to share with them her enthusiasm and suggestions on how to get ready for, and take the most advantage out of, this international experience.

On Facebook, in emails, and in the magazine VALE we can find many stories of successful immersion and integration in the host society. However, what I saw emerging from my data, and what caught my attention and interest, was “rich points” (Agar, 1994), i.e., stories of cross-cultural conflicts, miscommunication, or misunderstanding at the intersection of two cultures. Thus, I have decided to focus on three compelling stories of clashes in cultural expectations and value systems where three protagonists experienced Spain and their sojourn as a site of struggle and challenge. First of all, Albert (pseudonym) tells the story of how SA can be a racialized experience. Albert became alienated from the Spanish community following repeated incidents of racial discrimination, intolerance, and injustice experienced not only in Colovo but also around Europe while travelling during academic breaks. Secondly, Rebecca (pseudonym) illustrates how SA can be a gendered experience. Rebecca started out with an ardent desire to study and learn about the Spanish language and culture, a desire that was soon eclipsed after experiencing multiple episodes of male aggressive behavior, hostility, and antagonism towards US students. Thirdly, Theresa (pseudonym) shows how SA can be affected by social class and a consumerist view of education and global/international experiences. Theresa adopted a consumerist approach to SA, particularly to the academic component of the program, and viewed the world as a constellation of landmarks, bars, and shopping centers. Albert, Rebecca, and Theresa’s stories were selected for this study because their experiences presented both common themes seen across the entire SA group and unique individual qualities

and characteristics. In other words, their stories are not isolated instances of extreme cases, but they can be representative of the entire SA cohort.

The reason why I have decided to concentrate on three individual participants instead of the entire SA group is because their stories allowed me to dig deeper into the nature, specifics, and complexities of each learner' lifestories, and the impact of SA on their own language and culture learning process and identity negotiation. This analysis made it possible to represent multiple perspectives on rich points, i.e., not only the student participants' perspectives, but also the ones of the host society and other SA program participants (SA professors, SA program team), in a multifaceted and nuanced approach. Representing all these voices, I believe, allows for richer and multilayered understanding of experiences. It also make my study different from the existing ones for its novelty and uniqueness since what is not critiqued or reported in the published research on SA is the people's perspectives on student experience, a gap that I intended to fill with mu study. Finally, I also intended to investigate the history of values and worldviews that gives rise to the students' interpretations of the experiences that they were exposed to while abroad, and how they constructed individual meaning and understanding. This approach fits not only my interest but also the scope of this study.

The three situated and personalized accounts that I selected for the next three finding chapters of this dissertation illustrate real world experiences and the potential issues that L2 learners are likely to be confronted to while crossing borders. In these chapters I alternate descriptive elements with analytical and interpretative components, and I link experiences and accounts to the theoretical framework of SCT, whose main concepts are articulated in the second chapter. The data that I mostly used to delineate these three stories were interviews, participant observations, field notes, the SA program daily journal, phone and email communications and

other informal conversations that I engaged in with SA participants and local community members. The readers may draw their own conclusions about how relevant and pertinent these individual stories are to their own situations and experiences. My point was not to generalize the validity of the experiences narrated, but to pursue analytical rigor. Better said, I aimed at deepening my understanding of specific phenomena by “turtling” all the way down, using Geertz’s terms (1993), into the complexities, intricacies, uniqueness, and dynamics of individual subjects’ cultural identity and life experiences, thereby gaining insight into their evolving perceptions and feelings.

I have chosen Albert, Rebecca, and Theresa’s stories because their experiences presented not only recurrent themes seen across the entire SA group but also unique individual characteristics. In fact, in many ways the three protagonists are very similar to each other and to the rest of the SA group; and at the same time they were very different. They are different because of their racial, ethnic, social class, and gender identity and background, and because of how their individual social variables impacted their experiences in Spain. At the same time, they are similar. It seems that all three, like many of my student participants...

- Expected the host culture to be similar to the home one;
- Were unable to overcome their initial difficulties and cultural clashes and to have a successful and satisfactory SA experience;
- Recoiled into national superiority and maintained an ethnocentric perspective on the Spanish culture and on the events and situations they were exposed to, which affected their attitude and interpretation of the target language and society;
- Were unable to switch to a ethnorelative view of the world around them;

- Took refuge in their L1 group and avoided consistent contact and interaction with the Spaniards as a reaction to their disappointment with the program or culture that did not turn out to be what they expected;
- Never became immersed into the host society or truly engaged in it, particularly if we adopt as reference parameter the Engle and Engle's definition of immersion abroad (2004; 2003; 1999) that I discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation (pages 25-27). Here, I indicated how the consistent use of L2 inside and outside of the classroom, the extensive exposure to various manifestations of L2 and C2, and guided cultural discussion groups and sessions, can lead to true immersion in the host society.

Unfortunately, such elements were substantially missing in the day-to-day experiences of the three case study participants that I will present in the next chapters.

In Albert's case, I am unaware of any other US student among those that I observed who experienced discrimination based on race like Albert did in Spain. In fact Albert himself claimed in the interviews that he was the only one in his SA group who suffered from racial discrimination and intolerance for his skin color and attire. It is important to stress here though that Albert, a male African American working class student, is not exactly the usual clientele of US SA programs. Although Albert's experience of racism and discrimination is not typical, his story illustrates how US students' expectations and assumptions that the host culture will share the same or similar values and worldviews (for racial and cultural diversity and acceptance) can inexorably clash while crossing borders.

Regarding Theresa's experience, there is evidence in data, particularly in the SA program journal, that other students in her class and group shared similar consumerist views, and saw the contemporary Grand Tour as global infotainment and global cultural supermarket. Theresa,

together with other US fellows in her SA group, engaged in extensive travel in Spain and Europe, hopping from one capital to the next as witnessed in their Facebook pictures, accounts, and personal diaries. Likewise, certain capitalist views that Theresa and other students in her group shared affected how they negotiated the meaning of the academic component of SA. For example, they were very competitive in class and wanted to get an A at any cost - or at least a good/passing grade - because they needed it to maintain a certain GPA, their scholarship, or simply because they had paid for the course and they were doing the class assignments, no matter what their actual class performance and language abilities were. One SA Spanish professor had to admit with some frustration in *VALE* - the SA magazine written by US student participants in Colovo, that US students “están obsesionados con tener una A” (*they are obsessed with getting an A in the course*).

As far as Rebecca’s journey is concerned, her experiences with male aggressive behavior are far from being an isolated or extreme case. Several female students that I observed abroad complained about Spanish men and their attitudes towards women, and described them as being “creepy,” “bold,” and “aggressive.” US female undergraduates tend to categorize these behaviors and practices as “sexual harassment.” Unfortunately, SA programs rarely deal with explaining to the US student participants that there are significant cultural differences in what constitutes sexual harassment in other countries, and by this omission programs somewhat perpetuate the idea of US women being targets and victims of aggressive and hostile foreign men.

### Tying the Loose Ends Together

In an attempt to tie the earlier definition of culture by Goodenough (1957), Geertz (1973), Sapir (1921), Tang (2006), Moran (2001) and The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (1999) together with Albert, Theresa, and Rebecca’s case stories, it can be said

that their experiences show how dynamic, fluid, shifting, and contingent the notion of culture is, or maybe I should say languaculture, using Agar's terms (1994). Culture becomes tangible and real, and acquires deep meanings and significances, when contextualized in a specific socio-cultural setting where language, people, and their practices bring culture to life together with all its manifestations. Language is the mediating tool that shapes cultural ideologies and minds, and social identities. This idea reinforces the notion that language and culture are inseparably and inextricably bound, and the whole culture and language learning process depends on several factors. It depends not only SA program features, but also and most importantly on individual students' characteristics, personality, and investment in L2 and C2; how they are welcomed by the host community; and the kinds of social dynamics and encounters that they engage in, as I discussed in the second chapter. Ultimately, Albert, Theresa, and Rebecca's ethnocentric view of Spanish culture and society affected their investment in L2 and L2-mediated activities with target language speakers, leaving them alienated from the host community and incapable of facing the challenges and struggles that are inevitable at the intersection of two cultures.

## CHAPTER 5

ALBERT IS AFRICAN AMERICAN AND DOMINICAN: A STORY OF RACE,  
ETHNICITY, AND CLASS ABROAD

In her language memoir, *Kinky gazpacho: Life, love & Spain*, Tharps (2008) recalls how she had made a mental list of all the things she could do to blend in, get immersed, and become Spanish, such as trying to adapt her physical appearance and dress style, i.e., wearing red jeans and neckerchiefs. However, the initial enthusiasm for change was short-lived when she was called out as NOT being Spanish. One day she went to a store to buy *pipas*, the popular sunflower seeds that Spaniards snack on all the time, and the owner asked her where she was from:

“How do you know I’m not from Spain?” I answered back, teasing but kind of serious. He laughed then. A good-natured laugh, but a laugh just the same.

“Chica, Spanish people don’t look like you,” he informed me.

“What do you mean?” I demanded. Thinking of all the people I’d seen flaunting their red jeans.

“Eres morena,” he said, as if that explained it.

I was Black. Which meant there was no way I could be Spanish. Why had I even bothered? I untied my neckerchief then, since truth be told it was choking me. And I put my sunflower seeds back and bought a bag of potato chips instead.” (Tharps, 2008, p. 88)

Tharps’ recollection raises questions related to living, studying, and interacting abroad. How do male and female students of color experience SA when it is impossible to blend in, and where nobody from the host community looks like them? Do they feel hypervisible? If so, how does this affect their feeling of otherness? How might their experience be different from the experiences of students who share phenotypes with the host society? Tharps narrates other stories of her experience abroad as a Black student having to face episodes of (sexual) prejudice

and discrimination because of her skin color and physical appearance. These experiences tend to create feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and anger in Black students, and they accentuate their perception of being an outsider within a community into which they wish to get immersed and integrated.

In this chapter, I use the example of Albert, an African American university student in Spain, to explore these issues. Based on Albert's accounts, I argue that we have paid far too little attention to SA as a racialized experience.

I contend that SA students' CI and LI are not determined only by their individual traits and attributes, their motivation, and their enthusiasm to learn the language and the culture, and meet new people. Their experiences abroad are also inextricably bound up with particular social contexts as well as group dynamics, interactions, and encounters that they are exposed to abroad. These significantly shape, and continually shift, their identity and study abroad outcomes. I contend that their sojourn also depends on how students' race, ethnicity, and class are taken up and interpreted by the host community. This has a profound effect on the opportunities that they are offered, and that they take advantage of, to get engaged in the host culture and society, and to get involved in L2-mediated activities with native speakers. Albert rediscovered himself abroad and proudly affirmed his identity as a Black American.

Prior to his trip to Spain, Albert showed great motivation and enthusiasm to practice Spanish and learn about the culture, to get to know new people, and to participate in L2-mediated activities with native speakers. However, his expectations clashed. Abroad Albert experienced numerous episodes of racial discrimination and power differentials, which contributed to his disinvestment in the Spanish culture, society, and people. In an interview Albert expressed emotions of inadequacy similar to Tharps' for not feeling in his own element: "It's hard to



experience a culture that is totally different when you see people that look nothing like you. [...] I'm on the outside looking in." Albert gradually shied away from Spaniards and increasingly spent more time with his SA group members, with whom he felt the connection that he could not establish with the host society.

#### Background: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Study Abroad

One of the major themes of SA and foreign language education research focuses on participants' cultural immersion and immersion (Kinging, 2008b; Isabelli-García, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, and Lassegard, 2002a; 2002b; 2004; Engle & Engle, 1999; 2003). Much of the research comes out of the field of psychology and intercultural communication (Halualani, 2008; Kim, 1988a; 1988b; 2001; 2002; Kim & Gudykunst, 1988; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Research in this vein has cast SA outcomes, particularly integration into the host culture, as products of the nature of learners' cultural experiences, both positive and negative, acculturation process, intercultural communication, and individual traits such as personality, and motivation.

An important and abundant body of literature particularly pertinent to this study considers race, ethnicity, intergroup perception, stereotyping, the nature of prejudice, communicating racism, and inter-ethnic conflict (Kim, 2005; Orbe & Spellers, 2005; Stephan & Stephan, 2003; Van Dijk, 1987). Additionally, Guy (2007), Orbe and Harris (2008), and Cortes (1995) have discussed the powerful role of media in reinforcing the construct of race and ethnicity worldwide, while Krieger (1995) explored how stereotypes form and affect intergroup perceptions. Finally, Wright and Taylor (2007) investigated intergroup conflicts as products of prejudice. It is clear that individuals participating in SA programs, including Europe and more specifically Spain, walk into a socio-cultural context where there already exist powerful

ideologies about people of color in terms of class, behavior, attitudes, and cultural practices. These images and stereotypes about people of African descent highly affect SA students' perception of the host culture and people, and impact the nature of their sojourn abroad.

Another body of literature relevant to this study investigates identity and second language acquisition. Identity, or at least the notion of the fixed, stable self expressed in linguistic and physical acts, has been unraveled in recent research (Pavlenko, 2006a; 2006b; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Norton Peirce, 1995; 1997; 2000; McNamara, 1997; Watkins-Goffman 2001; 2006), and re-inscribed as an ever-shifting amalgamation of performances and subjectivities. The notion of the learner's subjectivity has been discussed by Siegal (1996) who conducted a case study of a white woman studying Japanese in Japan. Siegal defines the learner's subjectivity as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 364). In this view, each learner co-constructs his/her own identity and second language proficiency in a dynamic and multilayered way within conversational interactions. The subjects' emotions, their sense of themselves, and their relation to the world can vary a great deal. Such variations may depend on the shifting interactional and situational contexts and social dynamics that individuals are exposed to in their socialization and enculturation process with target language speakers in a specific socio-cultural, historical, institutional, and political setting.

In this chapter, I will address two important issues that emerge from this body of literature. First, not enough attention has been devoted to analyzing the interpersonal and social dimensions of CI experiences abroad when learners come in contact with the host community and target language speakers (see Kinginger, 2004; 2008b; Ginsberg & Miller, 2000). SA participants' psychological and intrapersonal experiences represent only one side of the coin.

The other side is constituted by the contextual and interactional components of their sojourn, their multiple social identities, the multilayered process of making sense of their practices and encounters, and the cultural tools that learners use to interpret their stories. Second, very little research has explicitly focused on how students' social background variables such race, ethnicity, and class are viewed abroad, nor how these affect students' interactions within the host society and shape their identity.

### Albert

As an employee and participant in the SA program in Colovo, Spain, I observed Albert during the 13 weeks of the program, and I interviewed him three times. Albert, a 24-year-old SA student of color with a double major in English and Spanish and urban working class roots, was originally from New Jersey but soon moved with his mother to a major Southeastern city. His father was originally from the Dominican Republic while his mother was African American. Part of his family (cousins, uncles, and aunts) still lived in New Jersey and in the Dominican Republic. In an email, Albert reported that he was very privileged, grateful, and proud to be to first one in his family to have a college education and to start graduate school: "Neither my father or mother went to college and my grandmothers nor my grandfathers finished middle school [...] My grandfather on my mom side couldn't even read. [...] My brother never went anywhere outside of the country."

Albert had studied Spanish continuously since high school and then in college, but he did not use it at home because he did not live with his father. Albert claimed to have chosen Spanish mostly because of his family heritage, because he had several Hispanic friends, and because of a strong personal interest in the Hispanic culture. He decided to spend a semester in Europe because he had never been there before and did not know much about Spain. He commented in an email: "I had no idea what to expect from Spainards." Albert's main motivation to go to Spain

was: “I wanna speak Spanish and practice my speaking abilities.” Albert became interested in the SA program in Colovo, Spain, thanks to Alejandro, a good friend of his. Alejandro was from Colovo, and Albert was impressed by his friend’s enthusiastic description of his hometown. In an interview Albert said that “he’s ((Alejandro is)) from here ((Colovo)) and he you know had nothing but good things to say about his home so that’s the reason why I chose here.” Albert’s family helped him financially to pay for the SA program, and Albert was very conscious of the value of that family money, and of the financial burden that it would imply.

I had met him for the first time in class in the US when he took the intermediate Spanish course that I was teaching in 2004. I met Albert again about four years later in the context of the SA program in Colovo when he had already graduated but still needed one additional class in Spanish to complete his second major in Spanish.

I selected Albert as case study participant for this study because he was distinctly different than the average clientele of the SA language programs offered by US academic institutions. The US study abroad student profile developed by the Institute of International Education (2008) as part of the *Open Doors* report on International Educational Exchange indicates that the majority of US SA students are female, junior year, and Caucasian. The percentage of African American students is only in the range of 3.3% and 3.8%. Albert is male, a person of color, has urban (not suburban) working class roots, is older, and has a heritage language background. These differences can be useful in exploring the ways in which SA is gendered, racialized, and different by class background.

#### *Albert’s Individual and Social Subjectivities*

*A Working Class Black American with a Dominican Heart.* In an interview Albert identified himself with his mother’s African American heritage and culture:

I'm American and I'm a Black American. [...] If your mother is you know Catholic then you are Catholic you know. Your father's different. Like my mother is Black so I'm Black. I'm African American and when I check it on like a survey, I check African American. That's the culture I was brought up in and that's what my mother is.

From his family upbringing, and particularly from his mother and grandmother, whose jobs required hard manual labor, Albert gained much respect for, and a strong connection with, working class people. Unlike many of his peers, he gravitated towards working class people and readily interacted with them. He reported in an interview:

I made a lot of friends you know like the people that work here ((at the dorms)). I stop and talk to them like the people who clean our rooms. I always stop and talk to them cause I feel the connection cause my grandmother used to do work like that all the time. She used to tell me stories that people never talked to her. It makes the job a lot harder. So uhm that's why I stop and talk to the people who clean like the hallways and our rooms. Uhm and also my mother, she used to work in a uhm comedor (*dining hall*), like the one here.

Albert evidenced a strong sense of pride and self accomplishment for being the first member of his family to have earned a college degree and to participate in an SA program with students from the upper-middle class. He reported in an email:

It made me think of how far I have come as a person who hasn't had the advantages of some, but more advantages than most; especially since neither my father or mother went to college and my grandmothers nor my grandfathers finished middle school. Now, I go to school with students who come from the upper class and we are obtaining the same education. It inspires me to be better and to do better, to show other minorities that if I can do it...you can do it.

Besides his African American background, Albert described himself as having a Latin heart and fully embraced his father's Dominican heritage and culture as well, much more than other cousins of his who were 100% Dominican but who did not celebrate or keep alive the traditions of their ancestors. Albert noted in an interview: "They look at me and they are like you know he ((Albert)) embraces it ((the Dominican culture)) way more than you ((his pure bred Dominican cousin)) and his mother ((Albert's mother)) is not even Dominican." Part of Albert's

family still resided in the Dominican Republic and it was clear in the interviews that he was deeply attracted to the island:

The Dominican part of me I love it you know and I have family there and as soon as you get off the plane there you just feel it's hot but you feel like the passion of the people and the love of not only their culture but the love it feels like the love for you.

In a word, Albert was the product of two cultures, the African American and Dominican. The baseball hat and jersey, the athletic shoes that he often wore, and the rap, reggaeton, and hip hop music that he listened to were just a few evidences of one side of Albert's hybrid cultural identity, as commented in an interview: "I wear my baseball cap cause that's part of our culture that's what baseball is that's the American pastime." When I called him in July 2008 I discovered the message on his cell phone had been recorded both in Spanish and in English. Albert explained to me in an email that the idea behind his voice message was to reflect his multiculturalism: "Mi mensjae..jajaja he hecho el mensaje antes de salir para espana, pero nunca he cambiado el mensaje. Sin embargom sobre todo queria mostrar mis dos culturas" (*my message... jajaja I recorded it before leaving to Spain, but I have not changed it since. Most than anything I wanted to show my two cultures*).

*An Ambassador for All Black People.* Albert wanted to represent himself abroad as a people person, as noted in an interview: "I talk to I talk to everybody. I try to say hi. If they wanna talk I'll stop and talk." His personal mission was to talk and interact with everybody and show how nice Black people are, despite the influence of the media in broadcasting and portraying a certain image of African Americans around the world:

I made it my point to speak to everybody. I spoke to them. Yeah cause I dunno how many Black people they encounter you know so [...] and I might be the only Black person they meet in their lifetime so you know if they wanted to encounter when somebody is saying something about a Black person or somebody with darker skin you know like oh no I met this guy in the colegio (*dorms*) he was good people "buena gente" (*a good guy*) and you

know he was cool [...] And I try to represent myself not only myself but you know people who look like me.

Albert was also aware of discrimination and injustice in society, and had to be knowledgeable about the US laws and regulations protecting or discriminating against Black people. As he stated in an interviews: “I know my rights as an individual as an American.” He followed cases of racial profiling and the case of Jena 6 (a group of six black teenagers charged with the beating of a white student at Jena High School in Jena, Louisiana, in 2006, and sentenced to several years in prison): “I was always socially conscious of discrimination and racism and I was able to detect it when it occurred.”

From a SCT perspective (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1991, 1998), Albert’s words above reveal three main notions: 1) Social interaction with others in the social environment is critical in the learning process; 2) It is important to study the historical and cultural context of a specific event or situation in order to understand it in its entirety; 3) All our activities are mediated by cultural artifacts - or ways of thinking, speaking, and feeling— that we inherit and pass on to others. First, Albert interpreted his sojourn abroad as a unique opportunity for interacting with a variety of different people. Second, he raised the issue of how Black people are portrayed around the world based on years of slavery, racial discrimination, and powerful media representation. Third, the way he felt and talked about discrimination was mediated by past incidents and discourses of injustice in the US experienced first hand and through others.

*A Learner with an Ardent Desire to Practice the Language, Explore the Culture, and Share Experiences.* While in Spain, on numerous occasions Albert showed his ardent desire and disposition toward language and culture learning. During an interview Albert mentioned that his main goal in participating in an SA program in Spain was to practice and improve his language skills, learn about the culture, and meet new people in Spain:

I like the language of my cousins and my dad [...] I feel it's part of me to learn it [...] I want to see the difference in the languages of different countries that I have been to, and the Spanish that my father speaks is a little bit different so I wanted to see like the difference between the two languages.

You are going to learn things from different people they are going to learn things from you. [...] They learn what you believe in and they get a taste of your culture and your ideas. So uhm it's cultural immersion in both ends with my culture and me learning theirs.

The social practices in which Albert engaged fit well with a SCT perspective on learning and development in which a fundamental assumption is that knowledge is socially constructed.

Albert was an active participant in the social construction of knowledge. From the very beginning, he seemed to be looking for a network of people within which he felt welcomed, and with whom he could exchange thoughts and values, and share his culture, background, and experiences. Meeting new people would have also given him the opportunity to maintain and reinforce his own language and culture learning agenda, improve his competence in L2, and acquire membership in the target language community. Albert's language desire translated into, using Piller's words (2008), "the desire to master another language [...]; a desire for access to interactional partners in the target language; [...] and a desire to be legitimate members of both language communities" (p. 66).

All in all, then, Albert evidenced every inclination to fully embrace LI and CI in his Spanish SA program. With his Spanish-speaking background and predisposition for the language, one might have expected him to thrive and excel in Spain. However, his experience turned out quite differently, and his expectations of a full cultural and linguistic immersion in Spain clashed.



## From Being an Actor, to a Spect-actor, to a Spectator:

### Albert's Evolution Abroad

Observing Albert's SA experiences, I saw him evolve from being an actor, to a spect-actor, to a spectator within the host community. The word "actor" derives from Latin and indicates somebody who acts; "spectator" is somebody who looks; I propose the term "spect-actor" to designate a person who sometimes just looks and other times acts. By applying this trope to the case of Albert, and using the notions of investment advanced by Norton Peirce (2000; 1995) and of agency from the SCT perspective (Vygotsky (1978), at the beginning of his sojourn Albert heavily invested in L2-mediated activities with L2 speakers in the early part of his sojourn, and was a resourceful and agentive student who created varied opportunities for learning. For instance, he volunteered at the local community service center with his Central American female friend, went out with his Hispanic female friends that he met in the residence halls, and hung out with his Spanish Reggaeton artist friend that he met through Alejandro, his good friend from Colovo residing in the US, and his network of connections and friendships. However, he progressively severed his connection from the Spaniards and from the Spanish and European culture in general, and developed a profound feeling of "alienation of the mind," as he called it in an interview, because of the prejudice and racial discrimination he perceived; he felt himself to be so different from a racial, ethnical, cultural, and socio-economic standpoint. As Tharps (2008) wrote "Spanish people don't look like you" (p. 88). Albert is Black. Not only did he shy away from interactions with the host society but he also withdrew his engagement from the academic component of the program. At the same time, Albert's affiliation, affinity, and camaraderie with his US SA group intensified. Albert still invested in L2-speakers, particularly those he met at the dorms such as staff members, Hispanic and Spanish female students, and his

Reggaeton artist friend. However, his interactions became more sporadic, short, casual, and superficial. After being the actor protagonist of the action on stage, Albert progressively earned the title of spect-actor abroad, and eventually spectator within the host community, minimally engaged in it. This is especially true toward the end of his sojourn when he was counting down the days and could not wait to go back to the US. He commented in an interview: “I learned a lot about myself but uh I am just ready to go. Time to move on. And I wanna go somewhere where I can really learn Spanish and have another opportunity.”

It is hard to define a straight line that demarcated Albert’s transition from actor, to spect-actor, to spectator. As a matter of fact, Albert continually shifted back and forth as his subject positions were undergoing a continual struggle and revision, resistance and adaptation to new life circumstances and cultural environments. At the end of this process of identity negotiation, what emerged was a powerful and proud affirmation of his racial, cultural, socio-economic identity as a multicultural black American. He came to the realization that he cannot live away from his people, or “*mi gente*” as he referred to them, i.e., the community of people where he grew up, to whom he felt strongly connected, with whom he identified and shared important lifestories, and where he truly felt at home and welcomed.

