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**Travelling Light: An investigation into the  
relationship between professional environments,  
language(s) and readings of cultural difference in  
graduates' narratives of working life abroad**

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## **Abstract**

Travel, according to the anthropologist James Clifford (1998), is a fundamental characteristic of human behaviour. Grand tours and temporary residencies in European cities are no longer the preserve of the elite but today have become a global commonplace and one of the discourses of postmodernity. Broadened access to travel has not, however, altered the notion of being well-travelled which has continued to accrue both economic, symbolic and cultural capital. Study or work abroad has become a commonplace and at the same time it has undergone a degree of change, becoming a simple accessory or another commodity to add to one's curriculum vitae. In recent years interculturalists, and modern linguists in particular such as Byram (2001), Cormeraie (2002) and Kramsch (1998), have turned their attention to studies of the experience of the Year Abroad for students of foreign languages. Much of the focus in these studies has been on the accumulation of intercultural competence and on linguistic and cultural fluency drawing conceptual frames from the discipline of education. The problem with this research is that it has become bound into the concerns of education and has not looked beyond the structures of pedagogy to wider cultural issues and manifestations of travel and dwelling abroad.

This thesis examines the experiences of graduates working and living abroad, with an emphasis on the relationship which exists between their working contexts and cultural difference. This research makes two main contributions to the field. One is to approach the graduates as cultural voices throughout their narratives of residency and working life abroad which can be perceived as the writing of their own identities. The other is the application of psychoanalytical theory to the graduates' readings of cultural difference and intercultural encounter as performed throughout their narratives.

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# Part One

## Introduction



## 1.1. The Argument

The thesis explores the narratives and experiences of graduates working and living abroad. Graduates are products of (Higher) Education and highly employable individuals. I work with the notions of cultural valuing and fetishised commodification inherent in Western capitalism in order to address the graduates' experiences of difference within working contexts. I perceive them as key figures within the dominant economics of intersubjectivity and global marketisation shaping Western societies. The global economy implies a commodification of skills and experiences making professional valuing and exchange possible. In this sense, graduates enjoying working lives and residency abroad can be perceived as relevant commodities to what I call the global. The global can be understood as an economic, cultural and social force leading to facilitated economic exchange, professional mobility and cultural homogeneity on an international scale.

The global village orchestrates a multiplicity of economic and cultural transactions as well as the standardised spread of capitalistic markets beyond national and cultural boundaries. Through its ongoing diffusion and consumption, the global generates cultural conformity and homogeneity on a wider scale through its production of identical goods across the globe.

The thesis demonstrates how graduates working and living abroad experience cultural change and transition in significant ways. Their narratives demonstrate skills of cultural flexibility and adaptability making them key protagonists of the global emphasis on cultural standardisation and exchangeability. The graduates serve the purpose of international industry and businesses abroad through their efficient -and productive- response to cultural shock. One of the findings of the thesis is that the actual shock may not lie in the graduates' exposure to cultural difference, but in the realisation of an increased homogeneity affecting the workplace and their surroundings. I perceive this central ambivalence between sameness and difference as a defining process affecting their narratives and reception of cultural difference throughout residency and working life abroad. An examination of their experiences of cultural difference begs an analysis of various professional contexts in order to compare their impact on the graduates' perceptions.

The thesis is divided into three sections. Section One focuses on international businesses and corporate organisations while analysing the effects of the global on the graduates' narratives. This section also comes to terms with the logics of cultural valuing I illustrate through the concept of "culture accessory". I define the accessory as the sum of linguistic skills, experiences of residency and working lives abroad as well as cosmopolitan lifestyles which give the graduates added surplus value in economic, social and cultural terms. The graduates may, in fact, use their working lives abroad as a *faire valoir* enhancing their professional and personal profiles while giving them access to privileged spheres within capitalism.

Section Two introduces graduates working within the field of Education while complementing the data analysis of nine semi-structured interviews with selected

educational theories relating to their roles and functions as teachers and practitioners. Section Three examines the narratives of multilingual graduates working within the contexts of recruitment, tourism and banking. My choice of these working environments displays the graduates in varied professional landscapes while underlining their growing presence within Western societies as a direct consequence of cultural internationalisation and global economics.

The thesis begins with the assumption that the global acts as a leading cultural and economic force within the graduates' lives and resulting experiences of difference. Section One posits global exchange and standardisation as international processes conditioning the graduates' reactions to cultural difference. It examines international and corporate environments as well as the accessory metaphor standing for Western processes of cultural commodification.

The global does not only have positive effects on an international scale. Section One and Two both underline the detrimental consequences of the global and its social and political implications beyond the economic logics of facilitated exchange. The effects of global economics do not, in fact, limit themselves to the social and cultural spheres, but have a resonance on educational circles, too. Universities have to compete against each other the way graduates do within their professional lives. Increased choice, rivalry and pressure affect the graduates' experiences of cultural difference in significant ways. The global privileges short-term strategies and measurable outcomes while addressing individuals as consumers through its promise of cultural efficiency and tangible professional outcomes. I show how the notion of



employability affecting institutions also resonates within the graduates' perceptions of educational capital through a critical analysis of their narratives.

There are pockets of resistance within the graduates' narratives. The three sections explore their personal negotiations of cultural conflict and integration while depicting their professional struggles as individuals working and living abroad. The thesis stresses the critically enlightening -but also culturally alienating- effects of residency and work abroad throughout their narratives.

On the one hand, language operates as a key site of critical reflection, since graduates are both helped and dispossessed by the ones they speak. On the other, the knowledge and mastery of languages is an essential prerequisite to successful working lives abroad. The graduates have linguistic skills enabling them to cross boundaries and exist outside their own cultural backgrounds. But they also show a clear awareness of what languages are *worth*, implying a pragmatic understanding of the value of cultural exchange and commodification within global capitalism. This means that the graduates are aware of the value of their experiences abroad and that the accessory has a price on the labour market. Difference is valued within capitalism and the graduates display linguistic and cultural skills which are key to their professional success. My analysis of language is therefore contradictory since the graduates want to preserve a sense of cultural uniqueness that is made problematic by the valuing of their own difference. This linguistic paradox is developed through an ongoing analysis of their ambivalent experiences of cultural difference as expressed within their narratives.



In Section Three, I work with psychoanalytical readings of otherness and intersubjective encounters in order to emphasise the fundamentally inefficient and unmanageable nature of cultural difference. Lacan (1966, 1973), Freud (2001), Kristeva (1988) and Žižek (1997) perceive difference as a radical challenge within the formation of the subject and compulsory interactions with others. It presents difference as a necessary and problematic *friction* within one's relationships. It highlights it as a central -but also painful- element within intersubjectivity. Psychoanalytical theories situate difference in the paradox of language through its emphasis on linguistic ambiguities and limitations. For Lacan, language is the "Great Other" while it is *unheimlich* -uncanny- for Freud. If language is key within the psychoanalytical process of the talking cure, the analyst must, however, be wary of language and treat it critically as the manifestation of the patient's symptoms. This ambiguity permeates language as it is an essential tool within human exchange and understanding, but also has restrictions and fails to come to terms with what difference is. If difference is inseparable from language, expressing the core of difference through words is not an easy task. I suggest that one cannot express everything through them and that coming to terms with someone's difference linguistically is not sufficient. Lacan (1973) perceives manifestations of difference which escape language through what he calls the Real of intersubjective relations. If the graduates' experiences of cultural difference are shaped, produced and understood through the languages they speak, language does not, however, come to terms with manifestations of difference that take place outside the symbolic realm of linguistic production. Difference in this sense therefore has to be understood as an ongoing *escape* and necessary negotiation for the graduates. In my analysis of Lacanian *jouissance* as a key interpretative tool towards the understanding of the graduates'

experiences of residency and work abroad, I stress their appropriation of a culturally aware -as well as self-critical- perception of difference.