In this first part of the chapter I have introduced Albert and I have laid out the main assumptions deriving from SCT: a) Learning is a social process; b) history and culture explain all phenomena; c) cultural artifacts mediate our activities; d) ZDP is the condition within which individuals best learn; and e) agency is a critical element in learning. In the second part of this chapter I will further discuss these assumptions applying them to Albert’s experiences abroad. First, I will explore how Spaniards view people of color. Second, I will describe Albert’s incidents of discrimination abroad. Third, I will investigate how Albert’s race and class impacted

his interactions with the host society. Finally, I will conclude with major implications for Albert's opportunities for cultural immersion.

### How Are People of African Descent Viewed in Spain?

An informal poll conducted among a group of male and female adult Spanish host community members suggested that there exist latent discrimination and xenophobia in Spanish society towards people of African descent:

Aunque desde las instituciones y desde el gobierno español no se promueven situaciones de discriminación ni prejuicios contra las personas de otras razas (no sólo africanos, también americanos-latinos, asiáticos...), considero que hay cierto sentimiento racista o xenófobo en la sociedad (aunque sinceramente no creo que sea mayor que el que puede haber en los Estados).

*I believe that there is some racist or xenophobic feeling in the Spanish society, although Spanish institutions and the government don't foment any discrimination or prejudice towards people of other races (not only Africans but also Hispanic-Americans, Asians...) Though, I frankly do not think that such feeling is stronger here in Spain than in the US.*

Any racist and xenophobic feeling among Spaniards seems to be intensified by the heavy waves of immigrants coming from Northern Africa:

Esto ((el racismo en España)) es debido a la reciente ola de inmigración subsahariana (del norte de África), sea negra o mestiza (como muchos árabes). Estos inmigrantes, llegan a España en condiciones muy malas, sin dinero, con poca ropa, y buscando cualquier trabajo para poder vivir. [...] Algunos españoles culparon a la fuerte inmigración por quitar los trabajos de los españoles (lo mismo que los mexicanos en USA). To make a long story short, la ignorancia de unos pocos llevó a la generalización y a la discriminación de inmigrantes, que en realidad, no hacen más que intentar ganarse la vida sin hacer daño a nadie.

*Racism in Spain is the result of the recent waves of immigrants from Northern Africa, both Black and mixed (such as many Arabs). These immigrants arrive to Spain in very bad conditions, without any money, with barely any clothes, and looking for any job to be able to make a living. [...] Some Spaniards blamed the numerous immigrants for taking their jobs (the same as with the Mexicans in the US). To make a long story short, the ignorance of few people led Spaniards to generalize and discriminate against immigrants, who, in fact, simply try to make a living without causing any harm to anybody.*

Manifestations of discrimination and xenophobia are most apparent in Spain's major cities that host most immigrants. However, according to one of the Spanish community members

that I interviewed, at times it is as much curiosity of the Spaniards toward the Other as racism and intolerance:

Hay bastante racismo en las grandes ciudades como Madrid y Barcelona. En Colovo tambien, pero muchas veces, es mas curiosidad que racismo. Te explico; En Espanya la gente te mira fijamente, y la mayoría de las veces es mas curiosidad por sabes de donde eres y ver como vistes que otra cosa. Por otro lado, cuando la gente no conoce algo, la gente teme. Es decir, tienen miedo a lo que no conocen. Cuando ven a una persona de color en Espanya, la gente la encasilla como africano inmediatamente.

*There is much racism in big cities such as Madrid and Barcelona. In Colovo as well, but oftentimes it is more curiosity than racism. What I mean is that in Spain people stare at you firmly, and most of the times it is curiosity to find out where you are from and what you are wearing more than anything. In other words, Spaniards fear what they do not know. When Spaniards see a person of color, they immediately categorize him/her as an African.*

Compared to other cities in Southern Spain, people from Colovo are considered more nationalist, which, according to another Spanish community member that I interviewed, may intensify racist and xenophobic feelings among the natives against the immigrants:

Aquí en Colovo he encontrado que la gente es más nacionalista (Colovonista...) que en Andalucía, y eso lleva a que el porcentaje de gente que practica rechazo a extranjeros en general, y negros en particular, sea mayor. Al menos en Málaga la multiculturalidad ha sido un hecho continuo y normalmente tomado como una riqueza de la zona.

*Here in Colovo I have found people to be more nationalist (or Colovonist...) than in Andalucía ((region in Southern Spain)). As a result, the percentage of people who reject foreigners in general, and Black people in particular, is higher. At least in Málaga ((city in Southern Spain)) multiculturalism has been a constant phenomenon that people typically view as a rich trait of the area.*

The reaction of Spaniards to a person of color can be innocent, investigatory, or more prejudicial:

Uno no sabe lo racista que es un lugar hasta que lo vive en su propia piel o en la piel de otra persona, en mi caso, mis amigos negros en Colovo o mi esposa mas recientemente. Desde miradas fijas, hasta seguirnos en un supermercado para que asegurarse que no robabamos nada!

*It is hard to tell how much racism there is in a place until one experiences it first hand, or through somebody else, in my case through my Black friends in Colovo and more recently through my wife. It can go from being stared at firmly to being followed in a supermarket to make sure that we were not stealing anything!*

The media play a powerful role in affirming the construct of race and ethnicity worldwide (Orbe & Harris, 2008; Guy, 2007; Cortes, 1995). The popular discourses (Wertsch, 2002) generating from TV shows, movies, and sitcoms seem to reinforce old stereotypes about African Americans, as one of my Spanish informants commented in an email:

En cuanto a la television, esta claro que Hollywood no esta haciendo la mejor labor en cuanto a representar al mundo afroamericano. Las familias que se muestran en las peliculas o sitcoms son siempre las mismas, es decir, sus interacciones estan llenas de estereotipos y siempre intentan hacer reir al publico.  
*As far as the TV is concerned, Hollywood is clearly not doing a great job at representing African Americans and their world. The families that we see in the movies and sitcoms are always the same, the way they interact is very stereotypical, and they always try to make the audience laugh.*

Albert soon came to feel that the Spanish students residing in the residence halls in Colovo had a narrow and often inaccurate image of Black Americans and Black culture, music, and attire, and he blamed MTV outlets and music videos:

Everything that they know of blacks comes from US media outlets. Although this may be positive, I know Europeans have negative conceptions about blacks. They have to, because there aren't many blacks in Europe to deduce an accurate deduction, so everything they know about blacks is from TV, and USA TV only represents blacks in three categories, as athletes, rappers, or degenerates.

Albert took a Spanish cinema course in Colovo and found that Spanish and Latin American cinema exacerbated to a certain extent the idea of Black people as being associated with lower socio-economic scales:

I feel Spaniards feel a sense of superiority over Dominicans. Especially, when it comes to socio-economic levels, because they have the perception that everyone in Dominican Republic is poor. [...] I watched a movie 'Princesas' which was about prostitution and one of the characters was Dominican and the movie showed that the other characters did discriminate against her, even though everyone else were prostitutes. They had a lot of misconceptions.

Reflecting on the sources of discrimination and prejudice in Europe and around the world, Albert concluded that the origin of it also resided in the history of slavery itself, and not only in the media broadcasting an image of Black people as inferior human beings:

These prejudices come from the beginning of history. Blacks were slaves in Europe, South America, the Caribbean, and the US. Thus, this superior mentality is still prevalent today. Many whites feel that they are better than blacks, not only because the media focuses on blacks when they fail, but it stems from slavery and how people justified slavery due to black's inferiority.

Wertsch (2002) pointed the way to a SCT of discourse by exploring the role of popular narratives and accounts of the past circulating in US society as mediators of collective remembering and interpretative tools to make sense of events and situations. For Albert, collective memories of years of slavery and prejudice against people of color, and the power of media representation and cinema worldwide shaped the negative portrayal of Black people: "During my mom's younger years she couldn't even drink at the same water fountain as a white person. This is crazy." The US media, however, played a positive role in the election of Obama as new president of the US, which opened a new chapter for African Americans and how they are perceived globally. In an email Albert reported,

This ((having preconceived ideas about black people)) changed when Obama came into the picture. That is why black America was so elated when he won. Now we have a new category for blacks as intellectuals. I feel at times being black is a gift and a curse. We have such rich history, drive, strength, and spirit and culture. However, to the outside world we aren't equal to many [...] i am excited..we finally have someone that is black that represents something so pivotal as being the president of the U.S. It changes how americans are precieved, it shows being open-minded and aspiring. Now when i travel, outside of this country i am proud to be an american. A country that help blacks down for so long allowed a black to reach the ultimate goal [...] Especailly, when blacks have a negative perception all over the world.

The Spanish community members that I interviewed for this study indeed viewed Obama as a capable man, and expressed enthusiasm for his presidency, a feeling that has been pervasive

in the Spanish press and media, as witnessed in the headlines news of *El País*, one of the major national newspapers in Spain:

Obama presidente. Comienza la ilusión.

LA DELICADA CONDICIÓN DE UN 'PRESIDENTE ESPECIAL'. La asombrosa victoria de Obama no garantiza un cambio en su sociedad ni el fin del "pensamiento racial." Pero su proeza alimenta un regenerado orgullo de ser estadounidense [...], y el icono de una familia de negros ocupando la Casa Blanca contiene una carga de energía tan positiva, que la historia de la humanidad nunca podrá librarse ya de ella. (Newspaper article by Ford and Vicent, *El País*, January 18, 2009)

*Obama president. The beginning of a dream.*

*THE DELICATE CONDITION OF A 'SPECIAL PRESIDENT.'* Obama's striking victory does not guarantee a change in his society, neither the end of racist feelings. However, his accomplishment instills a new sense of pride for being North American [...], and the icon of a Black family at the White House is such a powerful energy boost that the history of humanity will never forget it.

*How Attitudes of Spaniards toward People of African Descent Are Similar to and Different from the US.*

Based on my observations and the interviews I conducted with Spanish community members, SA program professors and staff it can be said that among Spaniards as well as North Americans there are individuals who are racist and discriminate against people of African descent, a feeling observable both as a mental attitude or ideology, and as a practice in society. In both countries, important steps forward have been taken against racism and xenophobia, and toward tolerance, acceptance, and integration. Despite this parallelism, the two countries sharply diverge in their attitudes and perspectives towards people of color. Most importantly, in the US there are many more black people than in Spain who, as a political and social movement, fought and continue to fight for their rights and integration among all American citizens as they are. Instead, in Spain people of African descent are for the most part immigrants - some legal, others illegal – whom the local population tends to hold accountable for certain issues related to violence and criminality. Spaniards are not used to live with blacks, and they typically look at

them with some reticence and reluctance, and as foreign individuals with limited education and low socio-economic status. Additionally, some of the Spaniards that I interviewed for this study had to admit that their country is not as politically correct as the US when it comes down to talking about blacks and related issues. They are much more direct and straightforward in their language choice than the American people, and they typically do not receive any formal education on civil and human rights like in the US school system. Some of the Spaniards that I interviewed also argued that in their country the physical appearance of a person affects people's attitudes and perceptions. In other words, while in the US there is a wide variety of multicultural and multiethnic looks, fashions, and styles, Spaniards tend to appear more homogenized and formal than Americans in terms of the clothes and shoes they wear, their haircut, and their overall look. This difference in physical appearance between Spain and the US emerged during the interviews with Albert too, and contributed to make him feel a fish out of the water in Colovo, as I will discuss below.

#### Multiple Episodes of Discrimination and Prejudice

On several occasions in Spain and while traveling within Europe, Albert perceived that he was discriminated against for his skin color, presumed socio-economic class difference, and hip hop/ Black culture attire. In an interview he explained that he was stopped twice by the local police for apparently no reason while he was sitting outside of a bar in Colovo with his US friends:

I was in the corner with uhm my group and the cop drove by and he said come here and I went towards him and he said you know where's your passport? [...]

Then the next night it was a different cop so I was walking I was with another student and I had my hat under my shirt. [...] The cop stopped me again and he said what's under your shirt? What is that? What is that?



Albert indicated that he did not react or express how hurt he was in front of the Spanish police, probably because he was unprepared to face a situation of aggressive behavior in Spanish, which might have aggravated his feelings of powerlessness. This is not a scenario that L2 students are likely to practice in class. After all, Bakhtin (1986) argued that we learn to use speech genres, as we learn to speak a language, by hearing them from others or by reading them in the texts of others. Therefore, unless Albert had been socialized into that particular speech genre, he could have not accessed it. However, during an interview, Albert stated that in US he would have dealt with the situation differently:

In the States I would have reacted totally differently. I would you know I would convey my emotions like like you know why are you stopping me? Don't stop me. Why didn't you stop them? Look at them ((his group of US friends)). They are over there too.

In two interviews and in an email, Albert narrated how he was insulted by an older man in the plane from Paris to Colovo for having touched his white coat in the upper compartment:

The guy who was sitting in the back seat got up and he was just so angry, he was so mad that you know that I took his jacket and he said I got it wrinkled by putting it back in the compartment.

He also mocked me too. Like first I was saying it in Spanish and I said "Sorry." And then he goes in English "I am sorry I am sorry" in a sarcastic manner "sorry sorry." His English wasn't that good. So he was saying "sorry" but mocked me too.

Similarly to the situation with the police, Albert did not try to defend himself and articulate his feelings. At that moment he probably did not find the words in Spanish but in an interview he did convey his emotions:

The guy on the airplane would have never talked to me in that fashion if I were white I know that for a fact and that situation would have never happened in the United States to that degree. The person may have thought that, but he wouldn't have berated me amongst passengers. He implied that the jacket was dirty because I touched it.

Albert was called "run away slave" by a Russian when he was in the train to Paris with a friend of his, as he recalled in an interview:

He was basically saying I was a slave and I was his ((Albert's friend's)) run away slave. I was my friend's property which was crazy you know cause I know in the States that would have never ever happened. You know if it does or if it ever occurred you know it would be a problem.

The episode and the man's blatant racism understandably made him angry: "I was upset man I was irate at first like I can't believe the guy had the audacity to you know he tried to belittle my race, belittle me as a person." Albert sometimes found that Spaniards looked at him in the same fashion as they would look at poor people or immigrant street merchants:

I think at times like people would look at me in the same fashion as you know people selling stuff in the street [...] I feel they see people of color as lower on the socio economic scale because that is all they see.

Albert perceived that he was also looked down upon for not speaking Castilian Spanish but a supposedly less prestigious variety of Spanish spoken in the Dominican Republic where they tend to omit a lot of the s sounds: "I feel Spaniards feel a sense of superiority over Dominicans. Especailly, when it comes to socio-economic levels, because they have the perception that everyone in Dominica Republic is poor. Also, they feel that they speak Spanish 'raro' (*a weird Spanish*)."

Finally, Albert found that he was looked down upon and approached informally for his hip hop attire:

It was just tough like to assimilate to the European culture and like my attire and they just look at you like in a different fashion. [...] And uh I felt if my attire would have been totally different or even if I was dressed in the same attire and if I was white I doubt he would have he would have approached the same situation in the same way.

In sum, Albert's race played a major role in his SA experience, a role that equaled or even eclipsed any initial predisposition or investment he felt about integrating into the target culture and society. Previous literature has not looked enough at how deeply variables such as

race, ethnicity, and class can impact and shape students' experiences abroad especially when they come in contact and interact with target language speakers within the host society.

#### Disengagement with the Host Community

Albert's perception of being discriminated against for his race, ethnicity, and social class profoundly curtailed his engagement with locals, and thereby reduced the breadth, depth, and length of his individual and collective interactions, social dynamics, and encounters with the host society. He gradually came to feel that he was different from everybody else, he was an outsider, and that he could not fully relate to the local students his age living in the residence halls. Thus, he began to recoil from most interactions with them besides short and sporadic encounters with the native speakers he felt comfortable with, i.e., his Black Reggaeton friend from Colovo, the dorm staff, and the Central American female students living in the dorms.

#### *Shying Away from the Spaniards*

In Spain Albert felt an outsider, a fish out of the water, the only Black guy, one who was incapable of blending in, fitting in, or getting assimilated in the local socio-cultural fabric due to his hypervisibility, for sticking out like Tharps (2008) reminded us at the beginning: "I was Black. Which meant there was no way I could be Spanish. Why had I even bothered?" (p. 88). Albert's attempts to identify himself with, and get immersed into, a community of people who did not look like him or did not embrace his Black culture were in vain, as he reported in an interview:

Coming into an environment where people are totally different than you from the way they look, the way they dress uhm so sometimes that can be the hardest thing to overcome. [...] It's hard to experience a culture that is totally different and see people that look nothing like you.

Albert never felt welcomed or comfortable among Spaniards. To be completely immersed in the Spanish culture and learn the language by interacting with the people - as he had wished at the

beginning of his trip - was no longer his objective. He began to embrace his own group of people, as reported in an email:

I really didn't feel comfortable in Spain, because I was always the only one who looked like me. For some people this isn't a problem, but for me it is. I like surrounding myself with people who have similar interests. DON'T GET ME WRONG I LOVE MEETING NEW PEOPLE, but I feel more comfortable around *mi gente* (*my people*).

In an interview Albert had to admit that he never really felt connected to the Spanish culture or Spanish people. His feelings of alienation and marginalization became stronger while interacting with locals, for instance some students living in the residence halls, whose values, interests, and way of living were perceived by Albert as a difference between their social class and his:

Things like [...] people who are economically privileged have. And they have their things to talk about. I learned English words like new stuff like like I have never heard which is a cultural thing like *paté paté* which is like ground meat in a paste. Like I have never heard of it ever. [...]

Boating like yachting yeah I dunno anything about that at all. Like things like little aspects like there would be a discussion between three or four people and like I'll ask questions but I have no knowledge of anything like that.

Albert's lack of connection with certain people from Spain was also a result of the fact that they could not relate to him and his lifestories of prejudice, they did not share the same racial, cultural, and social class identity, they probably never lived any episode of socio-economic inferiority or discrimination, and they could not feel the same emotions of being unwelcomed and alienated abroad. Certain aspects of Albert's experiences abroad were simply not a potential conversation topic among Spaniards, as noted in an interview:

You want other people to communicate the same experience with you so uhm I know a lot of times in the US people understand cause they got stopped by the cops but here you know when you explain it to other people that they don't understand or don't encounter that experience.

The SCT perspective informs us that all events, phenomena, and perceptions are to be interpreted within their historical and cultural context of occurrence. The historical cultural

artifacts that we inherit growing up in our society and carry with us deeply affect meditational means as well as *how* members of that society learn and *what* they learn. Albert is no exception.

The socio-cultural artifacts that he acquired growing up as a young working class African American, and used to make sense of his experiences abroad, were his disposition, or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977), to see the world in ‘colors.’ Albert was particularly sensitive to manifestations of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and intolerance, and to detect socio-economic differences and privileges in society. In an email he wrote that “our country was built on defining color.”

The powerful socio-cultural tool that Albert acquired and shared with his fellow Americans from the SA group was their education on civil rights and social justice, and how human rights movements - such as the Black movement, indelibly shaped the history of America. During the interviews I soon realized that Albert was keenly aware of his rights as a Black American, knew the US laws protecting or discriminating against Blacks, and was not shy about condemning incidents of social injustice, such as the racial profiling in New Jersey and the case of the Jena 6:

The state of New Jersey got sued because of racial profiling and they’d just stop you to stop you and uhm and you know a couple of times they stopped me and after checking all my information I asked them why did I get stopped? What is the problem? And they could not answer.

Jena 6 with you know the Blacks that beat up the white kid and they were trying to give them 15 years in Louisiana, 15 years for beating somebody up? And the kid had a concussion like 15 years 20 years of your life that’s absurd.

Wertsch’s observations about collective memories and narrative resources (2002) are relevant here. For him, US society and media representations have constructed and circulated collective remembering of historical events such as incidents of racial discrimination like the ones mentioned above by Albert. For Albert, remembering those events, and passing judgment on them, implies using the narratives (or discourses) that others have already used in the past. Such narratives played a central role in Albert’s memory. Many aspects of the way he spoke,

reacted to events, and expressed his thoughts while in Spain were shaped by such narratives and memories. Likewise, from a SCT perspective all events need to be analyzed within their historical and cultural context. The historical and cultural resources that Albert acquired growing up in his community affected the way he learned, what he learned, and how he interpreted situations, events, and people around him. Albert arrived in Spain expecting to see some sort of network of support that fought for equal rights and opportunities of all human beings, a notion that is widespread in the US but not in Spain. In other words, in Colovo Albert came to realize that there were no organizations similar to the NAACP for the advancement of Black people. Nor did Albert see in the Spanish media any public figure of color like Obama who impacted the political scene, functioned as a model, and made his/her voice heard in the intense months of political campaign that lead to the election of the new prime minister of the Spanish government.

*Affinity with Just a Few: SA Group Members, Hispanics, Dorm Staff, and His Black Reggaeton Friend*

It is clear that Albert's original goal in participating in an SA program was to practice and improve his target language skills, learn about the Spanish culture, and meet new people in Spain. However, as a result of the incidents of prejudice and discrimination he experienced locally and his disconnection from the host culture and community, Albert progressively developed a strong affiliation and solidarity with his US cohort of friends from the SA group. He spent the majority of his time inside and outside of class with them and he became increasingly involved in L1-mediated activities and group trips to London, Paris, and Malta where English was the predominant language spoken within the group. Albert told me in an interview that he felt a strong connection with his US cohort for being compatriots, and for showing a certain

sensitivity and compassion for issues related to discrimination and intolerance against Black people:

He he ((one of his white US friends)) was really affected by it ((the incident when Albert was called “run away slave” by a young Russian fellow)), which is I feel is a good thing because it shows how you know like even though people from different cultures are connected you know we are both American we’re both coming from the same the same place the same country you know even though it’s different races he was affected by it just like I would be affected by it. You know I mean he was upset just like I was upset. And uh I thought that was that was a stand up thing you know that he was also affected by it.

Albert’s affiliation and solidarity with his US group of compatriots was not only based on common feelings and perceptions of human rights and social justice. He also invested in them because he felt that he could acquire a range of important resources (i.e., friendships), access important social networks, gain social acceptance, and consolidate ties in the business, academic, political, and professional world that would be beneficial upon returning to the US:

You learn a lot from other University of Gareg students because these are the students that you might see. The other students like from Central America or the Spaniards maybe in the future maybe. But these people the Gareg group you are gonna see them probably in school or they live in the community, in the Nalat area. So if you are looking for a job you know they are right there. Yeah if they have a connection or something like that. So it’s imperative to speak to them to speak to anybody to have a connection with everybody cause you never know what somebody could do for you or what I could do for them. You know I might know somebody who has interest in what they are doing and you know I can assist them [...] You can make connections with somebody’s father you know somebody’s father can be this or somebody’s father can be that or a mother that has a connection here.

The Vygotskian perspective (1978) explains that learning is a social process, i.e., interaction with others is a critical element that impacts individual learning. Who we choose to interact with is also critical because it will determine what we learn, and the way we learn. From a language learning perspective, we would hope that SA students would have opportunities for creating ZPDs with native speakers of Spanish, and thus they would learn about Spanish languaculture. Albert, however, created most of his ZPD with his US friends who seemed to be

in a higher social class than he was. From a class perspective, it can be said that they were more capable peers than Albert, or at least they were more knowledgeable about the things that upper/middle-class people concern themselves with. Therefore, he learned valuable skills, even though such skills were not related to L2 learning.

Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital (1977) (knowledge, abilities, education, and advantages, which we receive from our parents for example, and which give us a certain status in society) and social capital (actual or potential resources deriving from group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support) are relevant here. By cultivating the relationship with his US white upper/middle-class SA compatriots, Albert wanted to transform his cultural capital into instrumental relations, or social capital, with them because they could transmit valuable resources to him, furthering his success or increasing his status in society. Finally, using Norton Peirce's notion of investment (2000; 1995) that equates language skills with cultural capital, it can be said that Albert was investing in the symbolic value of Castilian Spanish, whose prestige is still very much in place in the US, despite all the varieties of Spanish spoken around the world. Albert expected a certain return on his investment which was commensurate with the effort spent in participating in L2-mediated activities with target language speakers. Albert's investment, engagement, and social identity abroad was not unitary and fixed but it evolved throughout the semester abroad with the changing social world, cultural environment, and interactional settings he experienced.

Besides with his SA cohort, Albert also felt a strong connection and affinity with the small group of Central American and Spanish female students, the residence hall staff (particularly cleaning ladies, kitchen ladies, secretaries, and security guards), and a small group of local rap/ Reggaeton artists that Albert met through his friend Alejandro from Colovo. Albert



invested in, and was close to, this group of target language speakers. He felt comfortable with the residence hall staff because of the working class roots that they shared, as he stated in an email:

“I meet great people, like the woman who worked in the lunch room. They loved me, and I loved talking to them, I felt more a connection with them than with anyone Spain.” In another email he wrote that he was close to his Black Reggaeton artist friend and his network of friendships because they fully embraced the Black culture, music, and attire, and they were a multicultural and multiracial group:

The only people who wore stuff like me and listened to rap was Alejandro's friends and they were multi cultural. One, his mom was from Spain but his Dad was african, and the other mom was Spainsish and his Dad was Haitian. THEY LISTEN TO HIP-HOP AND DRESSED MORE AMERICAN. I felt very comfortable with them.

Finally, Albert felt affinity with the dorms' female students, particularly the small community from Central America, because of their common Hispanic origin and culture, the similar cultural artifacts they inherited, and the experiences of discrimination and feelings of otherness in Colovo, as he reported in an interview:

I think they sometimes they have encountered the same obstacles, cultural obstacles that I have too cause they don't have their friends here just like I do. You know they are making friends just everyday like I am so they are on the outside looking in just like I'm on the outside looking in.

However, Albert never got the opportunity to spend much time with them, and their conversations became rather sporadic, casual, and short because they were all very busy working, studying, and living their own lives, which Albert never really was part of.

Albert had hoped to develop a close network of friends, to feel like at home, and to create strong bonds with the local community as he had in the US and in the Dominican Republic.