The graduates are educated individuals subject to cultural change and confusion leading to a development of their critical abilities when dealing with difference on several levels. Their pragmatic understanding of their cultural value does not necessarily exclude the possibility of self-analysis and cultural doubt that can be found within their narratives. Section Three closes the research with psychoanalytical readings of interview data examining the relationship between educational theories of reflexivity, as understood by Barnett (1994), and Lacan's analysis of the reflection within the mirror stage. It is through their experiences and narratives of residency and working lives abroad that each graduate opens up the door of both critical reflexivity and cultural anxiety.

## 1.2. The Context

Sociology relates to the thesis theoretically through the concept of the culture accessory I introduced in the previous part of this introduction. Since the accessory plays a key role within the fashion system and industry, I use the critical relevance of fashion theory to the graduates' accessory in order to interpret the semi-structured interview data.

Working with the writings of Veblen (1994) and Simmel (1890), one comes to terms with the intertwined issues of social competition, cultural differentiation and class distinction within the fashion economy. Their analysis of fashion as a key industry - and cultural process- within capitalism offers a theoretical backdrop to a sociological exploration of the graduates' narratives in material and fetishised terms. I perceive the graduates' linguistic skills, comfortable educated backgrounds and enjoyment of working lives abroad as a key accessory and value within their professional lives that they can use as desirable surplus value as well as display of their cultural and economic powers. Bourdieu (1989) and Baudrillard (1972) are also quoted as key observers of the fashion effect and ensuing logics of cultural distinction performed through fetishised objects and commodified experiences, as well as the relevance of cultural consumption to Western societies. Their post-Marxist framework of cultural analysis highlights the commodification, competition and differentiation inherent in capitalism. These three factors find an echo within the graduates' narratives and their



awareness of difference as added cultural value and exchangeable form within professional contexts. In other words, they get to understand what their difference is worth and how such value can be used in personal, social and professional contexts.

Section One uses a sociological framework of data analysis as well as a managerial understanding of cultural difference affecting the graduates' treatment and reception of their own experiences abroad. Management theory is relevant here, since some of the graduates had attended business school and were working for international businesses and corporations abroad. Exploring the cultural analyses of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), Hofstede (1991), Adler (2002) and Tung (1994) offers an insight into the pragmatic response of Intercultural Management to the intricacies and complexities of difference as expressed by the graduates' narratives of residency and working life abroad. Efficiency and manageability are developed as notions affecting the graduates' sense of their own difference as well as highlighting the strategies -and limitations- when faced with difference and its relevance to the business world. Such readings may shape the graduates' narratives and influence their experiences of difference within -and outside- the workplace.

Section Two deals with graduates working abroad within the field of education and introduces significant voices within the field of Language Education. I develop and analyse the theories of Byram (1997) and Kramsch (1998) when dealing with the graduates' sense of cultural identity when evolving within the classroom. On the one hand, Byram's theory of "intercultural speaker" advocates a critically aware understanding of difference through language(s) benefiting from the input of Cultural



Studies and related disciplines such as ethnography and anthropology serving the reflexive and non-commercial aims of Language Teaching and Learning.

On the other, through her critique of the “native speaker” and advocacy of a widened understanding of cultural identity, Kramsch (1998) expresses a similar desire to challenge the confines of the discipline and its ongoing emphasis on native speakers and cultural authenticity.

Coming to terms with the experiences of the graduates developing within the context of Education abroad nevertheless highlights some of the writers’ limitations when faced with the realities of professional environments and cultural dilemmas encountered by teachers within the classroom. Educational ideals such as Kramsch’s critique of the “native speaker” and Byram’s “intercultural speaker” are tested against the graduates’ narratives in order to find out if the authors’ contributions apply to their experiences in the classroom. This second section also introduces an analysis of the marketisation of (Higher) Education which may -or may not- affect the graduates’ roles within the field. The graduates’ understanding of education -as well as their own sense of difference- are therefore being looked at and analysed.

Section Three develops an analysis of Barnett’s work (1990, 1994, 1997, 2000) and his concept of critical reflexivity operating as a theoretical tool allowing an examination of the graduates’ role within (Higher) Education. One of Barnett’s central contributions to the field is a rethinking of education in times of crisis and pragmatic understanding of the relevance of critical thought to Western society.

His emphasis on critical reflection is combined with an investigation into psychoanalytical thought and Lacan's (1973, 1996) analysis of the reflection within the mirror stage. The mirror reflection is related to critical thought and its demands of self-analysis and critique. Within their work, both thinkers highlight the need and relevance of external forms to self-awareness and mutual understanding. In this sense, a parallel can be drawn between reflexivity and the reflection.

Psychoanalytical thought also contributes to the thesis with an analysis of language as an ambiguous and complex tool. On the one hand, Section One approaches language as a reified object playing the role of accessory within the graduates' narratives of professional success. On the other, Section Three turns to Freud's (2001) analysis of the *uncanny* and highlights the problematic role played by language when referring to the narratives of multilingual graduates stressing a sense of cultural confusion and ambivalence. If language can be reified and used as a powerful tool, it is, nevertheless, inseparable from the notion of difference itself. The graduates themselves are different since they speak foreign languages and come from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Language has, however, certain limitations, and Lacan's (1973, 1996) recognition of manifestations of "The Real" of difference outside language emphasises its limited role. Not only words are never *enough* to fully come to terms with difference, psychoanalytical understandings of the complex relationship uniting language to subjectivity also find a critical resonance within Lacan's (1973, 1996) perception of language as "Great Other" and Derrida's (1996) reflection on linguistic ownership. For Derrida (1996) language cannot be owned since it was established as a normative

and external system existing outside oneself, even though one performs it on a daily basis. Language existed before -and will remain- after one's death. Both thinkers consider, establish and problematise language as fundamentally other and ambiguous form challenging and complicating identity as well as cultural phenomena.

Lacan's theory of *jouissance* and Kristeva's (1988) identification of a new linguistic body in her historically detailed depiction of the foreigner's psyche both offer contributions to the thesis and its advocacy of cultural difference as undefinable, ineluctable and uncommodified form. *Jouissance* relates to the experiences of graduates working and living abroad for the first time as the embodiment of desire and paradox shaping their cultural struggles as individuals evolving within standardised working contexts while coming to terms with their own sense of difference. Within her analysis of foreigners, Kristeva underlines the ambivalence and ambiguity inherent in cultural difference while reflecting upon the notions of shock and transition affecting cultural identities abroad. Psychoanalysis approaches difference with a critical and ambivalent eye contradicting managerial and sociological readings rooted within exchange and materialism. It acts as an interesting theoretical complement to humanistic concerns within Education while radically challenging fixed readings of cultural difference.



### 1.3. The Contribution

This section justifies the choice of the case study of graduates working and living abroad. The graduates are multilingual, educated and socially privileged individuals who encounter difference outside the academic or schooling contexts. They are committed to their working lives abroad while displaying a central awareness of the value of their social backgrounds, economic power and linguistic skills.

In Section One, the main contribution is the creation and development of the concept of the accessory applying to the graduates' narratives of residency and working life abroad. I define the accessory as the sum of linguistic skills, experiences of residency and working lives abroad as well as cosmopolitan lifestyles which give the graduates added surplus value in economic, social and cultural terms. I expand the realm of the accessory into the context of intercultural encounters taking place within and outside the workplace. Accessories are key within the fashion economy and denote class differences as well as social power.<sup>1</sup> They are objects of desire within Western capitalism that are directly related to the culturally charged notions of taste and differentiation.<sup>2</sup>

The culture accessory is key for graduates working within competitive and working contexts: it embodies their distinctive cultural capital while adding surplus value to



their career paths. It also stands for their cosmopolitan, educated and comfortable lifestyles and can be performed through name-dropping, internationalisation and the strength of their linguistic skills making them important protagonists within the international economy. The accessory belongs to the fetishised realm of commodification turning cultural phenomena into transactional, valuable and consumable objects.