Unfortunately, his expectations were not met, as witnessed by one of Albert's classmates:

((Albert)) Pensaba que iba a venir y tener amigos así como en DR pero cuando llegó aquí pasó tiempo saliendo de fiesta y haciendo unas cosas en la comunidad (voluntó por una

escuela de niños con una de las chicas de latinoamérica) y nunca encontraba los amigos que buscaba.

*Albert thought that he would go to Spain and have friends just like in the Dominican Republic. However, in Spain he spent time partying and doing a few things within the community (he volunteered at a nursery school with one of the girls from Latin America) but he never found the friends that he was looking for.*

### Implications for Albert's Opportunities for

#### Cultural and Linguistic Immersion

Albert's perception of being discriminated against for his race, ethnicity, and social class was a crucial issue during his sojourn abroad. It severely curtailed his involvement in local activities and social networks, and thereby reduced his language and culture learning opportunities. Albert's emotional investment in L2 and in the target culture was inevitably affected, so much so, that he expressed the desire to abandon the program and go home early, as reported in this email: "I wanted to go home and I thought maybe they would send me home early and allow me to take my finals earlier."

#### *A Growing Sense of Dissatisfaction for His Language Gains*

It is clear that Albert's variety of practice was limited and marginal, and his access to Spanish social networks was restricted to a few local people who were themselves racially and economically marginalized in Spanish society. The interactional contexts he was involved in at times did not go beyond the initial greeting level. One-time, occasional, and short conversations became the norm. As a result, Albert came to feel profoundly dissatisfied, disappointed, and frustrated with his CI and LI experience. Albert's language desire remained essentially unfulfilled and he longed for a fuller, more authentic, and more intense CI and LI experience in Spain. In an interview, he expressed ambivalent feelings about his progress in terms of language acquisition and culture learning:

I am not satisfied at all but uh [...] I feel I should be a lot better. It's like I know that there are a lot of avenues where you can speak more Spanish. And I tried to capitalize every day. [...] I feel like I feel I learnt a lot of Spanish but (.) not not to the extent I really wanted to learn. And I felt I think I could have done more (.) but I did I did not make that that attempt.

Albert's feeling of dissatisfaction was aggravated by the realization of the severe economic investment that his family and he had undertaken to support his journey abroad, as reported in an interview:

I am down here spending money. It's not even my own money. I am spending you know my family's money. And I you know I feel that I should be a lot better than I am. And uhm I feel that me staying and spending more money and not really learning...

Albert felt that he was not acquiring the range of resources (language, education, friends, goods) that he had hoped for. His learning and SA outcomes did not meet his initial expectations. For him the return on the SA investment was far from being commensurate with the effort spent in financing the trip and learning the language, and was not a fair return for the privilege that he had been granted by his family to go study abroad.

#### *Disengagement from Academic Learning*

Albert never seriously invested in, nor seriously committed to, classroom learning in the context of SA. The several episodes of discrimination, prejudice, and intolerance he was exposed to from the start of his sojourn in Spain aggravated his disengagement from his classes. As a result, Albert's opportunities for language and culture learning were further curtailed.

On several occasions during the interviews he stressed the fact that going to class was a waste of time for him, and that he did not need all the credits that he had to sign up for because he had already graduated.

I really don't learn a lot in the classes. I do in the history class I do, about Spanish history and I enjoy that. But like in other classes I don't learn a whole a lot. Uhm and I don't have the motivation to learn a lot of the stuff in class.

Instead, he wanted to learn the street language and culture (purposely written with a small c) through interacting with natives who were able to correct him, as noted in an interview:

I wanna speak Spanish, like a complete immersion like speaking in conversation just me and somebody or me and a family and that's it where I can learn things [...] I feel that I don't better myself in the language unless I'm speaking with somebody who's better than me who knows more cause that's their language. So you know I rather I speak Spanish with some of the students you know I'd rather speak with a native speaker [...] I feel the best way to learn the language is to practice it orally with someone who can correct you.

The Vygotskian notion developed here by Albert is the idea that more capable others - in Albert's case native speakers or people with near-native Spanish-speaking abilities, work with learners within their ZPD and help them to improve their language skills. For instance, he really enjoyed the three tutorials that we did together. We met in the SA office or in the dorm cafeteria and while I was listening to him speaking Spanish I wrote down the mistakes that he made. He found it particularly beneficial to jointly go over his mistakes and he tried to correct himself. Clearly, he was working within his ZPD on a goal-directed activity. However, such a network of assistance was not available to him as often as he wished, and Albert came to realize that he was not learning as much as he had expected.

Finally, SCT provides a useful analytical lens through which to view the students' resourcefulness, especially their pursuit of learning from others and their active engagement in their own learning. Unfortunately, at school Albert gradually became not a particularly resourceful learner. He disengaged from alternative learning opportunities besides conversing with natives during the sporadic opportunities that he was offered mostly in the residence halls. He did not extensively rely on other L2 learning strategies such as reading the Spanish media and literature for his classes, watching movies, listening to the radio, news, or other TV programs, going to the library and consulting the local archives and resources, or looking for a conversation partner in the university billboards, as I had suggested to him. I contend that such resources

(media, literature, and libraries) can function as useful model texts and manifestation of local languaculture, thus offering learners opportunities to work within their ZPD.

The image of Albert that emerged from his Spanish teachers' words and from the daily SA program journal – a means held by the SA program team to report events and incidents relevant to the program and the students, was not always very flattering. For instance, one of his teachers in Colovo perceived Albert as somebody who was disengaged from academic learning:

At the beginning of my class he was paying attention and from there on I think he was [...] he started falling asleep in class, almost falling asleep. You had to tell him [...] I told him that you have to be participant in class.

Likewise, Albert seemed not to care much about the classes or the program. As per to the SA program journal, he had been severely reprimanded and formally warned with an official letter from the SA program director for breaking the SA rules by missing the 7.00am bus that took the SA group to Barcelona for a mandatory two-day visit of the city. Albert missed the bus because he partied with some local friends the night before, got drunk, and returned to his dorm room at around 8.00am the next day. Upon returning from Barcelona, the SA program team met with Albert and reminded him of the importance of following the program rules, as reported in an interview with the one of the SA program team members:

I think he didn't care about the program. And he said he didn't care about the rules of the program. He didn't care when he did not go to Barcelona and I had to read the ABC the rules and that. He said that he didn't care about the rules of the program.

For one of Albert's teachers, he signed up for a semester in Spain mostly to get relief from academic pressure, to live a vacation abroad, to speak Spanish and meet new people, and to have a good time, as she commented in an interview:

I think he also took this semester like a [...] vacation. He took it more like to meet new friends, to meet people in Spain and practice Spanish in Spain with Spaniards and party with them. The way he wanted to participate was like to party.

During an informal conversation that I had with another Spanish professor of Albert's, she volunteered that Albert was not doing very well in her class, despite the fact that she considered her class easy and that her class was the only course he really needed to complete the requirements for a double major in Spanish.

From a Vygotskian perspective, most of Albert's class experiences were not ideal learning experiences as he did not have the opportunity to work within his ZPD and to learn while interacting with an expert in a goal-directed activity (Wertsch, 1991, 1998). I was able to confirm that myself not only during my conversations with his Spanish teachers but also during my own class observations. This situation might have consolidated the idea in Albert that what is learned in class (history, literature, and grammar rules) is not as helpful and valuable to prepare students in an adequate way for their experience abroad and for interacting with target language speakers within the host community. From a Wertschian perspective (2002), a narrative resource that Albert used in his interpretation of his academic semester abroad was the dominant discourse around SA circulating in US higher education and among college students as identified by Gore (2005). Based on such discourse, SA equals leisure, vacation, and a break from academic stress, while education that really counts is available in the US, as Albert himself clearly suggested in an interview talking about the SA program:

A lot more academic stress in the States [...] We have one class for an hour an hour and a half and maybe no homework and anything to do. [...] Basically for a lot of people this is a vacation. [...] So we're there to party and to have fun.

### Implications for Albert's Identity Negotiation

#### *Affirmation of Albert's Racial, Cultural, and Socio-Economic Identity as a Working Class Black American*

In light of the negative experiences lived in Spain, Albert rejected Spain and Spanish culture, and European culture in general, and resented Spaniards for the treatment received. In a couple of emails he reported,

Europeans have negative conceptions about blacks [...] I hated Spain [...] I do have some resentment of going back to Spain. I don't think I would ever go back. There is no one there to relate with; everyone is the same.

My experience in Spain was so different than everyone else was because I was black and a male. Some of the black girls in the group couldn't believe the stuff that happened to me in Spain, but it probably wouldn't happen to them because the black man equals a threat.

Instead, Albert fully embraced Black culture and proudly affirmed his racial, cultural, socio-economic identity as a working class multicultural Black American, i.e., the result of a semester-long identity negotiation and construction process:

Nunca en mi vida que tuve que pasar tiempo totalmente con la gente k no se parece a mi; este describe el tiempo con los americanos y los espanolos tambien. Primero, esta experiencia era muy dificil pero, a lo largo la experiencia cambio para ser un proceso para aprender sobre mi. Por k, actualmente entiendo k no puedo encontrarme alrededor la gente que se parece a mi.

*Never in my life did I have to spend time with people who are totally different from the way I look, I mean both the American students from the group and the Spaniards. At the start, my experience was hard but later it turned to be a learning process about myself because now I understand that I cannot live around people who look nothing like me.*

Despite his multicultural background, his strong desire to learn the language and the culture of different people, and to travel to see the world, Albert learned that he could not be separate from his people. In an email Albert had to admit that "I like being around people who look like me. I do like hanging with a diverse crowd, but i LIKE THE OPTION OF SAYING.."i WANT TO HANG WITH LOS MORnenos" (*Black people*)." Albert strongly identified with that community

of individuals for sharing similar cultural artifacts and for racial, cultural, and socio-economic affinities.

From a SCT perspective, the cultural artifacts that Albert acquired throughout his education and upbringing in a multicultural and multiethnic environment predisposed him toward certain beliefs and practices about society. Most importantly, such artifacts set a series of expectations in him that inevitably clashed in Spain. Abroad Albert did not find as much diversification of nationalities, races, and cultures as in the US where he could easily fit it, as reported in an interview:

((In Spain)) everybody looks the same you know. We haven't seen a lot of Asian people in Spain, in Europe [...] or like I dunno different different nationalities [...] Where I'm from in New Jersey/New York area it is so diversified so diverse.

Albert found that he was not able to adapt his artifacts or build new ones in Spain, and his sojourn left him with a deep sense of disillusionment. However, in an interview he stated that he was determined to seek a second opportunity for himself, another chance to redeem himself and make up for the semester in Spain that did not translate into a satisfactory CI experience: "I wanna go somewhere where I can really learn Spanish and have another opportunity [...] I wanna go uhm to the Dominican Republic again you know and visit my cousin and do a complete immersion." Albert's words are an affirmation of his own racial and cultural identity in his choice of the Dominican Republic as potential site for the next experience abroad, a place where ideally he will blend in more easily, and where he will find himself surrounded by people who look more like him, embrace his culture, and have things in common with him.

### Conclusions

In this chapter I have argued that Albert's social background variables such as his race, ethnicity, and class profoundly impacted his sojourn in Spain, affected his interactions with



locals, and had strong implications for his identity construction and opportunities for CI and LI. At the start of his SA sojourn, Albert manifested an inclination and predisposition to embrace LI and CI abroad and to integrate into the target society thanks to his Spanish-speaking background and determination to learn the language and the culture. However, his expectations to blend in inexorably clashed. His experience was interspersed with multiple episodes of racial discrimination and prejudice within the host society that had preconceived ideas about Black people—mostly due to the heavy waves of immigrants in Spain—and viewed them at times with curiosity, at times with superiority, other times with suspicion, fear, and rejection. Albert felt an outsider, profoundly unwelcomed and uncomfortable among Spaniards. Needless to say, Albert's race played a major role in Spain, a role that eclipsed his initial investment in the target language, culture, and people. Albert's perception of being discriminated against for his race, ethnicity, and social class reduced his individual and collective interactions and social dynamics in time, space, and breath. It curtailed his engagement with locals, his participation in L2-mediated activities, and his academic engagement.

In many ways the story of Albert in Spain illustrates how challenging SA can be, and how deeply social background variables such as race, ethnicity, and class impact students' sojourn. Despite the personal and social struggle that Albert experienced abroad, the trip has been significant. It offered him the opportunity to receive an education, in class and outside of class, one that he could not possibly receive in the US. Through his Spanish journey, Albert experienced an empowering process of identity construction when he proudly affirmed his racial and cultural background as a working class multicultural Black American. His journey also served as a springboard for his next CI and LI experience abroad.

## CHAPTER 6

### “I’M NOT LEARNING ANYTHING IN CLASS”: A STORY OF STUDENT - TEACHER CLASH OF CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS

US students enrolling in host or home university courses in the context of a US university-directed SA program oftentimes experience class dynamics, instructional interactions, teaching styles, and cultural expectations that sharply diverge from what they are accustomed to in their own country.

Authors such as Kinginger (2004; 2008b), Pellegrino Aveni (2005), and Patron (2007) have talked about these episodes of intercultural clashes in the classroom abroad but by and large we really have not analyzed these events systematically, the important issues that they raise for US learners studying abroad, and the consequent effects on their experiences and on the perceptions of the host society. How do students and teachers interpret and experience the academic component of SA? How do they negotiate the meaning and content of cultural immersion in the classroom? How do they feel and react when they encounter a set of unfamiliar norms of classroom interaction?

In this chapter, I use the example of Theresa, one American upper-middle class female university student in Spain, to explore these issues. Based on Theresa’s accounts, I argue that we have paid far too little attention to analyzing SA and classroom interactions, dynamics, and outcomes in terms of class, globalization, and capitalism, particularly the capitalist notions of value for money, and education as a marketable commodity. These notions have recently overtaken and profoundly impacted US higher education within SA programs. I contend that we

need to consider how US undergraduate students interpret the academic component of SA based on their socio-cultural identity and cultural artifacts, how this impacts their sojourn and perceptions, and how they are perceived in the host society.

While Theresa met all the academic requirements to participate and enroll in the courses taught abroad, she was ill-prepared for SA in several ways. She was significantly less proficient in Spanish than most other students in the program. Theresa never invested in, or committed to, the formal program curriculum in a systematic way. She had behaved more as a moneyed consumer than as a learner inside and outside of the classroom setting. She did not pursue academic goals, particularly one Spanish course taught by Dr. Álvarez. She repeatedly stated that “I’m not learning anything in the class.” She criticized and challenged her professor, whom she saw as a distant figure and with whom she did not establish any personal contact or constructive dialogue. Her attitude led to an open conflict with her teacher. I will use this class to illustrate the broader socio-cultural dynamics at work in conflictual SA experiences.

#### Background on Study Abroad and Classroom Experiences

Based on the *Open Doors* report by the Institute for International Education (2008), SA participation among US university students has increased over 150% in the last decade. In addition, 241,791 US students participated in an academic program in 2006/07, an increase of 8% compared to the previous year. Due to this rise, universities across the US have allocated increasing resources to the development of academic programs abroad that are envisioned to offer opportunities for intellectual development inside and outside of the classroom by way of their rigorous curriculum.

The scholarly literature in applied linguistics and language education has considered several aspects of classroom experiences in SA, and it has investigated a few important aspects

that I briefly discuss below. Bacon (2002) discussed the integration of academic and informal learning and the dynamic interplay between experiences inside and outside the classroom in an SA program in Mexico. The data in the study revealed that the most dramatic change observed in her case study student's L2 proficiency took place as she learned both societal and academic 'rules' that enabled her to function within the host culture. Churchill (2006) highlighted the differences in the ways students are received in classrooms by their host institutions and how this affects L2 development. He showed that the extent to which learners participate in instructional environments, and the qualities of their participation, does not only depend upon self-construction. It also exists in a dynamic relationship with both the features of a particular classroom and the dimension of the SA program design, instructional priorities, and local values. Kline (1998) explored the conflicting messages concerning academic literacy in homestays and in classrooms abroad, particularly the clash between the image of French culture promulgated by the home institution and the reality students experienced while in France. The home institution portrayed the average French as "possessed of great 'culture générale' and obsessed with knowledge of current events" (p. 153), constantly reading *Le Monde*, the leading national newspaper. However, while living with their host families, students experienced that everyone would subscribe to TV guides, and hardly anybody would read *Le Monde*. Patron (2007) investigated the difficulties of French students in adapting to Australian classroom norms and academic literacy practices, and the elements from Australian culture occasioning stress and frustration for French sojourners. Pellegrino Aveni (2005) also talked about the difficulties of US students in adapting to Russian classroom norms, and the issues that can originate when the teacher's role and style, and the student's responsibility and performance, are interpreted from within two different cultural systems. However, the author conducted her study exclusively

through the lens of the students' perceptions along the same line as Brecht and Robinson (1995) who used qualitative diary studies to research the value of formal instruction in SA contexts, and the reaction of the students. Finally, Kinginger (2004) told the story of a US adult female student who enrolled in regular university courses in France, did not receive any assistance on how to register for or locate courses, was unprepared for the style of classes taught abroad, and ended up shying away from school because she could not figure out what was going on in her classes.

Two issues emerge from this body of literature that I intend to address in this study. First, virtually no research has explicitly focused on how classroom experiences and interactions shape SA, particularly how US students' culturally-mediated take on the academic component of SA affects their sojourn and perceptions of the host culture. Second, little attention has been devoted to collecting and analyzing other SA participants' interpretation of the academic aspect of SA. For a comprehensive understanding of the SA experience, it is important to hear the voices of other SA participants, i.e., the professors, the SA program team members, and the people from local community.

### Conflicting Teacher and Student Notions of Study Abroad as an Academic Program

In an interview for the faculty and staff weekly newspaper, the director of the sponsoring university's Office of International Education asserted that "SA is a great educational tool." During the orientation session of this particular SA program in Spain, the director defined SA as a highly cultural immersive academic program with a rigorous and challenging curriculum, mandatory field trips, and a variety of optional extra-curricular activities. The three main objectives, as highlighted in the first slide of the PowerPoint presentation used during

orientation, were to ensure students' "1) safety and health abroad; 2) academic success abroad, 3) cultural experience."

However, the undergraduate students in the programs that I observed did not always take their studies as seriously as at their home university. For example, the administrative and student coordinators of the SA office in the home university were convinced that the extremely low enrollment of students in Colovo in the Fall— compared to the much higher enrollment in the Spring—was due to two main factors: football and *Fallas*. According to them, most students, both male and female, did not want to trade the American football season at their home university for an SA experience in Colovo in the Fall. They also believed that the Spring semester in Colovo was more highly enrolled because of *Fallas*, a festive street celebration taking place in Colovo during the second or third week of March, attracting people from all over Spain and Europe. One SA student corroborated that *Fallas* may translate into two consecutive weeks of break from school and an opportunity for extensive travel:

We had *fallas* uhm you know we would be away for *fallas*. I was hanging out with the kids in our group or things of that nature and then we had vacation. I travelled I went to Paris and London and Malta. So it's been a lot.

Likewise, three former SA students who were invited to the orientation session to talk about their experience in Spain portrayed the local teachers as very nice, understanding, and willing to help students, as I reported in my field notes. At the beginning of the semester in Colovo one of the Spanish SA professors informally told me that she considered her own course easy. She reported that nobody had yet failed her class.

During an interview with a former SA female student who went to Colovo, she compared her professors in the US and in Spain. She referred to her professors in Spain as her friends

because she felt very close to them, she could talk about everything with them, and they really cared about their students' learning experiences, needs, and well-being:

One of my teachers would tell us like about festivals that were going on, where we could go to when we needed things, a lot of us wanted to get manicures and pedicures before we went on spring break and we didn't know where to go, and we just happened to be talking about it in the class. She knew she heard us talking and she told us where to go, she told us what bus to get on, how to get there, she gave us the business card of the lady, she called the lady and told her that there would be students coming to get our nails done. No one would ever do that in Gareg. [...] That is part of the culture like you talk to them I mean and it's very it was very very interesting to refer to them like as my friend.

During formal and informal conversations with various SA students, it was apparent that the amount of homework that they were assigned was noticeably less than it was at their home university. As one student stated in an interview, there is:

... a lot more academic stress in the States. [...] ((In Colovo)) we have one class for an hour/an hour and a half and maybe no homework and anything to do so we are (horsing around?) in the hallway ((of the dorms)) like I said where they ((Spanish and international students living in the dorms)) have they have a rigorous uhm curriculum they have to do.

However, the more casual academic atmosphere of SA also had drawbacks. Two students expressed concern that they had not had any graded assignments, they had not taken any exams, and they had not turned in any paper that was formally evaluated with a letter grade. The end of the semester was approaching and they did not know where they stood in the class or with which grade they entered the final exam. This concern emerged in the students' end of the semester course evaluations as well where one recurrent comment that I noticed for that particular class was "more opportunities for grades."

In all, students' sense that SA is more of an extended vacation than a serious academic and cultural encounter and endeavor is likely to trigger conflicts with other SA participants and teachers. The case of one student, Theresa, is especially illustrative of this dynamic.

### Theresa

Theresa was a Caucasian US female undergraduate studying abroad in Colovo. She grew up in the suburbs of a southeastern city, and her lifestyle in Colovo suggested that her socio-economic status was upper-middle class. For example, Theresa's parents had granted her financial means to travel extensively for five months within Spain, Europe, and the Middle East during and after the SA program.

On Facebook Theresa described her college activities in the US as being part of a sorority and attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. She listed interests including the beach, running, football, tennis, ping pong, traveling, hunting lobsters, photography, sailing, and reading about birthdays. One day she said that her favorite book was the *Birthday Book* where one can find the description and characterization of his/her own personality based on the day when s/he was born. It is also important to stress that early in the semester Theresa experienced a great deal of emotional stress due to the loss of her stepmother. In an email, Theresa wrote,

this proved to be one of the most trying and difficult times for me to be away from my family after she passed away. She passed away January 27, within one week I was already back in the Nalat airport. When I returned to Colovo from the funeral, I had to make a decision for myself to be optimistic, pray for strength, courage, and understanding.

During the first day of classes in Colovo, when all courses and professors were introduced, the department head, the SA director, SA program team members, and Spanish professors promoted SA as an academically challenging and intense learning program. Nevertheless, Theresa's perception of the academic aspect of SA was very different. She did not take her studies very seriously. Instead, she interpreted SA as a release from academic stress and commitment, a "parenthesis from reality" (Tharps, 2008, p. 89), and a vacation abroad. Theresa had earned all the credits and had completed the pre-requisites to enroll in intermediate/pre-advanced courses



abroad. However, her competence level in Spanish remained considerably lower than that of other students in the program, and her classroom performance was lackluster, as reported in an email by one of her Spanish professors:

En mis clases era una estudiante bastante perdida. En ocasiones yo misma me cuestionaba si sabía de qué trataba lo que explicaba. [...] creo que el hecho de no conocer mucho el idioma la llevaba a un estado de frustración (tal vez no desconocido para ella) que la "animaba" a pasar de todo.

*In my classes she was rather lost. At times I wondered myself if she had any clue of what I was talking about. [...] I believe that the fact that she did not know much Spanish led her to such a condition of frustration (perhaps not unknown to her) that motivated her not to care about anything.*

Based on the informal conversations with Theresa's teachers in Colovo, I reported in my field notes that she averagely earned Cs, Ds, and Fs in her courses, and eventually failed one of the four classes she was taking, i.e., Dr. Álvarez's. Ironically enough, Theresa wrote in her diary at the beginning of the semester that she found her courses to be easier than expected: "I thought the classes were going to be a lot more difficult than they are."

Theresa's limited Spanish competence and her attitude toward learning created an open conflict between her and Dr. Álvarez, one of her Spanish professors. Dr. Álvarez was a Caucasian female professor in her early forties, who was originally from Spain and lived in Colovo. She was an Associate Professor in the Spanish Department at Ucevo and had been hired by the Ucevo to teach Spanish to US students enrolled in various SA programs in Colovo. She stated that her teaching experience with US students was extensive and exceeded ten years, although she had never taught in the US.

As the semester evolved, Theresa was perceived by the people around her as being highly affected by her difficult class experience, her problematic relationship with Dr. Álvarez, and her very modest academic outcomes. For example, a classmate of hers wrote to me and another SA program team member in Colovo in her support:

Theresa is seriously worried about the grade she will receive in this class and very much fears that she may be failed. I know that obtaining a decent grade is of the utmost importance to her as it affects both her future study and graduation plans. Several times now I have seen her crying over the fact that she has no idea what she did to receive the treatment that she did from Dr. Álvarez.

To cope with this situation, Theresa enacted a strong relationship of intergroup solidarity and congregation with her US SA fellows inside and outside of class, as she recollected in an email to me: “As time pressed on I made friendships with wonderful people that I know will last a lifetime.” She framed her experience in Spain as an intoxicating, thrilling, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for extensive travel around Europe and the Middle East. She would go shopping for souvenirs, she would go to bars, restaurants, and dance-clubs mostly in the company of American friends from the SA group or with a good female friend from the US who visited Theresa in Colovo, as reported in Theresa’s diary: “That night went and got drunk with group – TRASHED [...] Fun times.” While abroad Theresa also met several new people from all over the world.

#### The Clash between Theresa and Dr. Álvarez:

##### A Problem of Placement and Attitude

It is clear that Dr. Álvarez’s course was the wrong class for Theresa, as were the other courses where she was placed. In the following section I argue that her course misplacement was a product of the way that SA programs work.

##### *A Problem of Placement*

Theresa did not have the language abilities necessary to be in the intermediate/pre-advanced courses offered in Colovo by the sponsoring university. Like many other SA programs, this program recruited students from other US universities, and Theresa was from a different US university. While she had completed all the course requirements to be officially enrolled in the

program, it turned out that the level of instruction at her home university had left her with a language proficiency level that was far lower than other students in the program, as reported by an SA program team member in an interview:

She didn't have to pass I mean nobody has to pass a (.) how do you say? A placement test. Nobody has to pass that. And other students all of them almost all of them were from the Gareg and:: so they have the same classes. They were different in the level but not as many differences as I mean Theresa had in her level of Spanish. She was from another university but I remember when they accepted Theresa for the program Idoia told me that she was accepted because (.) because the requirement the course requirement in her university were met the expectations or she met the requirements of the course work here at Gareg. That's why she was accepted.

All Theresa's professors and SA program team members in Colovo agreed that she did not have the requisite skills in Spanish to be enrolled in their classes. Dr. Álvarez was the first one who immediately notified the SA program team of Theresa's lack of proficiency in Spanish compared to most other students in her course, as reported respectively in an interview with an SA program team member and in the SA program daily journal, a means the SA program team used to report important events and issues concerning the students and the program:

She ((Dr. Álvarez)) said that Theresa needed help. She was doing terrible in her class.

La Dra. Álvarez también me ha comentado que [...] a Theresa la ve bastante perdida en clase.

*Dr. Álvarez also told me that she sees that Theresa is rather lost in class.*

Theresa's situation did not improve as the semester went along, as suggested by Dr. Álvarez in an email: "Creo que, aquí, el único problema es su nulo nivel de español, que, además, me fue corroborado por las otras profesoras del curso. [...] La alumna apenas entendía el español" (*I think that here the only problem is Theresa's nonexistent level of Spanish, which was also confirmed to me by her other professors. [...] She barely understood any Spanish*).

In an email, one of Theresa's Spanish professors confirmed that Theresa was a D student in her class:

Theresa en mi clase era una alumna de D-/D en exámenes y eso. En clase no participaba casi nunca. [...] No me entendía. [...] Sí que sé que mi clase era muy difícil para ella, pero en ningún momento vino a mis horas de oficina para pedir ayuda.

*In my class Theresa was a D-/D student in exams and things like that. In class she almost never participated. [...] She did not understand me. I do realize that my class was hard for her, but she never came to see me during my office hours to ask for help.*

It is apparent that several of Theresa's problems stemmed from the fact that she did not have the linguistic competence she needed to succeed academically. There were no lower level courses available for Theresa to take in Colovo. If Theresa had been correctly placed in her SA classes, it is possible that the student-teacher clash and the issues related to it would have never originated, which leads one to think of the major implication of placement in this study. Unfortunately, Theresa's mismatched language proficiency led to discouragement and disaffection with her classes. During an informal meeting in the SA office in Colovo, Theresa herself raised the issue of how correct placement successfully impacted her previous SA experience in Mexico, as reported in my field notes:

I'm not learning anything in Dr. Álvarez's class. [...] I learned much more when I went to Mexico a couple of years ago with another SA program. I lived with a local family and studied in class with local students. I was placed in that class after a placement test based on my abilities.

Placement was an issue not only for Theresa's Spanish teachers in Colovo but also for several other teachers working for the SA program. At the end of the semester in Colovo, three professors that I talked to spontaneously expressed their concern about correct placement in the academic semesters to follow. All three commented on the significant disparity among students' competence level in their classes, and they requested that I talk to the SA program director about it. They felt that in the future it would have been better to have two separate conversation and composition classes based on the students' performance level. Another professor felt that for some students in her class reading Spanish literature had been very challenging and a real

struggle. Another professor pointed out that four different levels of students were placed in her class: beginning, intermediate, advanced, and heritage language students such as Noelia, a bilingual student from Puerto Rico. The same happened in Dr. Álvarez's course where Theresa was in the same class as Paco, a bilingual student from Mexico.

### *A Problem of Attitude*

Besides Theresa's low competence in Spanish, her attitude and behavior inside and outside of the classroom were also perceived as problematic. SCT points out that in order to understand any phenomenon, it needs to be studied in its historical context. Accordingly, to investigate Theresa's attitude, I looked back at her behavior over the course of the entire semester in Colovo. I remember that from the first day of the program she got off on the wrong foot at the airport in Spain where she lost part of the belongings that she had shipped in a cardboard box. In an interview, one of the SA program team members recalled,

Remember at the airport when she lost her boots? It was like she was mad at everyone like mad at the:: I think it was part of her behavior. It was part of her the way she is. I remember in the airport when she came back, it was like it was the police's fault, your fault, the police didn't treat her the way she wanted to be treated, or the people in Airfrance like everybody was like you know making her life difficult.

The same SA program team member also came to feel that Theresa did not take her SA courses seriously enough, as she noted in an interview: "I think she wanted to study abroad I mean she thought the classes would be easier or all the teachers would understand that she's there for study abroad program." One of Theresa's Spanish professors in Colovo also felt that Theresa was not committed to academic learning, and that her language proficiency gap was an excuse for bad conduct rather than a cause. In an email she reported,

Creo que el problema no era simplemente el idioma sino que, a diferencia de muchos otros estudiantes, se tomó el study abroad como una fiesta con clases que interrumpían dicha fiesta. [...] No sé si me explico: entre las pocas ganas con las que viene y la "excusa" de un nivel bastante bajo del idioma, su actitud en clase era totalmente pasiva.

*I believe that the problem was not only the language but also the fact that, unlike many other students in the group, she took SA as a party with classes that interrupted the party. [...] I don't know if this makes sense: besides her little motivation and the "excuse" that her Spanish was rather poor, her attitude in class was totally passive.*

Dr. Álvarez, one of Theresa's Spanish professors in Colovo, likewise felt that Theresa enrolled in the SA program with the wrong mindset, as she wrote in an email:

Su falta de educación, en el sentido de "good manners," explica su actitud y los problemas surgidos. [...] He tenido alumnos con poco nivel y, créeme, muy arraigados a sus costumbres americanas, que se han adaptado sin problemas a este y a otros muchos programas de norteamericanos. Por supuesto para ellos puede resultar difícil adaptarse a la situación pero, si confían en el profesor y en el programa (ayudantes, tutores, etc.), al final siempre es un éxito.

*The fact that she did not have good manners explains her attitude and the problems that emerged. [...] I have had students whose Spanish was poor, and, believe me, they were very much tied to their American traditions. However, they adapted themselves without problems to this program and to many other programs for US students. Of course it can be hard for them to get adjusted to the situation, but if they trust the professor and the program (assistants, tutors, etc.) in the end their SA experience always turns out to be successful.*

Even Theresa admitted in an email that "I do not believe I put out the caliber of work that I was more than capable of." While all faculty agreed that Theresa was a difficult student, the friction between her and Dr. Álvarez was clearly not caused by her alone. Both the students in Dr. Álvarez's class and the SA program team member that I interviewed felt that Dr. Álvarez was noticeably more unfriendly to Theresa than to other students. For instance, during an informal meeting in the SA program office two students in Dr. Álvarez's class stated that she actually "hated" Theresa. Another student in Dr. Álvarez's class felt that Theresa was graded more harshly than other students, as he commented in an email that he spontaneously sent to me and another SA program team member:

Theresa did nothing out of the ordinary that would cause her to deserve such treatment from a professor ((Dr. Álvarez)). I was able to see the way in which Theresa was graded by Dr. Álvarez and it was certainly on a level that would be considered highly unfair based on how other students in the class were evaluated. It often looked as though Dr. Álvarez did nothing but mark Theresa's tests and quizzes wrong, without ever having read

her responses. For some reason, it seemed that Dr. Álvarez had it out for her from the very beginning.

Even the SA program team member had to admit that Dr. Álvarez's behavior was excessive, and felt that she should have tried harder to hide her poor opinion of Theresa. In an interview this same team member commented,

She couldn't hide the her how should I say that? no odio sino her mania (*not her hatred but her obsession*), disagreement with the student. She couldn't hide that. Sometimes you need to be, you know, to pretend.

Learning as Vygotsky conceptualized it did not take place here because Theresa was not exactly a resourceful student, her attitude was not conducive to learning, and more specifically she was not working within her zone of proximal development. The classes that were offered in Colovo were far above her proficiency level. It also cannot be said that Dr. Álvarez and Theresa made an effort to compensate for this gap or collaborated on tasks so that the responsibility for learning was mutually shared. Neither Dr. Álvarez nor Theresa ever cited any example of how they took on more responsibility and initiative for directing and accomplishing specific tasks. Perhaps Theresa would have profited from working with a teacher who provided more individualized assistance in helping understand and learn the class material that was too hard for Theresa. However, the profile itself of an academically uncommitted and disengaged student like Theresa did not allow actual learning to take place as agency, or lack of it, is critical. In addition to looking at the assistance Theresa did not receive or seek from Dr. Álvarez, another line of analysis is observing that Theresa did not request assistance from more experienced language users such as her peers, more capable classmates, the SA program team members, who also functioned as language tutors, or native speakers from the local community. From a SCT perspective, learning is a social process, i.e., it takes place through interaction with others, and it

is particularly effective when learners work toward a joint goal in a task-directed activity (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998, 1991).

#### Who is challenging who?

Theresa and Dr. Álvarez clearly did not like each other and were incapable of hiding their feelings, as described by an SA program team member in the program daily journal: “La reacción de Dr. Alvarez me muestra el odio mutuo que ambas se tienen” (*Dr. Alvarez’s reaction shows the mutual hatred that they feel for each other*). Their hostile attitude toward each other led to an open conflict in class, a conflict that in many aspects resembled a clash of cultural expectations.

To understand the nature of such conflict, it is useful to discuss the concept of procedural display (Bloome, Puro, and Theodorou, 1989) as well as some cultural underpinnings of discourse (Gumperz, 1982). One way of understanding the behavior appropriate for the classroom is Bloome et al.’s concept of procedural display. Their perspective on classroom behavior views lessons “not so much as a way to teach/learn academic content or as a way to transmit/acquire a set of values (though lessons may do both), but rather, we see lessons as a particular set of cultural events” (p. 267). Bloome et al. define procedural display as “the display by the teacher and students, to each other, of a set of academic and interactional procedures that themselves count as the accomplishment of a lesson” (p. 272). The rules of this classroom game between students and teacher are never explained. Each student learns a specific set of rules throughout their schooling in their own native society, while teachers who have grown up in a different culture may have learned a different set of rules. As a result, they may be unable to engage in appropriate procedural display, and conflicts and misunderstandings may occur.



To understand how misunderstanding and miscommunication between interlocutors can arise it is useful to consider the socio-cultural underpinnings of discourse. John Gumperz (1982) focused on the participants' personal background knowledge, or cultural artifacts using a SCT notion, their attitudes toward each other, and the socio-cultural assumptions concerning their role and status. He noted that such features are critical in discourse, and described several instances of miscommunication at the intersection of cultures between interlocutors using different contextual criteria and cultural artifacts for making sense of their conversation. In other words, Theresa and Dr. Álvarez related their class interactions and dynamics to the cultural artifacts that they inherited growing up, and misunderstanding and conflicts arose as their experiences sharply diverged, as illustrated in the following sections.

*Is Dr. Álvarez the challenger?*

In an informal meeting in the SA office, Theresa complained that she could not talk to Dr. Álvarez because she was rude, impolite, and arrogant, and her attitude with her was intimidating. In her diary Theresa wrote "That lady is a bitch." She reported that Dr. Álvarez would single her out in class, call on her, and challenge her with remarks such as <<Theresa, which planet are you on? Are you with us? What does this word mean? Why do not you ask me if you do not know what it means?>> Theresa found that Dr. Álvarez's comments were hurtful and embarrassing, as she commented in an email:

I felt that the remarks that were made in front of the entire class were cutting, disparaging, or condescending. I left class day after day feeling hurt, discouraged, and confused. The embarrassment alone, was enough to have me dreading the next class in fear of the cutting remarks.

Theresa did not understand what she had done to deserve such treatment from her professor as her relationship with her other two Spanish teachers was not problematic. In an email Theresa reported,

the other students ((in the class)) on their own time and without being asked came out of concern for the class as a whole, to discuss the uncomfortable environment and awkward tension/ feeling that was felt while the verbal abuse took place in Dr. Álvarez's Classroom.

It was apparent to Theresa and to the class that Dr. Álvarez did not treat all students the same way, did not evaluate them equally, and had a preference for certain students in the class with better academic abilities and performances. Theresa went to talk to an SA program team member to report this unequal treatment, as per the SA program journal:

((Theresa)) cree que la Dra. Álvarez la ha tomado con ella, porque nota una actitud extraña hacia ella que no nota con otros de sus compañeros. [...] Entre sus quejas, también ha mencionado que todos los demás estudiantes tienen permiso de la Dra. Álvarez para saltarse la clase por irse de viaje, pero que ella sabe que no lo tendría. De hecho no falta a clase porque sabe que a ella sí la castigará y que otros han faltado a clase y han quedado totalmente impunes. Además, otros estudiantes se duermen en clase o hablan, pero Dr. Álvarez no les dice nada.

*Theresa believes that Dr. Álvarez had something against her because Dr. Álvarez has a weird attitude towards her that she does not have with her other classmates. [...] Among Theresa's complaints, she also mentioned that the rest of the students have Dr. Álvarez's permission to skip class to go travelling ((on Fridays)), but she knows that she would not be allowed to do that. In fact, she does not miss class because she knows that if she does she will be punished. Instead, other students did skip class but they did not get punished. Also, other students fall asleep in class or talk, but Dr. Álvarez says nothing to them.*

The SA program team member that addressed Theresa's concern had to admit that it was not the first time that she had heard students commenting on Dr. Álvarez's unequal treatment towards students whose class performance and abilities were below average. The same SA program team member wrote in the SA program journal that "esta actitud ya me la comentaron estudiantes del semestre pasado con respecto a Kelly" (*other students from the previous semester had already commented on this attitude of Dr. Álvarez's towards Kelly, a low-performance student in Dr. Álvarez's class*).

I would argue that there is more going on here than a simple student – teacher clash. In fact, it is in part a clash of cultural expectations. From a SCT perspective, humans inherit,

modify, and pass on cultural artifacts that mediate all our activities. Throughout her schooling, Theresa inherited the idea that professors and instructors are expected to treat students the same way and show no preference regardless of their students' class performance, academic and intellectual abilities, background, and physical appearance. When it comes down to grading and assessing their students' progress in the class, they are required to be fair and unbiased. As an SA program team member stated in an interview,

You need to treat all of the students the same way. You're not [...] everybody's gonna notice it you know because I mean everybody noticed it, even the ones who were on the teachers' side they noticed the weird relationship between Dr. Álvarez and Theresa. Of course they blamed it on Theresa. They noticed I mean you aren't supposed to notice every day in class.

American professors also tend to be direct when making positive statements but generally express disagreement, conflict, or negative statements more indirectly (Braxley, 2004). In explaining the source of cultural clashes in classroom discourse between international graduate students and their US professors, Braxley pointed out that for most Americans indirect language is preferred (i.e., << I don't think you are right>>) and even false praise (<<I find your ideas interesting, but...>>), while more direct phrases seem rude or confrontational. Based on these cultural artifacts, Theresa and her classmates probably expected her professors in Spain to avoid any kind of blatant student - teacher confrontation or criticism, particularly in public and much less in front of the whole class. Yet, this expectation may not hold in classrooms in other cultures. For example, Pellegrino Aveni (2005) analyzed the social environmental cues in a classroom setting with US students in Russia. For her, when US students abroad receive open criticism in class, this may reduce the students' sense of security in the presence of their instructor. Instead of trying to reach out to their professors and build a constructive dialogue with them, Pellegrino Aveni argued that US students usually opt to cut the class and to condemn the

teacher for his/her abrupt style, insulting feedback, and harsh correction. Rebecca, a US student in Pellegrino Aveni's study, blamed her instructor for the state of her speaking abilities and performances.

It is possible that Dr. Álvarez was purposely cutting with Theresa in her classroom manner. However, Pellegrino Aveni (2005) prompted us to also consider the possibility that this approach can be interpreted from within a system in which the teacher's own role and authority is understood differently from the way US students view it. In other words, this intercultural clash, or "rich point" in Agar's term (1994), may have been not only about Dr. Álvarez's direct remarks and criticism. If her style was perceived as harsh by some of her US students, this may also be because in the US learners are accustomed to instructional interactions and dynamics where an egalitarian culture encourages teachers to minimize the status differences between themselves and students, avoid overt criticism, and to praise students for their outcomes and accomplishments even when they have been co-constructed with the help of the teacher (Poole, 1992). Moreover, Pellegrino Aveni pointed out that in the US it is against the privacy law to publicly share any deed related to the students' academic history and performance, or to display their grades, records, and academic achievements. In an email, an SA program team member also emphasized how Theresa's cultural artifacts clashed with the Spanish academic environment: "Spanish professors today in the United States tend to be themselves the product of student-focused, communicative teaching methods, whereas Spanish university education has traditionally emphasized the lecture format and calibrated grades based on a final examination." Theresa might have expected her professors to focus on their individual students' learning and progress, and to play the role of "caretakers" (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005), supportive guides, and compassionate mentors. Instead, Dr. Álvarez did not exactly act like a caring caretaker focused

on the students' success at any cost. She relied on formal results and exam grades to assess her students' class performance, as reported by an SA program team member in the program journal: "Theresa lo tiene muy difícil para aprobar en su clase porque ha sacado un 1,5 en su examen" (*It will be very hard for Theresa to pass her class since she got a 1,5/10 in the exam*).

*Is Theresa the challenger?*

While Dr. Álvarez called attention to Theresa in class and was intentionally hurtful, Theresa was never a vulnerable or defenseless target of Dr. Álvarez's comments and remarks. Instead, Theresa promptly challenged her teacher's authority and power, and perhaps it was in part because Dr. Álvarez was a young professor at Ucevo. In an informal conversation with Dr. Alvarez I found out that, when addressed by her professor, Theresa would reply with an arrogant tone in English <<I don't know>> or in Spanish <<Sí sí sí>> (*yes yes yes*). As reported in the SA program journal, Dr. Álvarez also complained to the SA program team that "Theresa se ha pasado la clase sin hacer nada, poniéndose crema en las manos, tocándose el pelo, mirando al techo" (*In class Theresa did nothing but put lotion on her hands, touch her hair, and look at the ceiling*). Likewise, Dr. Álvarez recalled one day when Theresa slammed her exam sheet on her professor's desk and left the room very upset at the end of the class although Dr. Álvarez had requested to talk to her. One of Theresa's classmate confirmed that Theresa was far from being an exemplary student in class, and on top of this she did not show much respect towards her teacher.

In sum, Dr. Álvarez claimed that she had never met any student like Theresa before, despite her extensive experience with US college students abroad. Dr. Álvarez appeared to have taken personally some of Theresa's remarks and behaviors in class. Dr. Álvarez's words and behavior indicated that she might have felt disrespected, offended, irritated, and hurt by the fact

that Theresa challenged her authority and image in front of the rest of the class. In an interview, an SA program team member reported,

She ((Theresa)) challenged her professor so I guess that of course a teacher doesn't like when a when a student comes to her in front of the class it's like you don't like that. You don't like the attitude of the student in your class because you think that's your territory and you try to: to: be smooth with all students, to be polite, to be civilized in class. You want them to participate, you want them to learn. When one student doesn't learn, doesn't participate in the class, this student criticizes your class in front of the class instead of telling you apart or when she gives you the exam.

For SCT, the cultural artifacts that Dr. Álvarez acquired over the years deeply shaped the interpretation of her role, responsibilities, and prerogatives as university professor teaching foreigner students. Thus, to explore Dr. Álvarez's cultural artifacts, I looked back at her schooling. Dr. Álvarez had all her education in Spain where she also did her graduate studies and earned her PhD. Unlike Dr. Álvarez, Theresa's two other Spanish professors had done their graduate studies in the same Southeastern university sponsoring the SA program in Colovo, where they also taught Spanish to US undergraduates. It is also important to note that on a personal level Dr. Álvarez was far from crabby or easily irritated. She seemed to me a very approachable and accessible professor, unlike some other colleagues of hers from Ucevo with whom I interacted. She treated me more as a colleague than as a graduate student. She insisted that I address her using the informal *tú* form of address, she supported me and showed interest in my research project, and invited me to observe her class any time I wanted.

Like the Russian teacher described by Pellegrino Aveni (2005), Spanish faculty members typically express remarks and comments on their students' progress or participation in front of the class, and they occasionally challenge them. I have also noticed it in my own experience as a researcher in Spain and before that as an SA student in Italy, Germany, and France. Spanish professors may openly criticize or compare students in the class with other students. Episodes of

favoritism in class are not totally uncommon. Tenure-track professors are seen as authority figures who generally remain unchallenged in class when they deliver their sermons. Students are accustomed to accepting any comment from their professor without feeling personally targeted, offended, singled out, or discriminated against. Pavlenko (1999) prompted us to view this faculty members' attitude and overt criticism in the classrooms in the light of the public/private dimension of social life, i.e., a crucial difference from the corresponding cultural and codified legal notions and ideas informing US students' mentality. More research illustrates that in other cultures, for example in the Korean culture, teacher–student interactions are consistent with hierarchism (Byon, 2004; 2006; Sohn, 1986), i.e., Korean teachers in Korean-as-a-foreign-language classrooms try to stress the status differences and power differences between themselves and students. This concept confirms that expectations for appropriate classroom discourse and behaviors are culturally defined and that SA experiences are profoundly shaped by the interaction between the cultural artifacts of US students and those of their Spanish educators. As suggested by Bloome et al. (1989) and Gumperz (1982), the misunderstanding and conflicts arisen between Theresa and Dr. Álvarez stemmed from their sharply diverging experiences and cultural artifacts.

#### “I'm Not Learning Anything. I Want My Money Back”

The student and teacher clash worsened when Theresa earned a grade of 1,5/10 in the midterm exam, which was worth 20% of the final grade in her class and corresponded to an F in the home institution. Theresa claimed that Dr. Álvarez did not even correct her exam. Instead, she simply drew a red line across Theresa's answers on the exam sheet. Dr. Álvarez claimed that she did indeed read Theresa's responses but did not re-write them correctly because the whole test needed to be re-written, and Theresa should have known where to locate the right answers in

the course material. For Theresa Dr. Álvarez was not doing her job, and she complained to the SA program team. In my field notes I reported Theresa stating that she was not going to learn if Dr. Álvarez did not correct her exam and was not teaching her. Theresa insisted that she was not getting the education she was paying for, and she wanted her money back. Likewise, an SA program team member recalled in an interview that “Theresa complained in the office that she wasn’t learning anything:: that Dad paid a lot of money for this program and for her to learn and she wasn’t learning ANYTHING.”

From a SCT perspective, the cultural artifact that Theresa inherited and that mediated her expression of entitlement to be reimbursed is perhaps the capitalist notion of value for money, and of education as a commodity to be purchased, that has recently overtaken US higher education within SA programs and undergraduates’ understanding of international education. In an email, Theresa wrote that “We ((Theresa and her US friend)) traveled to Dubai, Oman, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine ((after the SA program in Spain)). We learned in two months what one would not learn in 23 years of the best education money could buy in the states.” Based on this capitalist notion, when one pays for SA courses and professors, one expects in return assistance and services that are commensurate with the monetary value of such courses. Here students expect to be treated like clients: ‘satisfaction guaranteed or your money back’ is a common refrain reinforced in the media as well. Along this line, it can be said that Spaniards may perceive foreign language instructors in the US as taking the students by the hand, nurturing them, taking responsibility for their learning process, making sure that they understand the material, and co-constructing their results, as Poole (1992) indicated, and as I noticed myself the first year of teaching in the US after receiving an education in Europe. At times failing a student may seem for foreign language instructors in the US a tough decision to make or the last resort,



as reported in an email by an SA professor educated both in Spain and in the US: “Un instructor en EEUU tiene mucha más presión para no suspender a un estudiante que un instructor español. [...] En EEUU suspender parece un castigo extremo sólo para aquellos que "se lo han ganado" con méritos” (*An instructor in the US has a lot more pressure for not failing a student than an instructor in Spain. [...] In the US failing a course seems to be an extreme punishment only for those who really deserved it*).

Theresa’s interpretation of education as a commodity to be purchased perhaps explains why the idea of failing Dr. Álvarez’s course did not cross Theresa’s mind despite her low grades and poor performance in the class. After a meeting with Theresa, the SA program team reported in the program journal what follows:

Theresa llegó quejándose de la clase y Federica le preguntó cómo se sentiría si suspendiera la clase. Dice que Theresa en ningún momento se le había pasado por la cabeza suspender. Federica le recuerda que tiene un 1.5/10 y un 4/10 en unas notas de la clase y ella dice que si suspende su padre va a estar muy enfadado con Gareg, sobre todo porque ha pagado por una educación que ella no está recibiendo. Además, no ha pagado para que la traten así.

*Theresa came to complain about Dr. Álvarez’s class and Federica asked her how she would feel if she failed her class. At no point had the thought of failing the class crossed Theresa’s mind. Federica reminded her that she earned a 1.5/10 and a 4/10. Theresa said that if she fails her dad is going to be very upset with Gareg, especially because he has paid for an education that she is not getting. Moreover, he has not paid for her daughter to be treated like that in class.*

In her mind Theresa was trying hard in Dr. Álvarez’s class, she was making a reasonable effort to show up for class even on Friday mornings after partying all night, and to complete and turn in all assignment in a timely fashion, i.e., three important requirements that needed to be met in order to pass the course. In other words, Theresa felt entitled to get what she had paid for: the three credits for the class.

“Do I Have To Give Her a Passing Grade Just Because  
She Pays for Sitting in My Class?”

Dr. Alvarez's did not feel that Theresa deserved to pass her course simply because she had paid for the class and the program. As stated in the syllabus and course description, Dr. Alvarez expected the students in her class to be committed to learning and understanding the class material, to perform satisfactorily in the exams and course assignments, to attend class in an attitude conducive to learning, and to participate. For Dr. Alvarez, Theresa did not meet any of these expectations, which resulted in the student not receiving the credits for the class. In an informal conversation, Dr. Alvarez told me that giving a passing grade to Theresa would be an insult to the rest of the class whose performance and abilities were much higher. Likewise, in an email that Dr. Álvarez sent me after the end of the program, she restated that Theresa's low competence level in Spanish, poor performance, and lack of effort and motivation were critical reasons that led her to fail Theresa: “¿Cómo valoramos a los demás estudiantes si aprobamos al que no sabe, no se esfuerza y muestra un nulo interés?” (*how do we credit the rest of the students if we give a passing grade to someone who doesn't know the material, doesn't make any effort, and doesn't show any interest?*). In the same email, Dr. Álvarez commented on another issue playing against Theresa, i.e., Theresa's arrogance towards her professor, and the fact that she never requested to meet with her for assistance: “No solo no pidió jamás ayuda, sino que en la clase se dedicaba a evitar el diálogo directo conmigo” (*She never asked for help, and on top of this she avoided any direct dialogue with me in class*).

Based on the cultural artifacts that I have acquired growing up in Europe until my early twenties, on my experience as an SA university student in Italy, France, and Germany, and on my observations as a researcher in Spain, I would argue that in Europe it is common to meet

tenure-track university professors like Dr. Álvarez who are demanding as to their course material, and who have a reputation for failing students at written as well as oral examinations. Failing a student in the class usually indicates that the professor has assessed his/her efforts and results as being insufficient, inadequate, or incommensurate with the academic value of the course. A Spanish professor in Colovo confirmed this perception in an email saying that “suspender, de hecho, no es visto por un profesor español como algo extremadamente negativo sino como el resultado de la falta de trabajo (o simplemente de comprensión de la materia) del estudiante” (*actually in Spain failing a student is not interpreted by the professor as something very negative. Rather, it is the result of the student’ lack of work or simply lack of comprehension of the course material*).

#### The Multiple Therasas

Because of these diverse and multiple perspectives brought into this study, we see different images of Theresa. We have the descriptions and perceptions of the people around her, the diary that she maintained while abroad, and her emails upon return to the US where she tried to draw a different image of herself. Her identity and the way she portrayed herself, consciously and unconsciously, appear to be at times rather contradictory and ambivalent. So far we have seen her as an individual who has been through a lot of emotional stress due to the loss of an immediate family member and her conflictive relationship with Dr. Álvarez. She also comes across as a kind of Paris Hilton doing study abroad (i.e., the ugly, out of control American abroad), as well as the world traveler Theresa thirsty for new adventures and fortuitous encounters with people from all over the world. Does her attitude in class stem from arrogance, frustration, or fear because she is in an impossible position? We are torn between disgust and sympathy, disapproval and solidarity. In the rest of this chapter, I will use SCT to dig deeper into

Theresa's actions, perceptions and behavior, and shed light on her multidimensional subjectivities and positioning, and how it impacted her classroom experiences and SA sojourn.

*Paris Hilton Doing Study Abroad in the Grand Tour Tradition*

A fundamental assumption of SCT, and of this dissertation, is that all our actions are mediated by semiotic cultural tools, or artifacts. Such tools include discursive resources and naturalized ideologies circulating in US society that SA participants use to make sense of events and experiences. Most students understand their SA experiences based on their habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) as young, typically middle-class Americans who have been exposed to such discourses and ideologies. Gore (2005) undertook a challenging study to uncover the ideological and historical roots of beliefs about SA in the US, and analyzed the discourse in American international education. Gore investigated how “a constellation of dominant beliefs has coalesced to form an episteme held by the U.S. higher education community” (p. 23). Within the dominant discourse “study abroad programs are perceived as attracting wealthy women to academically weak European programs established in a frivolous Grand Tour tradition” (p. 24). Associating SA to the Grand Tour tradition equals to interpret it as a leisure time and a vacation to main cities and sites abroad, a presumably significant experience to complete someone's education. Instead, the academic aspects of the SA program are considered as vacuous, requiring minimal efforts and dedication on the part of students, leaving them with a lot of free time, light workload, and little resource to occupy their mind, cultivate their interests, and engage in language learning and significant interactions within the host culture and society. Likewise, SA is a parenthesis from reality and from the business of academic achievement, a decorative touch on the education of elite women. The supposed academic weakness of SA is perpetuated by questionable prejudicial attitudes inferring that SA offers a non professional course of study

which is inferior to American education, and that the best teachers are to be found in the US. Gore also uncovered an alternative discourse about SA emerging in the post-9/11 era. Based on this alternative discourse SA does provide students with a strong education, academic training and preparation by way of the liberal curriculum that are unmatched in the US. Students going abroad can significantly contribute to global understanding, respect, tolerance, and peace, and they can learn to face challenges and resolve differences in a quest for educational experiences that are unavailable at home. Theresa's behavior suggests that she belongs to a generation of college students whose interpretation of SA leans toward the dominant discourses identified by Gore; i.e., SA attracting rich women who perceive it as a decorative add-on to their elite education; SA as a vacation and a break from academic stress; SA as leisure and an opportunity to party hard away from the parents.

Theresa's lifestyle, daily routine, dress code, social behavior, and travelling habits within and outside of Spain suggested that she grew up in an upper-middle class family and social environment, which seemed that her class had impacted the perception and impression that people had of her. In an email she reported,

They ((people)) judge me..."a little, rich white girl, from the suburbs, whose father is now Alderman". People may think I'm spoiled, ignorant, and that "Daddy" will fix my problems. They probably think that I do not have a mind of my own and that I certainly have no time to think about important global issues, much less International Business (Spanish Business).

By and large Theresa framed her SA sojourn in the Grand Tour tradition: a unique and once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for extensive group travel around Europe and the Middle East, partying, shopping and bar hopping, and meeting new people from all over the world. In her diary, Theresa listed the various destinations, sights, adventures, and encounters lived with her fellow US friends. During the SA program Theresa reported that she went to Madrid and Toledo with

the SA group during the first days of the program. Then, she went to Alicante, Requena, and Castellón, located next to Colovo. In addition, she went to the south of Spain, and visited the cities of Cádiz and Seville. She flew to Italy (Milan, Rome, and Venice), Greece (Athens, Naxos, and Santorini), Paris, and Amsterdam. What facilitated Theresa's busy travel agenda was the extreme ease of mobility and the access to low cost flights connecting European and world capitals, as well as the generous budget that she was granted from her parents. In an email Theresa commented that "after wrapping up my courses in Colovo, my bestfriend of 20 years and I were granted an amazing opportunity from our parents to travel around Europe for two months." After the SA program in Spain Theresa and her best friend also travelled to Dubai, Oman, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine.

It seemed, however, that Theresa did not seek SA for academic learning or integrating into the host community. In Dr. Álvarez's class, like in the other classes, Theresa did not participate. She did not ask for my help or the other SA program team member despite her professors' recommendations and her very modest academic results. Instead, she tried to spend the least possible time in preparing for class, as reported in the program journal by an SA program team member: "((Theresa)) se niega a dedicar más tiempo del que ha dedicado hoy a esa clase porque hace que le duela el estómago" (*Theresa refuses to devote more time to Dr. Álvarez's class than what she has spent today because it makes her sick to the stomach*).

Theresa's apparent association of overseas education with vacation, and her failure to take the academic component of SA seriously, unfortunately also manifested in academic dishonesty. I caught her cheating during Dr. Álvarez's final exam. She copied part of a business letter that Dr. Álvarez had announced as being part of the final from her cell phone onto her exam sheet. An SA program team member reported the incident in the program journal:

A las 9.00, los estudiantes toman el examen de la clase de Dr. Álvarez. Federica vigila el examen, ya que Dr. Álvarez no iba a venir. A las 9.20 recibo un mensaje al móvil de Federica diciendo lo siguiente: “Theresa copiaba algo del móvil creo. Ahora está en mis manos. Quieres mirarlo?”

*At 9.00am the students took Dr. Álvarez’s final exam. Federica supervised the exam because Dr. Álvarez was not going to be there. At 9.20am I ((an SA program team member)) received a text message on my cell phone from Federica saying what follows: “Theresa was copying something from her cell phone, I believe. I have her cell phone in my hands now. Do you want to have a look at it?”*

In all, Theresa tied SA to leisure, tourism, and entertainment rather than focusing on L2 learning and contact with locals. Theresa’s experience abroad was interspersed with an intense agenda of diversion activities and a densely packed catalogue of short-term social engagements and appreciations of Culture (intentionally with capital C as it is the institutionalized Culture), mostly in the company of other fellow Anglophones engaging in English-mediated activities. She had a laptop computer to stay in touch with her family and friends through the internet; she had visits when she was in Spain; she shopped extensively; she participated in outings to bars, dance clubs, and restaurants; she partied and drunk heavily; she took part in several group trips; and she went to music concerts, to the bullfight, and to a professional soccer game. Her diary during the program shows that she was approaching her experience largely as a tourist who looked at a new culture from the outside.

Theresa might have been an extreme case, but she was far from alone in her SA behavior and mindset. They are common in a generation of college students who embrace the dominant discourses about SA as described by Gore (2005), and associate SA with break from academic rigor, leisure and entertainment at the expense of wealthy sponsoring parents in a world that they view as a big enchanting Fantasyland.

### *A Strong Cohort Effect*

While Theresa's teachers might have viewed her as a difficult student, her peers generally regarded her favorably. Theresa built a close-knit camaraderie, strong solidarity, and group cohesion within her US cohort that were reinforced during common trips around Spain and Europe, their social time and hectic schedule of get-togethers in Colovo. When Theresa started to have classroom conflicts with Dr. Álvarez, a few of them closed ranks around her. As a result Theresa reported in an email,

I developed a strong personal network of friends who were diverse in nature from quiet to loud to studious to wild; these compassionate, caring, and self sacrificing individuals together represented a unified community offering strength and support. After the first couple classes I no longer felt alone or isolated even though the comments continued I felt safe because my community stood behind me. Although the day-to-day struggle continued with Dr. Álvarez it was no longer one I had face alone. The network of support that I relied on everyday provided me with the strength to bravely face a challenging and uncertain atmosphere. This feeling of unity that stood behind me when attending the class is a feeling I wouldn't trade for anything.

This strong Americanized community of practice, that for Magnan and Back (2007) impedes students' language acquisition, is not surprising as Theresa belongs to a generation of SA programs that tend to indoctrinate participants into a strong cohort effect as early as during orientation sessions. Coleman (1997) pointed out that at the level of program design US SA programs "generally envisage the short-term transfer of cohesive groups of American students to a different geographical base, where they may benefit from formal (classroom) and informal (naturalistic) language learning but without necessarily abandoning an American educational framework and academic support" (p. 1). In such a setting, US students tend to stand behind, and rely on, each other for social and psychological support, and they hang together no matter what their behavior is (Isabelli-García, 2006; Kline, 1998; Twombly, 1995). Several programs do not emphasize the importance of engagement in, and interaction with, the host society (Ogden, 2007)



while other programs explicitly downplay language and culture learning (Levin, 1999).

However, for Kinginger (2008c), the most modest achievers are generally those SA students who embrace the dominant discourse as identified by Gore (2005), i.e., students “who find themselves unable or unwilling to surmount the difficulties posed by a globalized SA experience” (p. 3).

### *Enhanced Egocentrism*

In the end, Theresa seemed to interpret the value of her SA experience not in terms of the program’s overt goals of increased Spanish proficiency and cultural understanding and integration, but rather in light of what she learned about herself. Five months after the end of the SA program, Theresa told me in an email that the trip was life changing for her:

Ultimately getting to experience the world and other cultures and people and behaviors is the only way to understand yourself, which i gained from the trip. [...] the trip did wonders for me, i grew in ways i never could have imagined before, the journey brought me face to face with myself, and in order for that to occur it brings challenges. I was also able to define something to me that has always been a question and am still currently working on it, which is my faith. that's essentially summed up what i gained from the trip.

Notable here that Theresa did not mention Spanish, nor did she mention anything about what she had learned about Spanish society and culture; the intense political campaign taking place at the time of her stay for the election of the new national government; or the heavy presence of international students and of immigrants in Spain, as well as their socio-cultural and economical impact in Spanish society. Instead, she focused on what she had learned about herself using the first-person pronoun twelve times in the excerpt above. The observations of cultural phenomena and experiences that Theresa reported in her diary, and the comments on her numerous trips, do not display much critical analysis on her part (“Spanish hair – Rattails of dread and every kind of mullet you can ever imagine”; “the town of swords – AWSOME” referring to Toledo). Rather, they provide an eloquent example of American individualism and the egocentrism of a privileged American college student. Unfortunately, by interpreting her experiences abroad as a self-

discovery journey, she saw disconnected to, and disengaged from, the socio-cultural context where she was living. The perspectives of the people with whom Theresa interacted were absent.

*Globalization, Capitalism, and English As Lingua Mundi*

Another fundamental assumption of SCT is that every phenomenon must be studied in its historical and socio-cultural context. This section introduces some themes identified in Theresa's story that are traceable to the socio-historical backdrop of foreign language learning abroad by US students and to their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) as young, upper/middle-class Americans. These themes are also related to the contemporary impact of globalization, capitalism, and consumerism, phenomena that are changing the way in which foreign languages are learned and taught (Block & Cameron, 2002).

For one thing, globalization has intensified the predominance of the English language and culture. Therefore, US students are increasingly able to use their own language in the settings they frequent when they go abroad. Theresa spent the majority of her time speaking English not only with her US cohort but also with local and international people residing in Colovo, and with other people that she met in her numerous trips. The clash between Theresa and Dr. Álvarez was aggravated by the fact that Theresa spoke English in class to peers and when she replied to her professor. Theresa also gravitated towards American ex-patriot cultural events while she was in Spain. For instance, she watched the Super Bowl and celebrated Saint Patrick's Day at a local bar in Colovo where several people from the US and UK regularly congregated. Without any doubt, English was a powerful cultural tool that Theresa was able to draw upon consistently and widely in these environments, making knowledge of Spanish language and culture perhaps seem unnecessary, and the role of foreign language study rather marginal, as Kubota (2002) suggests. It is all too common for students like Theresa to encounter situations abroad in which target

language interlocutors prefer to interact in English with native speakers of the language in order to practice and improve their competence in English, and express interest in the Anglo-Saxon culture. Unless highly motivated and committed to language and culture learning, an SA student like Theresa may rarely locate contexts for second language use, and may also struggle to enter local networks of target language people where L2 is spoken and L2 mediated activities are performed.

Theresa's financial means allowed her to travel extensively within and outside of Spain during and after the SA program. However, ironically enough, those very resources that allowed her to have an intense travel agenda of diversion activities to various cities, sites, events, and monuments, also left her virtually no time for language learning or study of any kind. It also took her away from establishing durable contacts with the local community in Colovo, and it prevented her from getting to know in depth the target language people, or the cultural manifestations that were typical of their city.

Theresa's privileged socio-economic background and identity also made it easier for her to reject cultural experiences with which she felt uncomfortable. For example, while youth hostels are often sites where cultures come together, they are also rather spartan. Thus, Theresa found the hostel she stayed at in Barcelona to be smelly, moldy, and dirty, and she claimed that she got congested and infected by a fungus, as reported in her diary: "Never stay at youth hotel in Barcelona. As a result got sick because of mold, dust, and just unsanitary conditions. This hostel looked exactly like prison." Theresa likewise rejected local food, and given a globalized landscape interspersed with American food, Disney icons, Starbucks cafes, and McDonalds, she was able to avoid dorm food almost entirely. In her diary she reported that she nourished herself with candies, chips, macaroni and cheese, and big Macs:

The food that we are served in the dorm is beyond life threatening. Every day the lunch ladies try to sell us some garbage that they literally fish out of the dumpster. [...] In my room I have a drawer full of candies and a shelf reserved for food (peanut butter, jelly bread, chips, bbq sauce, etc. [...]) Kbobs are nasty. They smell and they just suck.

In all, Theresa's case illustrates the accelerated spread of capitalism, the global "cultural supermarket" (Mathews, 2000), and the consumerist approach to education and international experiences, as interpreted by Block and Cameron (2002) and Falk and Kanach (2000), and Mathews (2000), that have rapidly impacted US undergraduates' perception of SA and the value of language and culture learning. Students like Theresa have learned to view travel as consumption of 'globalized infotainment' and to see the world as one big and homogenized entertainment shopping experience that provides "an exotic fantasy playground to moneyed consumers" (Kinging 2008b, p. 252). One may wonder to what extent globalization as a disenchanting process leading to a uniformity of our lives can distance students from the authentic experience of SA.

#### *Theresa the Ventriloquist?*

There is no doubt that the academic semester in Spain was tough for Teresa, as it was for Dr. Álvarez, and that both of them were unhappy in class. However, when I contacted Theresa for this study a few months upon returning to the US, she sent me three long emails at different intervals where she seemed to be ventriloquating the language of SA brochures and videos celebrating the glory and the magic of SA as an unparalleled educational experience:

After five months after the trip ended i ultimately felt it ((SA)) provided me with an education that could not be learned or bought in the united states or me staying in the us. [...] Studying with Gareg program opened the doors I never knew existed. If I hadn't studied with Gareg I wouldn't be who i am today, and i couldn't thank Gareg more for opening my eyes to a world i only knew through history books.

Although Theresa insisted on how SA enhances your understanding and opens your world view, there was limited evidence in her words, I believe, of actual participating in that discourse. In

fact, they read like a stream of unconnected thoughts patched together. A closer look at Theresa's words revealed that she was actually ventriloquating the language used in various websites that I could easily locate and that were designed to attract students to SA, share travel stories, or reflect on personal growth and understanding through travelling. It is possible that through her emails Theresa wanted to convince me that she was 'self-actualized' despite the fact that she did not engage with the target language and culture while abroad. In other words, her approach was a rather generic and consumerist orientation to travelling, a 'travel is good no matter what' approach. The following words seem to have been taken quasi-verbatim from a website on spiritual diversification (see below for the url):

My Personal growth is seen written throughout the letter, my individual awareness, testing theories, and learning through others [...] I opened my soul to finding inspiration from a great cache of locations, individuals, texts, and methods. [...] I learned from a variety of sources to listen to others without prejudice, welcoming new ideas, and seeking out guidance from novel sources.

[http://noolmusic.com/blogs/Randomnessa\\_Spiritual\\_Diversification.shtml](http://noolmusic.com/blogs/Randomnessa_Spiritual_Diversification.shtml)

There are many more similar instances of Theresa's ventriloquation. Some parts of her emails were taken quasi-verbatim from the website of the International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT) stressing the value of travelling and coming in contact with other cultures. Below I only have provided the first lines of a longer excerpt:

I Learned a truly aware traveler sees each new journey as an opportunity to improve international relations, spread goodness, and gain a greater understanding of humanity. To immerse yourself in foreign cultures is to open your mind to fresh ways of being...

<http://www.iipt.org/travelstory.htm>

Theresa ventriloquated the Libra horoscope of July 1, 2008 entitled "Widening Boundaries" taken from the daily OM Nurturing Mind Body & Spirit website. The words chosen emphasize the importance of travelling as a way to expand one's horizons: "Adventure takes us out of our

everyday lives and thrusts us into unfamiliar but ultimately educational and eye-opening situations...” (<http://www.dailyom.com/articles/2/2008/14047.html>).

Theresa kept regurgitating other people’s words. Her attention though turned to her conflicting experience with Dr. Álvarez and her feeling of having been unfairly judged by her professor as a spoiled, ignorant, and rich American girl. Below are the words that Theresa copied as appeared in the Newsvine in a section entitled ‘judgmental error’:

It's difficult to live in this world of stereotyping/Judging. Stereotyping/Judging, (Relating it to Dr. Álvarez’s class,(Female to Female)) I realized was one of my biggest issues that I lived with everyday. Though it is human to evaluate people we encounter based on first impressions, the conclusions we come to are seldom unaffected by our own fears and our own preconceptions...  
[http://world-news.newsvine.com/\\_news/2009/02/05/2397276-pregnant-tourist-abducted-killed-in-puerto-ric](http://world-news.newsvine.com/_news/2009/02/05/2397276-pregnant-tourist-abducted-killed-in-puerto-ric)

Ironically enough, some of the words further down in this excerpt seem to originally belong to Mother Theresa, as per the daily OM website under ‘judging others’:

As we seldom know what roads people have traveled before a shared encounter or why they have come into our lives, we should always give those we meet the gift of an open heart. Doing so allows us to replace fear-based criticism with appreciation because we can then focus wholeheartedly on the spark of good that burns in all human souls.  
<http://www.dailyom.com/articles/2007/8593.html>

Socially-oriented scholars of language such as Bakhtin (1986) discussed the concept of textual originality and argued that our voices are not our own but come to us from others, i.e., our utterances are filled with others’ words. When examined in this light, Theresa’s multiple textual borrowings are a normal practice. I also find Bakhtin’s discussion of ventriloquation and authoritative discourse (1981) to be useful here to understand Theresa’s appropriation of others’ words. He defined ventriloquation as a form of multivoicedness where the voice of another, often the voice of authority, is ventriloquated by another. Examples of authoritative voices (or discourses) are “religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers etc.” (p.

342). It is possible that Theresa realized that she was in an impossible situation. She was not in position of authority, she was perceived by the people around her as a disengaged student both intellectually and academically, and thus she felt the need to sound authoritative - at least in her last words, in order to 'pass'. Given the limited evidence that Theresa provided of her engagement in the discourse that she ventriloquated, her ventriloquation can be interpreted as a form of "parroting" (Prior, 1998, p. 132). Ventriloquating the voices of more authoritative others can be seen as an important stage in discovering one's own voice. Nevertheless, I believe that in this case Theresa was mostly trying to 'self-actualize herself' after studying abroad and travelling extensively, despite the fact that she did not engage with the host society.

From the point of view of cross-cultural adaptation, Theresa at no point attempted to understand Dr. Álvarez's motives for her actions, the origin of their clash, or her professor's take on the issue. Instead, Theresa seemed to have remained anchored and fixated to her own initial ideas of being judged and treated unfairly. Unfortunately, it appears that Theresa never considered the possibility that she had encountered a "rich point," as defined by Agar (1994), i.e., a clash in cultural artifacts at the intersection between two cultures, a conflictive situation deserving of a more dispassionate investigation in which, for example, Theresa might have questioned her own responsibility and role in the clash. Theresa did not attempt to adapt her cultural artifacts abroad, or to create new ones while in contact with the host society. Based on Bennett's cross-cultural adaptation model (1993), Theresa showed no evidence of having overcome the ethnocentric stage in which "the worldview of one's own culture is central to all reality" (p. 30).

## Conclusions and Implications

In this chapter I have argued that classroom interactions and dynamics abroad are affected by class, globalization, and the capitalist concepts of value for money, and education as a marketable commodity. I have used the story of Theresa as one extreme case to illustrate how US undergraduate students view the academic component of SA based on their socio-cultural identity and cultural artifacts, how this affects their experiences, and how they are perceived within the host society.

Theresa did not take the academic component of SA seriously and failed to seek SA for integration into the host community. Rather, she approached her experience abroad largely as a vacation and an opportunity for extensive travel, and behaved more as a moneyed consumer than as a learner inside and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, Theresa was placed in the wrong classes because her language proficiency level was far lower than other students in the program and than the requisite skills expected in fourth/fifth-year Spanish courses. Theresa's course misplacement led to discouragement and disaffection with her classes and grew into a severe cultural dissonance in her relationship with one of her Spanish professors abroad. Theresa found her teacher's comments to be hurtful and cutting, a style she was not used to in the US where professors tend to avoid overt criticism. This situation made Theresa feel uncomfortable and aggravated her disengagement from academic learning. Unfortunately, Theresa failed to see her challenging class experience as an opportunity to explore cross-cultural differences in value systems, where cultural expectations, teacher's role and status, institutional interactions, dynamics and responsibility are interpreted differently across cultures. In contrast, Dr. Álvarez considered Theresa as a disengaged, uncommitted, and occasionally disrespectful student in her class, who did not show any interest or put any effort in improving her low competence level in



Spanish, and who only concerned herself with earning the credits she had paid for signing up for classes.

Correct placement has obviously major implications in this study. It seemed that Theresa's course misplacement was the source of many problems that she experienced and that she originated. Had there been lower level courses offered during the semester in Colovo for Theresa to take, it is possible that the student-teacher cultural clash would have never come to the surface.

Another major implication in this study is the importance of educating US students to adopt the alternative discourse about SA, as discussed by Gore (2005): SA provides strong education, academic training, and preparation that are unmatched in the US. When faced with "rich points," i.e., episodes of intercultural clashes, miscommunication, or misunderstanding, students need to approach them critically. Kinginger (2008c) argues that the most successful language learners tend to be those who embrace an alternative interpretive approach to SA, "those who are actively seeking out worlds of difference and who are willing to suspend judgment in favor of gaining access to the perspectives of others" (p. 3).

## CHAPTER 7

“PART OF ME IS STILL DISGUSTED”: A STORY OF CULTURAL CLASH AND  
AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR TOWARDS AMERICAN WOMEN ABROAD

There was much frustration and disillusionment in the words of Rebecca, a US female university student in Spain, who felt that she was treated with hostility by Spaniards and found certain local cultural practices to be aggressive, threatening, and disgusting. Rebecca was aware that she looked very American, which might have increased the chance of drawing the attention of the locals. Most importantly, she felt profoundly disrespected and disgusted after being the target of numerous catcalls and two episodes of aggressive behavior in public places on the part of local teenagers. Likewise, she witnessed acts of sexism, gender violence, and disrespect toward US and Spanish women while in Spain. Rebecca’s cultural expectations clashed and her experiences deeply affected her sojourn and shaped her perception of the host culture and society, as she reported in an interview:

I had expectations of blending in with the culture and becoming comfortable in everyday experiences – this unfortunately was not fulfilled, however. [...] I would never want to live there. I had assumed that since Spain was a “modern” civilization, that they would have similar social standards of respect and decency – but it is definitively not what I experienced.

Rebecca’s accounts raise important issues related to US young women abroad living and interacting within the host community. How are female university students’ SA experience affected when they are subject to unwanted attention and aggressive behavior from local men? How do these encounters affect women’s sense of well-being and safety in the host culture? What values and worldviews about gender roles do they bring to SA that give rise to their take

on gender equity and respect? How does it affect their perception of the host culture and society? In this chapter, I use the example of Rebecca to explore these issues.

It is important to stress the fact that sexually aggressive behavior towards women is sadly a growing cultural phenomenon in Spain, and the outbreak of male aggression is as much a serious concern for US SA students traveling to Spain as it is for women of other nationalities. As a result of this situation, I argue that we have paid far too little attention to SA as a gendered experience, and how deeply gender and gendered social practices can impact and shape students' experiences abroad, especially when they come in contact with and interact with target language people within the host society. I contend that the nature and degree of a female SA participant's CI and LI experience is strongly influenced by the expectations she brings from her own background about gender and gender roles; by how she perceives gender roles in the local people and culture; and by her gendered experiences with the host community members, and what opportunities she has to interact with locals in ways that she perceived to be safe and constructive.

### Gender and Study Abroad

In American research on language learning and SA, gender is extensively problematized. For example, Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsburg (1995) consider gender as a predictive factor. They found that US male students of Russian were more successful than female students in listening to and speaking Russian in a mixed-gender interactive context. Female students reported that they had had less conversation practice than their male counterparts, especially if the topic was intellectual or political, because they were not positioned as competent speakers in interactions with men.

Other studies report that female students are subject to biased treatment, humiliating episodes of harassment, and unwelcome sexual attention on the part of local men. In fact, it seems that wherever they go, American female students are the victims of harassment. They are harassed in Russia (Polanyi, 1995), in Argentina (Isabelli-Garcia, 2006), in France (Kline, 1998), in Spain (Talbert & Stewart, 1999), and in Costa Rica (Twombly, 1995). For Block (2007), reports of sexual harassment seem to characterize US students' accounts much more than those of other international students abroad. In contrast, Patron (2007) noticed how disorienting and upsetting it could be for some French female students in Australia to realize that men do not ogle women in the street.

The studies cited above suggests that US women in SA often develop negative perceptions and attitudes toward the host society and culture as a result of sexual harassment. Some respond by withdrawing, limiting their involvement with target language speakers in socio-interactive contexts, and rejecting the host culture. Others express reduced confidence in their personal safety, feel less independent, develop sentiments of inadequacy for being treated with hostility and as a sex object, and realize that it is impossible to fit in.

On the other hand, studies suggest that the young men accompanying these female students often develop self-confidence and an active status of learners. Moreover, they celebrate their own heterosexual identities as valiant protectors of women, raised in a country that presumably respects, defends, and proclaims gender equity (Kinging, 2008b). For instance, Kinginger writes that Bill, an SA college student in France, constructs for himself a narrative of heroism and valor: "as a heterosexual American male raised on discourses of gender equity, his presence in social settings represents value added to situations where women are routinely subjected to sexual harassment" (p. 222).

Kinginger (2008b) also emphasizes that there exist powerful ideologies and stereotypes of American women that depict them as silent and even infantilized in their interactions with men. Other stereotypical images portray them as rich, loose, easy, and interested in engaging in sexual relations with strangers (Tharps, 2008; Twombly, 1995).

Women's experience in SA can also be contextualized in the broader body of scholarship on feminism, sexism and the subordination of women to men, sex and gender, gender equality, gender violence, and women's studies (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005; Jaggar, 1994; Koss, Goodman, Browne, Fitzgerald, Keita, & Russo, 1994). In "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire" for example Butler (2005) asserts that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (p. 145). That is, the category "woman" is not biologically based but it is socially constructed and affected by socio-cultural norms and values characterizing a particular social context. Likewise, Lemoncheck (1994) and Galler (1994) explore how women are presented in society and how they are considered as sex object, the myths of the perfect body, and feminine beauty and fashion. Lemoncheck supports the thesis that "the sex object is treated as less than a moral equal by her objectifier" (p. 199) and with it she explains the pervasive complaint that sex objectification degrades and demeans them. In other words, for her the woman who is treated as a sex object is a woman who is dehumanized. Galler asserts that the ideal of beauty that society creates is oppressive for us all, and that too frequently our own bodies become enemies. Finally, Koss et al. (1994) acknowledge that violence against women is indicative of "a social climate in which sexual victimization ((has become)) an almost normative event in women's lives" (p. 152). The authors also find that violence against women on the part of men is much more common than typically believed. Moreover, the reactions of friends, co-workers, and the criminal justice system may compound rather than remedy the violence. They conclude that gender-related

norms, values, and cultural myths have sanctioned violence by devaluing women and failing to hold men responsible for their deeds.

American female students are socialized in a society that tends to recognize how negative it is to be considered as a sex object or the object of desire. Americans are raised with the expectations that women should be recognized for what they can contribute intellectually and personally to the society and not simply for their physical appearance. They are therefore unused to cultural contexts where men are aggressive and overt in their appreciation for women's physical traits and attributes.

These US cultural norms are explicitly encoded in the academic culture and non-discrimination and anti-harassment policy US college students experience at home. Pursuant to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, and in accordance with federal and state law, Board of Regents' policy, and University policy, the US institution sponsoring the SA program explicitly prohibits sexual harassment, which it defines as "sexual harassment" in the Non-discrimination and anti-harassment (NDAH) policy (2003) as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature." Examples of sexual harassment cited in the university website include physical assault, sexual advances, inappropriate or unnecessary touching or rubbing, sexually suggestive or degrading jokes or comments, remarks of a sexual nature about one's clothing and/or body, remarks speculating about a person's sexual activities or sexual history.

Two issues emerge from this body of literature. First, research in applied linguistics and study abroad has not explicitly focused on how American students' expectations about gender and gender roles values and worldviews give rise to their interpretation of gender equity and respect. Nor has the existing literature considered how their culturally-mediated perception of

gender roles in the local culture affects their sojourn, or how gendered experiences with the host community members shape their CI and LI. Second, scholars in applied linguistics, language education, and SA point out that research has focused on the students' perspective while overlooking their behavior:

There is very little effort to describe what these students are doing, if anything, to induce foreign men to harass them: we do not know what their behavior is like or how that behavior is normally interpreted locally. Complaints about sexual harassment do not seem to characterize the comments of study abroad participants from places other than the United States. (Kinging, 2008a, p. 15)

Kinging raises an important issue that I will address in this study: little attention has been devoted to collecting and analyzing how educators and other SA personnel interpret the issue of sexual harassment—besides just considering it exclusively through the lens of the students—and how students are perceived in the host culture.

#### Rebecca

As an employee and participant in the SA program in Zadic, Spain, I observed Rebecca during the seven weeks of the program. She appeared to me a studious and responsible 20-year-old US university student. She was born and grew up in a suburban community outside a major Southeastern city. She had signed up for the SA program in Zadic to improve her Spanish-speaking skills: "I really wanted to become vocally competent in Spanish during my stay in Spain." She also had ambitions to learn more about the Spanish culture: "((I also wanted)) broaden my cultural horizons and come to a better understanding of how other countries differ from the US – as well as how life might be the same." Rebecca was a double major in political science and Spanish, and was planning to pursue her studies in international law. She admitted that her knowledge and images of Spain and Spanish culture prior to her trip were to some extent stereotypical and limited to the information conveyed in books, movies, and literature classes:

Spanish soccer, flamenco music and dancing, bullfights, Spanish families and their strong “sense of family.” Previous trips outside of the United States brought Rebecca to places like Mexico not only on vacation but also on a mission trip with her church during high school to build houses in a very poor rural community. Rebecca’s high school years were split in two. Up until 8<sup>th</sup> grade she attended a small private school with a white upper/middle class student population. Then, she went to a large public school that had a very diverse student population: 40% were Caucasian and the rest were Africa-American, Asian, and Hispanic. Rebecca said that such experiences developed in her “an appreciation for other cultures and an interest in study abroad, outreach, and community service.” She also mentioned her strong desire to meet and help people outside of her native community.

At the beginning of the SA program Rebecca showed much enthusiasm and motivation to speak Spanish and learn about the culture, to meet new people, to get immersed in the host community, and to fully embrace LI and CI in her Spanish SA program. However, as the program went on, she developed a deep sense of disgust and anger for the way she was treated in Spain as an American female, and for the numerous episodes of sexism, gender violence, and disrespect towards women that she witnessed while in Spain. Such disturbing experiences contributed to Rebecca’s growing disengagement from the Spanish culture, society, and people. She expressed reduced confidence in her personal safety, and increased affinity with her US SA group with whom she began to spend most of her social time. In sum, the gendered social practices, such as sexually aggressive behavior towards women that Rebecca experienced in Spain played a major role in her sojourn, a role that eclipsed her initial investment about integrating into the target culture and society.



Multiple Experiences of Unwanted Attention, Sexism,  
and Sexually Aggressive Behavior

On several occasions, Rebecca and her female friends were subjected to catcalling in the street by local men. On two specific occasions, Rebecca was subject to unwanted attention in a public place on the part of unruly juveniles in Zadic. The first time it was at night at around 10.30 P.M. She was sitting on a bench in one of the main squares of downtown Zadic holding her laptop on her lap and talking via Skype. As she related:

Two boys came and sat down on each side of me on the bench and started talking to me. But I was talking through Skype to my Dad and my boyfriend on the, you know, through the internet. And I guess they really didn't understand that and I didn't really know how to explain that to them. I was like I'm busy I'm was talking on headphones and I was like please leave me alone just I was being very nice I'm like I'm busy. And uhm they just kept sitting there and talking to me and like harassing me. So I got up and I moved. And went across and sat near like I got closer to the people in the restaurant cause they had tables out there in the plaza uhm and I thought they would just go away. But then they came back about five minutes later and got behind me and spit all over my computer and on me and then ran off as fast as they could.

The second case of harassment that Rebecca was subject to was during the day at one of the popular beaches in Zadic where people of all ages and entire families gather. She was sunbathing by herself waiting for other friends from the SA program to join her when a pre-teen went toward her, jumped on top of her and started to hump her while his friends were watching and laughing. Rebecca described her experience as follows:

I was laying on the beach tanning and then a little kid comes up and jumped on me and oh not little kid I guess he was maybe 11 or 12 or so [...] yea pre-teen I guess. And you know just comes up and jumps on me and his friends are standing there laughing and I was like what do I do? I mean I was lying on my back and I flipped over and kind of like threw him cause he was a lot smaller than me and like then I got up and walked away or left that beach or you know went somewhere else.

The two host families Rebecca lived with in Zadic exposed her to additional manifestations and practices of sexism and gender violence. The first family Rebecca and her

roommate were placed with was an older couple. Rebecca found the husband's behavior's sexist.

As she explained,

The man would just sit there and bark orders at his wife you know cause "go do this and go do this." She was always you know as quick as she could, go, and do exactly what he said you know. He sat there and ate his meal while she was standing there serving him and cooking you know they didn't even eat together because she was more like a servant to him [...] he was always trying to assert his dominance you know "I'm the man. Do this" and he would he wasn't abusive physically to her but you know even if she was obeying whatever he said to do, he would still go over the top and be more forceful just to like to assert his manliness and dominance over her the woman.

Rebecca and her roommate subsequently changed their first host family because of illness in the household. The second family where they lived until the end of the program consisted of a single mother with her seven year old son. Rebecca found the son's behavior controlling and violent.

As she described it,

He completely had every bit of control over what his mother. And you know she would she I guess kind of knew this but I think she was a single mother and had never been married to his father I don't think. And I assume she was probably treated the same way you know in her relationship you know. It's like the dominant man has control of the situation and so I guess she was just used to being treated that way. And let her son control her in the same way, her first grade son. And she might every once in a while tell him to do something. If he didn't want to do it he would lash out you know like violently physically until you know he got his way and he knew that at age seven that he could you know. If he wasn't getting what he wanted all he had to do was you know to be violent and he would get his way.

It is important to note that Rebecca's experience in her program was far from an isolated one.

Other female students from the same SA group reported episodes including being approached, touched, chased, yelled at, and having drinks poured on them by males, mostly adolescents. As an assistant in the program, I repeatedly heard women tell me that they felt they had done nothing provocative and that they did not feel safe. The SA program team, of which I was part, acknowledged the severity of the incidents that happened to Rebecca and other US SA female students, and we went to the police to file a report.

### Aggressive Behavior towards Women or Unruly Youths?

SCT emphasizes the importance of contextualizing all events in their own socio-cultural, historical, geographical, and political settings. Likewise, from a SCT perspective people are products of the environment where they grew up, an environment that shapes the way they think, speak, behave, and feel. In this section I will contextualize the incidents that Rebecca experienced in Spain in two crucial aspects of Spanish culture and society relevant to this study: machismo and aggressive behavior towards women on the one hand, and unruly, ill mannered youth on the other. By so doing, I intend to shed some light on the reasons why such incidents may happen in a city like Zadic, and how Spaniards view these events and the reactions of the US students involved. As stated in the rationale for this study, I believe that it is important to explore the locals' perspectives in addition to analyzing the events from the US students' lens. Only by exploring the complexity behind these events we can get to a full and more complete understanding of the incidents.

In an interview with Skirole (2004), Juan José Millás García, well known Spanish journalist and author of *Hay algo que no me dicen: El caso de Nevenka Fernández contra la realidad* (2004)- a novel based on a real case of sexual and moral harassment in Spain, defined Spanish culture as “machista, misógina, brutal” (*a macho, misogynous, and brutal culture*). Two SA program team members seem to agree with this assessment. For example one contended that,

Spain is historically a patriarchal society (as are most in human history, frankly) that divides women into saints (i.e., “good girls” who are respectable and, subsequently, respected) and whores (who are verbally or sexually used and/or abused).

Another SA colleague observed to me that,

Spain experiences a macho society, in my eyes. The man is still right, and the woman is considered a whore if she goes out and parties all night without her man by her side. Spanish society has accepted that mentality that the man can do whatever he wants. And this is what happens on the street.

There exist sharp differences within Spain when it comes down to practices of machismo and sexism. Zadic, the host city, is located in southern Spain in an area that it is rather conservative, impoverished, and underdeveloped. It is a place where once prevalent practices of machismo (an excessive display of masculinity, sense of virility, and male dominance) and sexism (the belief that one gender is inferior to the other) are still noticeable. As one of my SA program team members observed in an email: “Por lo que yo he visto, es una de las ciudades españolas más atrasadas económicamente, y más machistas!!” (*From what I have seen, Zadic is one of the most economically underdeveloped and macho cities in Spain*). Men from Zadic may display a macho mentality and behavior that is more ingrained and more overtly manifested than men from different parts of the country, as reported by an SA program team member in an email:

En Colovo nunca me había pasado algo así, porque los Colovonos son muy secos para esas cosas. [...] Los hombres Colovonos son muy creídos y no dicen cosas por la calle, así que si en Colovo te dicen algo, esa persona no es Colovona  
*In Colovo ((a city on the central coast of Spain)) I had never experienced anything like that ((porno innuendos in the street)), because men from Colovo are not inclined to these things. [...] They think very highly of themselves and they do not say anything in the street. So if somebody says something to you in Colovo, it means that this person is not from Colovo.*

Worsening economic conditions, particularly in an impoverished part of Spain like the South, exacerbates women’s position in Zadic (both city and province) where the unemployment rate is the highest in Spain (18,41%) as stated in the newspaper *La Voz* (April 25, 2008). Women from Zadic typically stay at home and men are the breadwinners, which may contribute to female feelings of financial dependence and support from their husbands.

Acts of sexism and practices of machismo may also stem from the sexual repression that Spaniards experienced during the 36 years of Franco’s dictatorship (1939-1975). One SA educator explained that:

A mí me ha pasado cosas de esas con viejos verdes y te dan ganas de cortarle el miembro a más de uno. Eso te ha pasado en algún otro país? a mí solo me pasa en España! tendrá algo que ver la represión sexual durante la dictadura? En otros países te dicen cosas por la calle, pero en plan piropos, no en plan porno.

*I experienced sexually and pornographically aggressive behaviors with old men and you feel like you want to cut their penis off. Have you ever experienced that in any other country? I only experience it in Spain. Does it have something to do with the sexual repression during the dictatorship? In other countries, men say things to you in the street, like catcalling, but it is not porno.*

Sexually aggressive behaviors towards local and foreign women are becoming more and more frequent in the whole country as confirmed by an SA program team member talking to the local authorities: “The female police officer who took the young woman’s statement in Leveso said that there is a huge rise in the number of such cases, perpetrated primarily by adolescent males.”

While in Spain during data collection and analysis for this study, I remember that the national Spanish radio would announce on a nearly weekly basis the death of a local or foreign woman cruelly killed in domestic violence by her partner. Sanmartín (2003) for the II International Report on Violence Towards Women by Queen Sofía Center (*II Informe Internacional de Violencia contra la Mujer del Centro Reina Sofía*) indicated that for the Spanish Department of Inland Security, in 2003 the number of women who were killed by an aggressor in unspecified circumstances was 168, with a prevalence of 7.75 women per million of inhabitants (pp. 29-30); 84 women were killed by a partner, father, or brother (pp. 37-38); and 65 were killed by a partner or former partner (pp. 44-45). In fact the national government has begun to recognize the scope of this problem. To prosecute all these acts and foment an attitude of zero tolerance, the framework law on integrated protection measures against gender violence (*Ley orgánica de medidas de protección integral contra la violencia de género*) was officially approved by the Spanish Congress of Deputies on December 22, 2004. My SA colleagues felt that male

aggression and violence were increasingly unacceptable. In an email one commented positively that:

The authorities did react in a positive manner. A similar situation in Seville in the Summer of 2008 showed that police and municipal authorities in Spain are striving to foment an attitude of “zero tolerance” toward such behavior.

Similarly, another SA program team member said in an email that:

I am glad to see the authorities in Sevilla at least taking these actions seriously. The young man that harassed the woman in our program was arrested and will be tried for the assault.

Despite its high unemployment levels and practices of machismo and aggressive behavior towards women, it should be said that the city of Zadic is still perceived as reasonably safe and quiet. It is probably significant that the first spitting incident that Rebecca experienced in the main square, and other incidents suffered by her SA group mates in public places, were perpetrated by unruly juveniles. In a program listserv message to the students, an SA program team member tried to reassure participants that Zadic remains a quiet and safe small city:

Seguro que estáis de acuerdo con que en general Zadic es una ciudad muy tranquila – creedme si os digo que es una de la ciudades españolas con niveles más bajos de delincuencia. Desafortunadamente y según las descripciones de los sucesos que nos han llegado, parece que el problema lo origina un grupo de adolescentes incontrolados que son algo común en cualquier ciudad de cualquier país.

*I'm sure that you guys agree that Zadic is in general a very quiet city – believe me if I tell you that it is one of the cities in Spain with the lowest delinquency rate. Unfortunately, the description that we have of the incidents occurred leads us to think that the origin of the problem is a group of unruly adolescents, a common issue in any city in any country.*

Other SA program team members likewise commented on ill mannered adolescents in Spain and confirmed that it is a spreading phenomenon in their country:

Por lo que he visto, los adolescentes en España son de los menos respetuosos con los espacios comunes y con las personas mayores.

*From what I have seen in Spain, adolescents show hardly any respect for public spaces and elderly people.*

Por desgracia, en España estamos acostumbrados a los comportamientos gamberros de adolescentes maleducados.

*Unfortunately in Spain we are used to the uncivilized behaviors of rude adolescents.*

An SA Spanish professor seemed to indicate that SA participants were overreacting to teenage male behavior that was certainly rude but not menacing: “they ((US students)) perceive Zadic and Spanish males as something dangerous (more than they are).” A former SA program team member agreed with this perspective:

I think sometimes that our girls feed on each others' experiences. Since they are always hanging out in big groups of Americans, they share 'war stories' (e.g., "Oh my gosh, last night some guy was grinding on me on the dance floor"). I wonder if sometimes they don't exaggerate or even re-evaluate experiences they've had with men through their friends' stories. It's almost like they become a tribe of victims.

Similarly, another commented “Me da la impresión de que tiene que ver más con falta de educación que con otra cosa” (*I have the feeling that it has more to do with bad manners than with anything else*). Finally, a Spanish informant stated “en España se piropea de manera muy habitual a las mujeres, y ahora también un poco a los hombres, aunque la mayoría de las veces la intención no va más allá” (*In Spain catcalling is a very common practice, among men and now even among men a little, but most times it stops there*).

To sum up, this section reveals how historical and socio-cultural influences are critical to interpret events. Spaniards seemed to recognize these incidents of aggressive behavior as a common phenomenon in their society, and they saw varying degrees of severity in male aggressive, violent, and rude conduct towards women. While some Spaniards found it to be a result of their fundamentally macho culture and patriarchal society, some others recognized in it a manifestation of ill-mannered youth. Some Spaniards also thought that in certain cases US students were misinterpreting these acts, were giving them too much importance, and were

overreacting to their experiences with Spanish men. In the next section I will discuss how for Rebecca these were severe events of aggressive behavior.

#### Interpretation of Aggressive Behavior towards Women:

##### Rebecca's Perspective

A year and a half after the end of the SA program in Zadic, looking back, Rebecca still expressed much disgust and anger for the aggressive behavior, catcalling, and the lack of respect towards women that she experienced abroad. Rebecca's American cultural norms dictates that it is socially inappropriate for men to ogle or harass women that they do not know in public places: "With the whole women's rights movement it is completely unacceptable in this country [...] but just where I was it was just normal there ((in Spain))." From a SCT perspective, all events and phenomena need to be analyzed historically. The socio-cultural artifacts Rebecca acquired growing up profoundly shaped her idea of respect, gender equity, and equal rights and opportunities - mostly understood in the light of the social changes brought about by the US with the civil rights, human rights, and women's rights movements:

*My definition of gender equity is really defined from an American view point which is something I realized while I was in Spain because it seems to be very different than their definition of gender equity. Uhm I feel like here ((in the US)) it's increasingly defined as men and women being thought of as equals in practically every area except for the physical ability which is obvious we are different physically, men are stronger and etc. but in an intellectual, you know, and psychological way I feel like in the US treating people differently in that area is really frowned upon especially the way that the women's movement, women's rights movement has changed our just social habits.*

Rebecca's expectations of what gender equity, and being treated respectfully is seems to reflect the voices of women's right groups that continue to define how to recognize what is acceptable and appropriate behavior in US society (see the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly, that enshrines the equal rights of men and women, and addressed both the equality and equity issues). Rebecca's italicized words



above also show that Spain was a cultural lesson for her, a good one, but not one that made her want to immerse herself any further in the culture. Instead, Rebecca developed much anger and disgust toward local men:

Part of me would love to go back ((to Spain)) and enjoy the beautiful country and the rich culture, but another part of me is still disgusted with many things that I learned/experienced while I was there. [...] I witnessed so many acts of sexism and violence/disrespect towards women while in Spain that I can honestly say that I would never want to live there.

Rebecca felt she was treated as an object, the object of attention and desire of rude, sexist men catcalling and harassing women in public places:

Men were making rude gestures or whistling at us or whatever. I didn't feel like they were giving consideration like as they would if they thought of us as an equal human. Or maybe they were *maybe it's just a different way of thinking* but it just kind of they objectified you. Makes you feel like more of a thing rather than a person.

What Rebecca is saying reflects Lemoncheck's argument above (1994) that the sex object feels that it is treated as less than a moral equal and therefore is dehumanized. The words italicized above seem to indicate again that Rebecca was indeed learning a lesson. She was in fact considering the possibility of different socio-cultural practices existing in Spain and diverging from her expectations rooted in the US history, the naturalized ideologies circulating within US popular media and educational discourses, and her *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) as a middle-class white American female student. This is a significant step, I believe, towards ethnorelativism (Bennett, 1993), and the acknowledgement that cultural practices are relative to one another within a specific cultural context. Nevertheless, Rebecca recognized the display of a certain degree of courtesy and subtleness on the part of US men to be highly desirable when acknowledging and appreciating female beauty: "it feels like men in the US are just taught to show women more courtesy and at least they don't physically and verbally harass them."

*Is the US that enlightened in terms of equality for men and women? Looking at Rebecca's words more critically*

Rebecca's words find an echo in Block's book (2007) on second language identities and in Bennett's (1993) cross-cultural acculturation model. For Block, US students tend to recoil into a sense of national superiority - as I feel it is the case here for Rebecca, particularly when they face "rich points" (Agar, 1994), i.e., episodes of cultural clashes, conflictive situations, or cases on intercultural misunderstanding and miscommunication. In their intercultural sensitivity development, they often experience what Bennett identified as ethnocentric stages, i.e., denial, defense, and minimization, as they assume that the values and perspectives of their culture are central to all reality. For example, what is respectful and considerate behavior for Rebecca is exemplified by the relationship between her parents, which set her expectations and parameter of comparison for the experiences that she lived in Spain:

My dad treats my mom completely equal and they make all their decisions together and although *my dad is the bread winner and makes the money* he definitively respects my mother for the job that she does, *how she raised us* and everything there's you know. He doesn't boss her around she doesn't boss him around and they there is a very very mutual respect between them.

Ironically enough, the words italicized above may be interpreted as though Rebecca's mother was the only parent who was in charge of raising the children while her father's job was to make money, i.e., more a manifestation of predefined roles in the family and in society than equal opportunities for men and women. In other words, here gender roles still appear very traditional even in the supposedly enlightened US, but they just seem to take a different expression. Along these lines, an SA professor was amazed by the words of many US female students in her classes when asked to express in an essay how they wanted their life to be:

la mayoría de estas chicas expresan que lo que desean es casarse pronto, no trabajar y dedicar su vida a la familia [...] Una actitud muy respetable pero al ser tan generalizada

me hace preguntarme si no estarán copiando algo “socialmente aceptado,” algo que “se espera de ellas” y que tiene una raíz machista.

*The majority of these girls express that what they want is to get married young, not to work, and devote their life to their family [...] This is a very respectable opinion but since it is so widespread I wonder if they are copying something that is ‘socially accepted’, something that ‘is expected from them’ and that is rooted in a macho mindset.*

The II International Report on Violence Towards Women by Queen Sofía Center

(Sanmartín, 2003) showed that women are still more likely to be victims in the US than in Spain, even after comparing the relative size of the two countries, being Spain twice the size of Oregon. For the Bureau of Justice Statistics of the US Department of Justice, in 2003 3215 women were reported to be killed in unspecified circumstances, with a prevalence of 21.98 women per million of inhabitants. The 40-country ranking, by prevalence per million women, of domestic femicides in 2003 showed that the US is 12<sup>th</sup> while Spain is 32<sup>nd</sup>.

Kinginger pointed out in a personal communication that students do not look critically enough at their own culture and end up glorifying it when in reality issues such as gender equity are still distant goals in the US society as well:

American students have been brought up to believe that their society practices gender equity- if we look we can easily see that this is not true, but somehow we are convinced to ignore all the evidence. We have effectively stamped out most traces of gallantry (men are scared to pay us a compliment or hold open the door for us, for fear that they will be accused of harassment) but in the professional world everything is more or less the same as it used to be, or worse.

It is clear that like Spain, the US is not exactly a bastion of equality for men and women either. Women’s position in the US has probably not improved in the last generation as much as one would like to think, and the high number of femicides reported in 2003 by the Bureau of Justice Statistics of the US Department of Justice (Sanmartín, 2004) raises crucial issues not only on gender equity and roles in society but also on male aggressive behavior towards women.

### Culturally Defined Gender Attitudes or Hostility to the US?

The episodes of aggressive behavior in public places experienced by Rebecca and her fellow US friends in Zadic can also be interpreted from a different angle. While they may be seen as conflicting attitudes toward gender and a clash in cross-cultural expectations and values systems, they may also be viewed as hostility to the US. In fact, the two incidents at the beach and in the main square reported by Rebecca might be seen as representing two different areas. The humping incident is obviously sexual, but the spitting incident could also have more to do with hatred, resentment, or disdain toward US arrogance, social inequality, and economic privileges. In fact, at least one former SA program team member interpreted it as such, commenting that “Quizás lo que le pasara a ese chico es que no le gustaban los americanos” (*Maybe what was happening was that that guy did not like Americans*) referring to one of Rebecca’s aggressors during the spitting accident. The same person noted “el aire de superioridad de algunos estadounidenses, que es precisamente el que hace que a mucha gente no le caigan bien” (*the air of superiority of some Northern Americans, which is exactly what makes people not like them*). This struck me as crucial to understanding how Americans, including women, may be viewed and treated by Spaniards in Spain.

It is important to consider here the anti-American feelings circulating among Spaniards - and Europeans in general, as well as to contextualize the events that occurred in Zadic within the backdrop of the worldwide unpopularity of the Bush administration - during which most of my research took place. First of all, an example of the anti-American feelings manifested in Zadic during the SA program (Summer semester ‘07) could have been the civil unrest and strikes against Delphi, a firm once owned by General Motors and until recently its main client, closing a bearing and suspension parts plant in Porelés (pseudonym), a town adjacent Zadic. Delphi's

mishandling of the Porelés losing was harshly criticized, particularly in Zadic, a city that already suffered with the highest unemployment rate in Spain. Delphi was the last straw. Pore workers and the entire Zadic community manifested in massive protest marches and sit-ins. Over 3,000 affected people and families joined in to protest outside Delphi Spain's headquarters.

Particularly noteworthy here is also the strong disapproval of the Iraq war and the US international politics; freedom fries; torture practices in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib; the “you are either with us or against us” attitude; and the failure to sign the Kyoto Protocol for the greenhouse gas emission reduction and to be aligned with European and other industrialized countries in climate change policy. These and many other Bush policies have resulted in many people around the world harshly criticizing Americans as is apparent in *El País*, the main national newspaper in Spain (Colombiani, 2009; Fuentes, 2009; García-Ormaechea, 2009; Editorial, 2008), as well as other papers around the world. For example, polls conducted in a number of countries during this period reveal that only Germany and France had more unfavorable opinions of Bush (Ipsos-Public Affairs, 2004). One former SA program team member suggested:

There is also the possibility that the US image in other countries contributed to the aggressive acts toward the young women. With an often unfavorable image around the world recently, the women involved might have simply been a kind of (sub)conscious outlet for the hostilities toward the United States.

He also noted:

It seems plausible that a group of young, unruly males in society that tends to reject the value of women as equals saw attractive and exotic young women from a country that is often viewed with hostility and acted according to those conditions; the result was sexually aggressive behavior and gender violence.

However, ironically enough, many SA students may be largely unaware of how other countries feel about these global issues, and how these feelings can impact their sojourn.

Two additional factors may aggravate feelings of hostility towards Americans: US students' low foreign language proficiency and cultural competence, and class differences. Although US students sign up for third and fourth year classes (intermediate/pre-advanced level of Spanish) abroad, the actual foreign language abilities and cultural competence of some students are rudimentary. Even Rebecca, who was a double major in Spanish, had to admit that her languaculture competence was low, she did not know what to say in Spanish, how to act, and did not understand what her aggressors were saying to her when they approached her in a public place. The languaculture barrier made her an easier target, as she stated in an interview: "For being in a foreign country that I wasn't familiar with and you know didn't speak the language that well was definitely like a big experience in feeling vulnerable." It would have been probably enough for Rebecca to say in Spanish something rather basic such as 'I don't understand' or even 'I am calling the police' in order to try to defuse the situation. A former SA program team member pointed that out in an email commenting on one of Rebecca's aggressors in the first spitting incident:

Who knows what he told her, but even if she didn't understand, ignoring him from the very beginning is probably not the best way to respond, no matter where the incident occurs. She returned rudeness with rudeness and did nothing to remedy the situation. It would not have been hard for her to defuse the conflict, or at least attempt to do so, by responding with a curt <<Lo siento. No te entiendo.>> (*I am sorry. I don't understand you*).

US students may strike Spaniards as inexperienced and naïve travelers. In addition, the incident that happened to Rebecca is perhaps not only due to her low competence level in Spanish and cultural incompetence but also to class differences, especially in a city like Zadic where the unemployment rate is over 18%: "In Spain, you don't go around with your laptop the way you do in Sonet. I imagine that this boy probably resented what this girl was doing, since it's almost like flaunting her wealth." As this team member speculated, I believe that in this context Spanish

adolescents might understandably resent young and rich US students with their laptops, particularly given the general antagonism felt toward Americans worldwide under the Bush regime. In a personal communication, Kinginger likewise has suggested that incidents of aggressive behavior may be aggravated by privileged and cosseted American youth:

Especially these days- and with help from the Bush administration- a lot of middle class kids are raised by 'helicopter parents' in a climate of generalized anxiety or even fear; they are likely to have led a very sheltered existence not including much exposure to 'dangerous people' unlike themselves.

In the following section I will illustrate how Rebecca actually perceived hostility on the part of Spaniards toward her and toward Americans in general, and how she speculated that it was due to international politics and tensions existing outside of the US.

#### Impact on Rebecca's Perception of the Host Society

Rebecca saw local people as arrogant and distant towards Americans. For example, Rebecca recalled that Spaniards did not show any sensitivity or initiative to help her when she was being harassed in the main square and at the beach:

There were a hundred people probably standing around and no one did anything about it I guess it goes back to the whole I'm an outsider thing. [...] Everyone just watching no one got up from their seats or did anything about it which kind of goes back I guess to me feeling like oh they were Spanish people and I was the outsider so why would they really want to help me out in that situation.

Occasionally, Rebecca felt that Spaniards were cold and hostile to Americans in stores, bars, and public places, and did not have any interest in connecting with them:

They were very cold towards well most of them were very cold towards us and we would go out to clubs and go dancing and stuff they would just ignore us. Unless they were like creepy guys that were you know trying to dance with us or something [...] They didn't really want anything to do with us.

Rebecca felt rejected as an American in Zadic. Unlike Mexico, where she found that local people emulated the US, Spain resented Americans and US politics, as voiced in an interview: "*I guess*

*a lot of that is probably due to politics and policy that they resent about America as a whole which I can understand because politics are complicated.*” Rebecca perceived a sense of superiority, power differential, and powerlessness in the way Spaniards treated and acted towards Americans on certain occasions: “I couldn’t believe that you could just throw wine on someone in the street and just get away with it just because *we are Americans and they are Spanish.*” Drawing from SCT, I speculate that Rebecca is claiming her authority in stating the words italicized above from the cultural experiences that she lived first hand under the much contested Bush administration. For eight years, Rebecca has experienced collective memories of controversial historical events like the war in Iraq, media representation, and popular ideology having to do with political tensions internal and external to the US. If every event and phenomenon is contingent upon historical context on a sociopolitical scale, as posited by SCT perspective, then contemporary SA is not exempt from the influence of such powerful forces and power differentials. Rebecca was in Spain during the last year of the Bush presidency, a presidency that had already left the US with two wars abroad and an acute economic crisis at home. It is possible that such a situation ultimately generated considerable antagonism between the US and Europe. Rebecca, like her fellow SA participants, probably found herself to be positioned as a representative of “the most powerful nation on earth” (Falk & Kanach, 2000, p. 160), a nation though whose image abroad can be associated more with the deleterious aspects of economic and cultural domination accompanying globalization and international politics than with awe for progress in other domains.

In sum, as posited by socio-cultural theories, individual learning and development is stimulated by and occurs through social interaction. Rebecca’s experience shows how US students’ nationality and identity can be challenged in unanticipated ways abroad, both at home



with their host families and in interaction within the host society. Although Rebecca was well aware of the potential unpopularity of her country abroad, it is still all too common for students like her to react to these conflictive situations with feelings of distress, to be unprepared to deal with criticism of the US, and to find their identity to be challenged, as noted by scholars from various disciplines (Kinging, 2008b; Falk & Kanach, 2000; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Bennett, 1993). In fact, I sense that very few students understand how deeply their expectations and value system can clash abroad, and the real implications for the US being “widely regarded with both awe and hostility, but rarely, if ever, with indifference” (Falk & Kanach, 2000, p. 163).

In the following section I will discuss the role of US students’ physical appearance, age, and demeanor in the nature of the experiences that they lived, and most importantly how they are perceived by Spaniards within the host society. Such findings may increase our understanding of hostility and antagonism on the part of locals towards US students, and why Americans are seen as outsiders.

#### Appearance and Not Blending in

Rebecca raised issues concerning her young age and physical traits as playing a major role in her being harassed and catcalled in the street in Zadic. Her height, slender body, and coloring (light skin, green eyes, and light brown straight hair) made her look very American, very different, and therefore more eye-catching, turning her into the object of attention of several men. During an interview Rebecca commented on how hard it was for her to blend in and pass:

Here in America it’s typical that women of my age are the ones that are really objectified physically. So I mean they are all tall, white skinned women, blond, kind of thing. Uhm So I feel like if I was older and didn’t fit into that age category it would be less likely to stick out like like an object you know. If I was dark skinned I would probably not have you know stuck out as much you know.

Besides physical appearance, I contend that it is also an accrued sense of individualism that makes it hard for US SA students to blend in, adapt themselves to, and integrate into the host society, as stated by a former SA program team member in an email:

Personally, I found myself frustrated because many didn't try at all to fit in to the culture they were visiting / studying. There was a pervasive individualism of "This is who I am / how I dress / how I talk" (though, ironically, many of them all wore/spoke the same!)

From the SCT perspective, the aspects of US culture that I discussed earlier (personal space, privacy, US Puritanism) are a big part of American history and society, including US individualism, aspects that inevitably clash across different cultures such Spanish culture.

In order to shed some light on how US students abroad appeared to Spaniards, particularly in relation to episodes of aggressive behaviors, I engaged in several face to face and email conversations with men and women from Zadic and outside of Zadic. I also interacted with current and former SA program team members, as well as with the staff and students working and residing in the residence hall where I lived during the Zadic 2007 summer program, and the local service provider for the SA program (the institution that provided spaces for classes, and made arrangements with host families and for field trips, hotel reservations, guided tours, and extra-curricular activities). I noticed that some of my interlocutors were contemplating the possibility that the US female students were somehow responsible for the incidents occurred, they were acting inappropriately and frivolously, and they might have done something to call attention to themselves and induce local men to approach them, even though they might have done so unintentionally

The prevailing image of young US women prevailing in Zadic is one of students who stick out and are rather conspicuous for the way they dress and the way they look. For example, in my field notes I reported comments such as "son rubias y llevan todas la minifalda" (*they are*

*blond and they all wear miniskirts*). Being discrete when they go out does not seem to be their most laudable trait, as reported below in an email by a Spanish informant in somewhat hostile and offensive terms. She seems to imply that if Americans believe that their culture is superior, then they do not behave accordingly while abroad. Instead, they appear arrogant and fail to display discretion in keeping a low profile:

Las ves vestidas con ropa que transparente, incluso la ropa interior les transparente a veces, andando como si fueran a comerse el mundo, más pintadas que un payaso en el circo, como si supieran más que nadie del mundo y de la vida, como si todo excepto su país fuese inferior. Es normal que a veces esto provoqué reacciones de desprecio.

*You see them wearing revealing clothes, and sometimes their lingerie sticks out. And they go out as if they wanted to conquer the world, wearing more make-up than a clown at the circus, as if they knew everything about life and how the world goes, and as if everything else was inferior but their country. It is normal that this results in reactions of disdain.*

In my observations I also reported that another way the members of the host community viewed US male and female students was that they typically congregate, are loud, and drink more than other international students, all of which catch the attention of locals: “No paran de beber cerveza” (*they drink beer all the time*). I noticed that US girls are occasionally portrayed as provocative dancers in the discos and night clubs, especially when they are heavily intoxicated, as noted by a former SA program team member in an email: “Bailan de forma más que sensual... Vamos, lo que aquí llamamos <<buscar guerra>>” (*They dance in a way that is more than sensual... ok, here we call it <<looking for trouble>>*). The same informant suggested that local men may interpret the behavior and intentions of these female students in multiple ways: “Dan pie a que los chicos se piensen que han ligado” (*They lead these guys to believe that they have hooked up*). Another Spanish informant commented on one episode when she witnessed how US female students called attention on themselves inappropriately in a public place, showing little cultural sensitivity: “empezaron a gritarle <<hola guapo, estoy muy cansada... hoy habrá fiesta de nuevo??...>> en este tono, y eso, al menos en España, es una insinuación [...] además de

aprender el idioma deberían aprender las costumbres del sitio” (*they started to shout at him <<hey, beautiful. I am very tired... Are we going to party again tonight?>> said in such a tone, it is an insinuation, at least in Spain [...] besides learning the language they should learn the culture of the host country*).

In all, students in US SA programs have the tendency to treat the program as an extended vacation, especially during the summer semesters in Zadic. For example, Rebecca and other female student participants spontaneously admitted that they chose the SA program in Zadic for the beaches. In addition to the beach, US students are seen out at night in big groups to go party. Based on my observations and conversations with Spaniards and SA program team members, the general image that these students project of themselves abroad is not always very flattering. They are often portrayed as young students who want to enjoy themselves but fail to pay much attention to their surroundings and to the local culture and society, which potentially makes them easy targets and exposes them to episodes of harassment, aggressive behavior, pick-pocketing, or robberies. Likewise, I have reported in my observations that US SA students tend to be unfavorably compared to their fellow European SA students, who are more experienced and alert sojourners, and who can speak several languages. Therefore, such students are perceived as more independent and socially and intellectually grown-up, as evidenced in the literature (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, Coleman, 1997).

The Spanish perspective on the incidents of aggressive behavior towards US women may also be grounded in the depiction of sexuality the US media portrays around the world, depictions with which all US female students tend to be associated, as reported below by two US students during an interview: “Maybe they see that on TV. They see that maybe people in Hollywood, in the movies, the way they dress, like Britney Spears’ dresses in her videos and in

which trouble she is now.” From a SCT perspective, history, naturalized ideologies circulating in a country and media representation are powerful tools that shape how events, situations, and people are viewed. In an email, a former SA program team member acknowledged that:

The young women I spoke with in the program indicated that they knew full well that the stereotype of American women abroad is that they are “loose,” or promiscuous. In other words, American women are considered (stereotypically) as whores, and come-and-go whores at that since they rarely stay in the country long enough to follow up on police reports (meaning that even if Spanish men abuse American women, probably nothing will come of it because the women will be returning home soon anyway).

Cinema seems to present the image of Spanish men taking advantage of foreign women because they are considered as naïve and not very smart, which makes them easy targets. The following words from a former SA program team member illustrate this point: “Desde que comenzó el turismo en este país existe la creencia de que es muy fácil aprovecharse de cualquier mujer extranjera, y de hecho hay películas de los años 1960 que retratan esta mentalidad” (*since tourism has started to boom in Spain, people believe that it is very easy take advantage of any foreign woman, and actually there are movies from the 60s that portray this mindset*).

In the following section I will discuss other significant findings related to Rebecca’s experiences and perceptions in contact with locals that illustrate how deep cultural norms and common interpretation of space and social life can clash when crossing borders. The dual account represented here and the richer and more detailed data coming from the multiple perspectives allows for a multilayered interpretation of events.

#### Public/Private Dimension of Space and Social Life

Rebecca raised important issues concerning the public/private dimension of space and social life in Spain versus the US:

being treated disrespectfully for me is just being shown a lack of consideration uhm kind of *being interfered* with in some way that the other person would not want to be

interfered with, uhm which is basically just I guess showing respective equality or acknowledgement of some form of equality uhm as a human.

Rebecca's words italicized above illustrate a fundamental difference in Spanish and American cultural conceptions of private and public space. As a Spanish informant from the south of Spain explained:

si estás en un sitio público no puedes esperar que nadie se acerque, ni te hable... para eso vete a tu casa, y si estás en un sitio como Cádiz, menos aún, es la manera de vivir de la gente.

*If you are in a public place, you cannot expect that nobody will approach you, or talk to you... If that's what you want, then you better stay at home, especially if you are in a place like Zadic because that's how people live.*

As I discussed earlier, the US is not a bastion of equality for men and women, just like Spain. However, it seems like Rebecca's sense of safety and freedom in her own country, understood as the ability to do things on her own whenever and wherever she wanted without feeling at risk, remains uncontested. In fact, it constitutes another cultural artifact that she acquired growing up in a small college city, and that clashed in Zadic where police patrols are not as frequent and effective as in Sonet:

I'm used to walking downtown Sonet and feeling completely safe and know that I'm not going to have someone walk up to me and spit at me because I won't talk to them. That wouldn't happen in Sonet. I can call the cops and get that person in a lot of trouble or something like that.

Interestingly enough though, Rebecca's home university uncovered repeated episodes of sexual harassment the same year when she was abroad, which hit the headline news for several weeks and alarmed the university authorities and community.

In Rebecca's perception, the US police clearly outperformed the Spanish police. The Spanish police were far from being omnipresent, including the times when Rebecca and her friends were harassed and looked for help. "No hay policia para tanto" (*There are no police for this*) is the comment that Rebecca sadly recalled from those experiences. Rebecca's sense of

vulnerability in Spain seriously hampered her self-confidence and freedom as a woman, and contributed to a growing feeling of powerlessness and defenselessness:

Typically it was kind of in my nature to avoid situations where I feel vulnerable so *I like to be in control of things* but uhm that's probably why some of these experiences upset me because *there wasn't really anything in my power that I could do to fix the situation*.

The words italicized above perhaps unveil some presumption, or the impossible desire of someone coming from one of the most powerful nations on earth to be in a position of predicting and controlling events and situations happening in social settings.

From an American socio-cultural background and perspective, it must be hard to believe that in a "modern" civilization" as Rebecca defined Spain, there are still people who can go unpunished for much aggressive behavior of any kind in public places, as noted by Rebecca below:

I was just more or less shocked just standing there in disbelief at that happening ((her first incident of harassment in the main square)). [...] I could never see that happening at a beach in Florida somewhere ((the second incident of harassment that she suffered at the beach)). It's just a different level of respect I guess there ((in Spain)).

Similarly, an SA program team member commented that:

I believe that Spanish society is rooted in patriarchal values giving the man the right to do whatever he wants. In opposition, the United States society shares both genders. Men AND women do not get away with as much harassment.

Rebecca's cultural expectations as a white US middle-class woman her age who had been raised in a protected and cosseted environment are likely to clash with those of the host culture. In cultures like Spain the attention from men and their tendency to reduce physical proximity with the other sex are not necessarily considered as socially inappropriate behaviors, a personal attack, or a threat, as stated by an SA program team member in an email:

Knowing students from Gareg and being familiar with the kind of students that goes into these study abroad programs, I assume that these girls come from a privileged background. Therefore, this kind of behavior from poor teenagers would be unacceptable,

rude and sexually harassing to them, while to a person coming from that same background it would be just annoying and inconvenient, and to some extent even expected.

Notable here is that the episodes of aggressive behavior experienced by Rebecca - and her fellow US friends, involved some kind of physical contact, although it was not always with the students themselves. It could be said that that kind of contact is perceived as more threatening by Americans who typically value their personal space more so than Spaniards, who instead experience a “cultura de contacto” (*contact culture*), as suggested by four female informants and former SA program team members in different email exchanges. High physical proximity tends to strike US women as socially inappropriate. It may be perceived as a violation of their personal space and privacy, worse if it has sexual overtones. It is important to point out here that Spanish youth culture witnessed much sexual liberation after Franco’ dictatorship as pointed out by a former SA program team member in an email: “21st century Spain is a hyper-modern country whose youth culture prides itself on sexual liberation.” This aspect of modern Spain clashes with the American society where what tends to prevail is a more puritan and conservative approach to sex and physical contact. For example, Americans in Spain witness much public display of affection that can be disturbing and disorienting for them in the light of their interpretation of public/private dimension of social life, as reported by two US female undergraduates studying in Zadic during an interview:

- Young boys and young girl making out EVERYWHERE=
- =yeah::
- in the doorstep, in the middle of the street, in stairways
- yeah I saw people licking each other
- we were just like get a hotel get a room. Just go somewhere, just somewhere.



From a SCT perspective, this section reveals the importance for US SA students to be prepared to understand and recognize the role of local and historical contexts, instead of imposing on them US cultural norms, practices, and values that are deemed to inevitably clash.

#### Implications of Rebecca's Interactions with Host Society and on Opportunities for Cultural and Linguistic Immersion

The perception of sexual harassment is an obvious issue for students when they go abroad. For those students like Rebecca and her SA friends who feel harassed, the experience can severely curtail engagement in local activities and social networks and thereby limit language learning. Their emotional investment in L2 and C2 was inevitably affected as Rebecca reported during an interview: "It makes me angry that few people are able to do that and you know change me and several of the other girls' opinions about the culture." This fact is particularly distressing in the light of the feminized nature of SA, as clearly shown in the *Open Doors Report on International Education Exchange* developed by the Institute of International Education (2008). The figures illustrate that from 1996/7 to 2006/7 the percentage of women oscillated between 64.6% to 65.6%, while the presence of men swung from 34.4% to 35.4%.

Rebecca's experiences eclipsed her enthusiasm to embrace LI and CI in her Spanish program and to invest in target language speakers. Indeed, she recoiled from most interactions with locals, as she admitted in an interview: "We didn't end up talking to Spanish people as much as we would have." Her affinity and affiliation with her US ex-patriot fellow friends increased: "After a while I've seen several things happen like this I was at least always with my roommate or uh yea we tended to kind of stick together in bigger groups after a while." Rebecca showed to have acquired a widespread habit among SA participants of standing behind, and

relying on, each other for social and psychological support (Isabelli-García, 2006; Kline, 1998; Twombly, 1995) when cultural clashes occurred.

Another important implication for CI and LI is the role of the host family as major, if not the single, cultural informant for students. For Rebecca, the second host family - constituted by the single mother and her seven year-old child, remained her main source of authentic manifestation of Spanish language and culture, with all the limitations that this entailed. When I asked Rebecca if she had established any other connection locally, or if she had enjoyed interacting with other people, she replied that for her and her roommate it was “really just the second family that we lived with.”

From a SCT perspective, learning is fundamentally a social process and takes place in a social environment in interaction with others where language and culture play a major role (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the opportunities that Rebecca had in Spain for social learning and for improving her L2 were limited. Besides with her second host mother, Rebecca did not mention in her accounts any other situation in which she worked with a native speaker of Spanish, or a more capable speaker, within her zone of proximal development. Neither can it be said that Rebecca undertook an active role in her L2 learning. She was not invested or engaged in a durable way, and did not actively participate in extensive and varied social interactions with natives, a necessary condition for actual learning to occur and for being socialized into the target society. In my observation of Rebecca during the summer semester in Spain, I never perceived that her classes challenged her. Several times I would ask Rebecca and her classmates how classes were going. The activities Rebecca described did not resemble Vygotsky’s ZPD in which, for example, she was working together with her teachers or classmates to accomplish goal oriented tasks. Instead, one day she voiced some boredom about the topics presented by her

professors, the teacher-centered approach that they adopted, and the repetitive class format and dynamics.

Finally, Vygotsky's concept of learning a second language – or a second languaculture as Agar (1994) would say – and the mediating role of learners' knowledge and practices in their first language, is applicable to Rebecca because it certainly impacted her perception of the host society, while her expectations and value system substantially clashed with the Spanish culture.

Instead of learning Spanish within her ZPD, Rebecca claimed that she began to realize how people across cultures carry with them a set of unique experiences, the cultural artifacts that they have inherited and that mediate all their activities, perspectives, ways of living, expressing themselves, and behaving in interactions: "One of the biggest things I took away from it was the bigger sense of uhm understanding of how the world works you know how people interact uhm more than just learning Spanish." Study abroad was an opportunity for Rebecca to expand her point of view on global issues and to gain a deeper sense of understanding and respect for immigrants in the United States who are treated the same way that she was treated abroad:

I have an interaction with an immigrant in my business you know... if they come in and they are not they don't understand our customs or they just are lost or confused and you know feeling vulnerable too in the same way that I did, it makes me treat them differently and try to be more understanding of other people's situations. [...] It makes you not want to treat them the same way that you've been treated in a way. [...] I felt like sympathize more now.

### Conclusions and Broader Implications for Study Abroad

In this chapter I have argued that SA can be a gendered experience. By that I mean to suggest that female SA participants' CI and LI experience is shaped by their socio-cultural expectations about gender and gender roles, by their interpretation of gender roles in the host community members, and by their gendered experiences and interactions with them. This is the story of Rebecca, a story of hostility towards Americans and of clash in cultural expectations and

value systems. The negative experiences that she went through eclipsed her initial enthusiasm and investment to interact with the host society members and to blend in their community. The implications on her opportunities for CI and LI and on her perception of the target culture were profound.

At the start of her study abroad, Rebecca showed a positive mindset to embrace LI and CI in her Spanish program, and she was eager to speak Spanish, meet people, make friends, fit in, and integrate into the target society. However, her cultural expectations clashed when she arrived in Zadic. Her journey was interspersed with multiple disturbing episodes of catcalling in the street, harassment, machismo, and sexism towards American female students like her, as well as within her two host families. She was perturbed, disgusted, and angry because for her Spanish men showed no respect or consideration for the other sex, and because they treated women as sex objects. Likewise, she perceived that Spaniards treated her and her fellow Americans at times with antagonism and resentment, other times with distance and indifference. Rebecca came to realize her unfitnes and otherness within the host community and became very uncomfortable among Spaniards. The result was her total disinvestment in the target culture and in L2-mediated activities with locals. The only satisfactory relationship that she built in Zadic was with her second Spanish host mother. Considering the events narrated in this chapter against the backdrop of the worldwide unpopularity of the Bush administration and US foreign policy, it is possible that Spanish men in Zadic felt hostility toward American arrogance, and resentment for their wealth and privileged economic conditions, and responded in an aggressive sexual manner towards US women.

During her sojourn, Rebecca did not speak Spanish much, nor did she become connected with Spaniards while she was in Zadic. Her social interactions with locals were very limited, as

was her cultural immersion in the host society. However, during her sojourn she was exposed to new ways of interpreting and performing gendered social practices and dynamics. In all, she claimed that she gained a better understanding of how other people across cultures act and interact, and developed a greater sense of respect and compassion for those immigrants who are rejected or treated with hostility in her country. It seems to me that during Rebecca's intercultural sensitivity developmental process, she went back and forth through the ethnocentric stages of adaptation (Bennett, 1993). In the end, I believe that Rebecca's experience was in part successful in the sense that she overcame the immediate tendency to place her own culture as central to reality. She acknowledged that cultural practices are relative to one another within a specific cultural context, even though this did ease her frustration and disgust about certain aspects of the host society. The artifacts that Rebecca inherited mediated her perception of various events and people in Spain and explain how her cultural expectations inevitably clashed within the host society.

The story of Rebecca in Spain illustrates how challenging and distressing certain aspects of SA can be for female students, and to what extent SA can be viewed as a gendered experience. The case of Rebecca and her US female friends also shows how important it is to provide students not only with street smarts at pre-departure orientation meetings and during the program but also with practical advice on culture and diversity and intercultural communication. Likewise, it is beneficial to raise awareness among students about socio-cultural differences when crossing boundaries, and to try to fit in, as pointed out by an SA program team member: "More emphasis should be placed on ways of staying low profile and trying to blend into the target culture" Another SA program team member emphasized the importance to make students aware of how the US is seen abroad, and how this may impact their sojourn:

The director and graduates assistants (myself included) explained during pre-trip orientation that women should dress more conservatively while in Spain; should avoid the use of English (for academic improvement and safety); should travel in small groups; and refrain from excessive behavior (e.g., drinking too heavily, dancing on tables / up against men).

Students should reflect that while they are free to wear, say, and do what wish, they always make an impression on the people around them, an impression that varies across cultures and that is shaped by history, media representation, collective remembering of historic events, and ideologies and preconceptions circulating in society. It is easy to sense some negativity, blame, and hostility on the part of several of my Spanish informants towards US female students as they hold them responsible, at least in part, for the incidents of aggressive behavior they were subjected to. However, from a SCT perspective, such students are products of their own environment, so incidents and clashes of this nature at the intersection of two cultures seem inevitable, and to a certain extent expectable. Likewise, it is all too easy to make unfavorable comparison between US versus European students and their experiences abroad, as some of my Spanish informants did. However, we should not forget that European university students, who are experienced travelers, polyglots, and independent individuals abroad, are products of a socio-cultural and historical environment that sharply diverges from the US context.

An insightful approach to sexually aggressive behavior suggested by Kinginger (2009) is to view it as a “rich point” (Agar, 1994), i.e., a cross-cultural conflict, a clash in ideas and practices at the intersection of two cultures, a case of intercultural misunderstandings. This means that it is useful to consider the ways in which these activities (that are called ‘sexual harassment’ in the US) are interpreted by local people, the representatives of host institutions and community, and the presumed victims. By doing that, we may find that we are in presence not of

appalling and inexplicable behavior, but of a rich point that is worthy of further investigation for the sake of learning and accessing another side of the story.

I want to take up the challenge proposed by Kinginger (2009) and Jackson (2008) who invites us to adopt a critical stance towards experiences such as the ones lived by Rebecca. Instead of coming to the conclusion that the rest of the world has a distorted idea of what gender relations and gender equity are, that a less egalitarian value system views the rights of females as a lesser priority, and that everybody should emulate the US, it would be better consider how students' behavior is viewed in the contexts they frequent. We may find that their actions and manners are disorienting and unsettling to the host society. In the stories of aggressive behavior towards US female students analyzed in this chapter it is hard to determine what exactly the situation was, and whether other contextual and circumstantial details might have played a role in the events that occurred. The absence of other perspectives besides the victims' makes it difficult to fully interpret the happenings, as several Spanish informants and SA participants also pointed out: "Habría que escuchar a ambas partes" (*we should hear both sides*).

In conclusion, a (summer) semester long SA program may not be long enough for the students to develop intercultural sensitivity. It is important, therefore, to view SA as a year-long project that does not start the day when students take the plane in or end when they fly back to their country. Rather, US students will need assistance and guidance before, during, and after the program. They will need to learn how to a) express empathy and respect for others; b) avoid treating cultural practices that are unfamiliar in the US as wrong, but see them in their own context; c) avoid comparing values and worldviews to the US as the only reference point; d) observe and listen to the perspectives of their hosts; and e) "challenge those aspects of their national identity that are objectionable to others" (Falk & Kanach, 2000, p. 164).

This study also has important implications at the university policy level. Small and large universities across the US are aggressively promoting SA, including the US university sponsoring Rebecca's SA program. However, by offering short programs (seven or 13 weeks) and sending students abroad in big groups to vacation spots, universities are essentially fostering students' sense that SA is more of an extended vacation than a serious academic and cultural encounter. Such academic institutions are eclipsing the potentials of SA experiences as a cultural and linguistic immersion. Thus, I would suggest that university presidents, offices of international education, and SA departments of universities fundamentally rethink and revise the SA experience, and reflect on what we want our students to get out of their sojourn abroad, and how we want to go about it. I would also recommend including more critical components in SA, and fomenting a less ethnocentric approach to the interpretation of cultural clashes and episodes of intercultural miscommunication and misunderstanding. In all, this study confirms the intricate connection between individual learner and context, as posited by SCT, and it emphasizes how important it is for all SA participants to understand and recognize the role of local and historical contexts in the students' learning and cultural immersion process.



## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study looked at two US-university directed SA programs located in two Spanish coastal cities. I show here that such programs are limited in the extent of authentic cultural immersion abroad, as articulated by Engle and Engle (2004; 2003; 1999), instead of...

- The short duration abroad, particularly during summer semesters;
- The limited use of L2 in curricular and extracurricular activities of many students – corroborated by my class observations and participant observations;
- The housing arrangements - students sharing a room with a US roommate instead of individual home stay or dorm stay as recommended by Engle and Engle;
- The restricted student participation in cultural integration activities such as language exchange session, volunteer work, service learning, or internships;
- The orientation sessions lacking in analytical and critical depth and discussion of potential experiences of clashes in cultural expectations;
- The absence of students' direct enrollment in host institutions or authentic work context following Spanish norms and academic practices.

Based on these findings, I would argue that US SA programs like the ones examined here cannot claim full-immersion as a realistic goal. Instead, they serve primarily as introductory programs that facilitate US students' first insertion into the host community and exploration of the foreign

culture and society, and offered an important academic component as well as a wide selection of extracurricular activities. Therefore, such programs can be viewed as a springboard for student participants for more immersive and independent sojourns in the future.

Within the entire group of student participants abroad, this study looked at three college students in particular as they navigated an academic semester in Spain. They were selected for this study because several aspects of their experiences were representative of the entire SA group and because their stories were compelling. In other words, they presented both common themes seen across the US cohort and unique and distinctive individual details, qualities, and specifics. Likewise, they illustrate real world experiences and the issues that L2 learners could potentially face while living in a foreign country. Such issues, or “rich points” (Agar, 1994), i.e., stories of cross-cultural conflicts and clashes in cultural expectations and value systems show how SA can be a site of struggle and challenge.

Social constructivist theory provided the frame for exploring how such male and female undergraduates made sense of their experiences, challenges, and perceptions while living abroad and interacting with the host society. The study’s research questions asked how three college students’ social background variables such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender, affected their SA experiences inside and outside of the classroom; how these variables were viewed by the host society; how these variables affected students’ individual and collective interactions with the host society; what the implications were for students’ identity construction and opportunities for linguistic and cultural immersion; what the underlying values and socio-cultural resources were that US students use for interpreting their experiences and interactions in class and outside of class; and finally how a local teachers and a student negotiated the meaning and content of cultural immersion in SA classrooms.

When data from the study were examined from a socio-cultural perspective, the study yielded two major findings. First, although two of the three case study participants, Albert and Rebecca, initially evidenced every inclination to fully embrace linguistic and cultural immersion in their SA program, the experiences that they lived in contact with the host community eclipsed any initial investment in L2 and C2. Albert's race played a major role in his interactions abroad as he was the target of multiple episodes of discrimination for his skin color, attire, and presumed social class. Likewise, in Spain Rebecca witnessed hostility and several acts of machismo and sexism both at her host house and out in public. In addition, she suffered two incidents of aggressive behavior on the part of local juveniles, and she was object of frequent catcalls in the street. These negative experiences dramatically curtailed both Albert and Rebecca's individual and collective interactions with natives. As a result, their opportunities for language and culture learning considerably decreased.

Second, students' failure to take the academic component of SA seriously and to seek SA for integration into the host community had major consequences. Theresa, the third case study participant for this study, approached her experience abroad largely as an expensive vacation. In addition, Theresa's class misplacement led to discouragement and disaffection with her classes and grew into an acute cultural dissonance in her relationship with one of her Spanish professors. Theresa perceived that her teacher's comments were harsh and cutting, and she did not facilitate Theresa's learning. This was mostly due to the fact that in the US Theresa was accustomed to instructional interactions where an egalitarian culture encourages teachers to avoid overt criticism. This divergence can be seen as a consequence of dissimilar perceptions of academic expectations, teacher's role and authority, institutional interactions, dynamics and responsibility, and difference in the mission statements of different institutions across cultures.

Other findings that this study yielded showed how deeply globalization and capitalism impacted the way case study students interpreted SA, including the academic aspect of the program, and how hard the cultural immersion journey was for certain students as their experiences abroad did not meet their expectations. When exposed to episodes of cultural conflicts, miscommunications, or misunderstandings; students typically retreated into feelings of national superiority, and interpreted and compared such events within the backdrop of their home culture.

Albert, Theresa, and Rebecca, three of the case study student participants, became the main focus of the finding chapters of this dissertation. They might have benefited a great deal of a more authentic cultural and immersion SA program that provided more structure and assistance in their learning process abroad. Particularly, I believe all three would have benefited more assistance to access and understand the two critical dimensions of culture that Moran (2001) calls “Communities” and “Persons”, so that they could establish durable and meaningful contacts with Spaniards and Spanish culture. As we saw in the next chapters, neither Albert, Theresa, or Rebecca developed a deep sensitivity and understanding of the Spanish socio-cultural contexts, people, and culture as a result of their sojourn. Tying my case study participants’ experiences together with Tedick and Cammarata’s discussion of bilingualism and multilingualism (in press) (see chapter 2 of this dissertation, pages 25-26), it can be affirmed that none of my three protagonists acquired the capacity and sufficient knowledge to become sensitive to, and appreciative of, the way the Spanish society and reality is constructed in its historical, political, and socio-cultural settings. In a word, their way to become bilingual or multilingual citizens of these linguistically and culturally diverse modern societies is still a long and uphill one.

As posited by Vygotskian socio-cultural theory, this study reconfirms the intricate connection between the individual learner, the socio-cultural tools they acquired growing up in a specific historical, institutional, and political environment, and the context abroad. Employing a social constructivist perspective draws attention to the challenges that a male or female college student must face while studying and living in the host community and interacting with the native speakers. This study demonstrated that SA can be a site of struggle and cross-cultural clashes in value systems, and a destabilizing and disorienting experience at times. However, SA touches every student and offers them learning opportunities that remained unmatched in their own home country. These challenges faced by students abroad can be mitigated if SA programs provide the instructional scaffolding, such as discussion groups and courses in cross-cultural awareness and intercultural communication, assist them to process their experiences and emotions, and help them develop understanding, appreciation, empathy, global civic engagement, and language ability.

#### Transforming the Field of SA Today for Tomorrow:

##### Implications for Future Research

###### *The Field Today*

Recent research on applied linguistics and international education (Dufon & Churchill, 2006; Byram & Feng, 2006) show that SA is a very multi-disciplinary field; the theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, and research designs employed widely vary, and commonly taught languages (Spanish, French, German) are not the only subject of extensive inquiry as Japanese, Chinese, German, and Indonesian are very popular too. This body of research provides very valuable insights and perspectives on inter- and intra-personal experiences and lifestories lived by individual students participating in an SA program. It is clear

that SA and students' cultural and linguistic immersion is highly affected by their personality traits, attitudes, motivation, and willingness to invest in target language speakers and L2-mediated activities within the host community. However, what plays a major role abroad is also the social dynamics and the interactional and contextual experiences that learners are exposed to, how they are welcomed by the target language community, and the opportunities that they are offered locally to become immersed into the L2 culture and language. Some scholars (Freed, 1995a; Huebner, 1995; Kinginger, 2008a) emphasize how broad individual differences among SA students are, and how differently SA touches every student. Their experiences with, and exposure to, the target language and culture can vary enormously. Their interaction with native speakers is not always intense. The opportunity for immersion and integration in the local social networks are rare at times. Significant language gains and increased cultural awareness and sensitivity are not necessarily an obvious consequence of living abroad. Therefore, it is hard to generalize and assess overall SA outcomes because each learner experiences unique lifestories. Social variable such as race, gender, ethnicity, age, and class can profoundly shape their perceptions of the host people and community, and consequently affect their future decisions related to L2 and C2. The common denominator in SA seems to be that such sojourn represents for many participants a challenging but rewarding experience at the same time, and offers them the opportunity to receive an education, in class and outside of class, that they could not possibly get in the United States.

Several aspects require urgent attention and improvement if we want SA research to evolve from the present situation and address future challenges:

- We need to reach a better understanding of the qualities and specifics of individual students' experiences and accounts abroad, the cultural resources that they use to make

sense of their experiences, and how race, ethnicity, gender, age, and socio-economic class may affect the nature of their perceptions and perspectives. Additionally, globalization and capitalism, and the predominance of English around the world, seem to play a crucial role in shaping how foreign languages and cultures are learned and taught abroad.

- Besides understanding how students' personal histories affect SA, we also need to know how to better prepare students so that they can reconcile their personal histories with what they will find in another cultural context. It would be useful to teach them to analyze the various incidents experienced abroad within the context of the target culture and society instead of taking their home culture and society as reference point and parameter of comparison. For the students this could be an important step towards switching from an ethnocentric view of the world to a more ethnorelative approach.
- Dominant discourses circulating among US college students - identified by Gore (2005) as the consolidated belief that SA is a vacation, offers weak academic programs, and mostly provides an opportunity for students to travel and party in big groups - cannot prevail anymore. Instead, we should urge students to take SA more seriously so that the dominant discourses will be replaced by the alternative discourses that view SA as a unique opportunity to study the target language and culture; establish profound and durable contacts with the local community; and become involved in L2-mediated activities with target language speakers. SA is a good 'school'. It allows students to explore new spaces; challenge themselves and their preconceived ideas; and observe other people's practices with curiosity and fresh eyes; and suspend judgment for the sake of learning without being afraid of encountering worlds of differences and unfamiliar traditions and customs.

- Important changes to the basic structure of US SA programs need to be made, such as extending the duration of SA to one year or longer, promoting individual home stay or dorm stay, and negotiating complete direct enrollment abroad and authentic academic work context following local norms.
- We ideally need different configurations of SA opportunities for different proficiency and experience levels.
- As suggested in the Modern Language Association (MLA) report (2007), we need to educate students to acquire “translingual and transcultural competence,” i.e. the ability to “operate between languages” and “function as informed and capable interlocutors with educated native speakers in the target language” (pp. 3, 4).

*The Future is Now: What Do We Need To Do Today for Tomorrow?*

As argued by Kinginger (2008a), our SA students are at risk of failing to get engaged in the host society abroad and to notice how ignorant they are of these communities that they visit and study. To counter this situation, Kinginger proposed an activist stance to SA and language learning: “As educators, we need to upgrade our ability to argue in favor of meaningful study abroad experiences explicitly including an emphasis on language learning as negotiation of difference” (p. 20). ‘Negotiation of difference’ means acquiring the ability to appreciate and value the practices and perspectives of others through language learning.

SA needs to be aggressively promoted among students, faculty members, and departments that do not have a strong SA tradition. SA also needs to reach out to rural and minority students (i.e., students of color and heritage speakers), and analyze how they approach and expand notions of translingual and transcultural competence through such programs. The



quality of academic programs abroad should be strongly emphasized. Furthermore, opportunities for financial support need to be extensively investigated.

More qualitative research and ethnographic inquiry is required to shed light on the nature and significance of SA for individual students, and the impact of crucial students' individual social variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, age and class in their perceptions and practices. Ethnographic case study is a suitable methodology for digging deeper into the characteristics and specifics of individual students' accounts and stories, and to explore the cultural tools and naturalized ideologies that they use to interpret their experiences. More research should include data from other SA participants besides students, such as local teachers, SA coordinators, host families, and host community members. This will allow researchers to draw a more comprehensive picture of student experience in context, and deep analysis of all its components and facets. More emphasis should be placed on studies linking language learning to the negotiation of difference, the development of cross-cultural awareness, intercultural communication, and civic responsibility.

Teachers have the responsibility to engage and involve students before, during, and after the SA program. SA does not start and end the day when students board the plane to fly in or out. It is a long learning process that requires much preparation, assistance, follow-up, and strong and genuine commitment to serious, profound, and durable investment in L2 people and culture. An immediate intervention that can be implemented is the integration in SA of teaching material such as the students' guides as well as the SA program professionals' guides designed by Paige et al. (2002a; 2002b). Such guides suggest best practices and strategies to optimize the students' target language and culture learning process. They are ideal manuals and exercise books to be adopted and used inside and/or outside of the classroom during the semester before departure,

while abroad, and upon return. They suggest weekly recommended readings, activities, and exercises that assist SA participants throughout their journey and learning process.

Another important implementation in SA would be to integrate courses and discussion groups on cultural awareness, intercultural communication, culture and diversity, and language and culture as part of the academic component. Such courses provide an excellent environment for the students and professors to read about, share, and discuss experiences and accounts of real lifestories, and explore practices, perceptions, and worlds of differences. What could be implemented in the curriculum is also a sound discussion about high culture versus popular culture. The programs that I observed seemed more focused on high culture or "visible" culture, but students were thirsting for more exposure to popular culture or "invisible culture." Yet that's exactly what ended up repelling them too, when they got a big dose of Spanish invisible culture that they could not comprehend or went out of their comfort zone. The role of the teacher in these contexts and discussions is to act as a facilitator of learning and serve as a guide or a coach who assists the students in acquiring knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity to certain questions and topics. In this environment, learners are prompted to develop genuine curiosity and respect for other people's practices and perspectives.

Students also learn from other fellow students, native and not native of the target language. Therefore, they would take much benefit of the opportunity to mix with various students and learn from each other. Given the diversity of student experiences and perspectives, class members can contribute a great deal to the learning process of the group as a whole. To achieve this end, it is crucial to create a classroom climate that provides a safe environment and forum for the open flow of ideas, without any fear of being discriminated against. Through authentic, dialogic participation of students of various backgrounds and origins, a deeper

appreciation can be gained of how course content and life experiences are construed and reconstructed to become relevant to the students. I am convinced that what students retain in the long term is what they can apply to their own life circumstances.

As a result, the need is growing to design highly individualized program features, components, configurations, and opportunities that meet different proficiency and experience levels. A good example comes from the work of Engle and Engle (1999; 2003; 2004). They suggested not only guided cultural reflection and analysis sessions that work as regular debriefing moments for students. They also promoted initiatives such as of volunteering at a local hospital or day care center; cultivating a personal interest in the host community such as becoming part of a local volleyball team; joining a bike or a chess club; or taking a dance course or guitar lessons. Being exposed to such manifestations of the local culture and interacting with various people helps understand the value and significance of such experiences.

An active engagement locally can also be sustained with intensive and extensive reading of relevant literature on cultural awareness and intercultural communication. Students can be encouraged to think and write about certain assigned topics, link direct experience and abstract understanding, and “enrich and extend authentic cultural experience through reflection, personal articulation, and practical advice” (Engle & Engle 1999, p. 46) in class with their peers. Creating personalized and individualized opportunities for SA students based on their personality traits, proficiency, expectations, and future plans can make a big difference in students’ life.

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APPENDICES  
Appendix A

LIST OF TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

(.)	Unmeasured micropause
[...]	Omitted speech
(( ))	Commentary
(?)	Unclear utterance
WORD	loudness and/or emphasis
=	latching
<i>italics</i>	translation

Adapted from:

DuFon, M. A., & Churchill, E. (2006). *Language learners in study abroad contexts*. Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.

## Appendix B

## FIRST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about your experience so far. And how do you feel?

Do you have any significant story (of cultural and linguistic immersion), any significant anecdote, episode or moment that you want to share with me?

Tell me about your routine/life in Spain. Tell me about your free time.

Tell me about your social activities.

What social activities do you do here in Spain? With whom, where, when, how often?

Tell me about your Spanish.

When do you speak Spanish? With whom, where, when, how often? What are the topics of conversation in Spanish?

Tell me about your classes in Spain. Tell me about your professors in Spain.

What is the role of classroom instruction in your cultural and linguistic immersion and learning process?

Tell me about your life in the Spanish dorms.

What is the role of the dorms in your cultural and linguistic immersion and learning process?

Tell me about your host family. Tell me about the host family members.

What is the role of your host family in your cultural and linguistic immersion and learning process?

Tell me about the SA program and activities. Tell me about the SA program staff.

What is the role of the SA program ( and staff) and the program activities in your cultural and linguistic immersion and learning process?

Do you watch Spanish TV? What?

Do you listen to Spanish music? What?

Do you like Spain so far? Do you like Spaniards?

What would you like to do more in Spain? Is there anything that you would like to do less? Or differently?

Why did you decide to study abroad?

What do you hope to achieve from the SA program? How are you going about it?

Do you feel you are speaking/learn more Spanish that you would at home? How?

Do you feel your Spanish has improved? Where? How? Why?

What did you know about the program before leaving?

## Appendix C

## FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In your first interview, you talked about \_\_\_\_\_. Can you expand on it?

How do you feel now compared to the beginning of the SA program?

Can you tell me a key incident that made you speak less or more Spanish?

Can you tell me a significant incident that made you feel like you have (not) understood Spanish culture?

Can you tell me a significant incident that made you feel like you have integrated into the Spanish culture?

Can you tell me a significant incident that made you feel like alienated from the local culture?

Is there any episode of intercultural misunderstanding/miscommunication, cultural clash or cultural obstacle that you want to share with me?

Can you name a person who has had the most profound influence on your understanding of Spanish language & culture? Who is this person? How was he/she so influential?

Have your peers helped you integrate into Spanish language & culture? Can you give me a specific example or can you tell me a story about it?

Has this SA experience changed you? How?

Will you keep in touch with someone from Spain? Can you tell me more about the relationship that you have established with this person?

Any future plan derived from this SA experience?

What have you learnt (about the Spanish language & culture)?

Do you feel now your Spanish has improved? How? Where?

Do you feel your experiences in Spain have been significant for you? How?

Were your expectations met?

## Appendix D

## DATA COLLECTED AND THEIR PURPOSE

Data Collected	What am I hoping to get out of it?
Interviews w/ case study participants	Individual stories and first-person accounts of participants' perceptions and understandings of cultural and linguistic immersion; a window into participants' thinking and learning
Interviews w/ the rest of participants	Participants' perspectives on students' experiences
Class observations	To understand the role of classes and teachers in the students' cultural and linguistic immersion & learning process
Field notes	To situate the participants' accounts in relation to the environments in which they act; to get the overall flavor of students' experiences & SA experience as a whole
Students' class material	Same as "Class observations"; to understand the participants' perceptions and the social, cultural, and historical elements of their journey
Students' weekly journal entries and blogging	Same as "Interviews w/ case study participants"
Students' personal diary	Same as "Interviews w/ case study participants"
Students' pictures	To get a sense of where they go, with whom, and what they do abroad
VALE magazine	To understand the participants' perspectives and the socio-cultural, political, and historical dimensions of their learning; to get the overall flavor of students' experiences & SA experience across different semesters
Students' course and program evaluations	To determine how students assess their classes, teachers, as well as the various components of the SA program
SA program daily journal	To get the overall flavor of students' experiences & of the SA event during the semester abroad; to understand the participants' experiences & feelings contextualized in their socio-cultural setting
Emails to the listserv	Same as "SA program daily journal"

Phone and email conversations after the end of the SA program	To explore feelings and perceptions of SA participants, how they develop over time, and how they look at their experiences months after the end their journey abroad
Informal Conversations	Additional comments and observations of interlocutors' on the SA event