In Section Two, I address Byram's educational theory of the "intercultural speaker"<sup>3</sup> and Kramsch's critique of the "native speaker"<sup>4</sup> while relating them to the narratives of graduates involved within Education abroad. The contribution to intercultural debates is to identify and emphasise the limitations of their pedagogical theories through an analysis of the graduates' cultural and professional struggles within an increasingly marketised context. This section also reflects upon the notion of cultural privilege while examining the impact of the graduates' professional contexts on their own sense of difference.

Section Three offers a psychoanalytical reading of cultural difference relating to the narratives of multilingual graduates working and living abroad for the first time. It uses an interpretative framework of cultural analysis moving on from the Freudian approach<sup>5</sup> to focus on three key concepts within Lacanian thought: the mirror stage, language as the other and intersubjective *jouissance*.

Lacan's interpretation of the reflection as an external form inseparable from self-knowledge acts as an interesting metaphor for the necessity of intercultural

communication and encounters shaping and affecting the graduates' critical -and by extension reflexive- understandings of their own difference.

Their exposure to unknown surroundings encourages a rethinking and reappropriation of their identity leading to cultural confusion *and* renewal. I work with Kristeva's depiction of the foreigner<sup>6</sup> in order to examine the cultural contradictions and ambiguities shaping the graduates' narratives and experiences of residency and working life abroad. If their linguistic skills and cultural capital allow them to pursue successful careers, Lacan nevertheless perceives the linguistic sphere as a fundamentally other and ambivalent form. If language is inseparable from difference through its embodiment of otherness, it is, however, not *enough* to fully comprehend it.

The concept of *jouissance* is applied to an analysis of the graduates' interviews while exploring the challenging -and yet compulsory- role of difference within their evolution as graduates starting their careers abroad.

*Jouissance* is understood as an interpretative tool highlighting the paradoxes and complexities of intercultural communication and encounters as opposed to the efficient, reified and dominant discourse of cultural valuing. It acts as a resisting strength throughout the graduates' narratives of confusion, negotiation and ensuing refusal of simplified cultural categories. *Jouissance* advocates a critically aware understanding of intercultural rapport while underlining the fact that difference always *escapes* and can never be defined. Through its emphasis on contradictions,

ambiguities and constant negotiation, *jouissance* reasserts the unreachable,  
ineluctable and uncommodified state of cultural difference

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- <sup>1</sup> See Veblen (1994), Simmel (1997) and Baudrillard (1972).  
<sup>2</sup> See Bourdieu (1991).  
<sup>3</sup> See Byram (2001).  
<sup>4</sup> See Kramsch (1998).  
<sup>5</sup> See Cormeraie (1995).  
<sup>6</sup> See Kristeva (1988).



## **Part Two**

### **Methodology**

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology is divided into two parts. The first focuses on specific issues and problems encountered throughout the empirical process, with an emphasis on the difficulties related to the location of informants within the research. The second part examines one's inevitable bias as a researcher and attempts to examine it critically in order to get a clearer picture of the empirical process and its influence on the researcher. The fact that my linguistic profile and education history were often familiar and similar to the graduates I spoke to is a significant fact affecting data collection and interpretation.

The thesis introduces, examines and analyses the experiences of graduates working and living abroad for the first time. The ages of the nine individuals I spoke to range between twenty-five and thirty-five and two out of nine informants were male. I interviewed one Irishwoman, one Scotswoman, two French people, one German, two Italians, one Norwegian and one Englishwoman who all had one thing in common: they were graduates from European universities or business schools.

I perceive their upbringing as comfortable or privileged in terms of education, economic backgrounds and career paths. The graduates' enjoyment of life abroad,

their foreign careers and linguistic skills clearly distinguish them from other workers. All are bilingual, but most speak three or four languages fluently. They are educated individuals starting their professional lives within unknown contexts and it is worth bearing in mind that the thesis deals with their experiences of cultural difference as foreign workers, while examining the balance between work and cultural discovery inherent in their lives.

My primary assumption that graduates working and living abroad would be easily approachable and accessible was challenged from the start and led to strategic responses ensuring the collection of required data. However logical their presence may be as a result of the impact of global economics on Western societies, I nevertheless noticed that the graduates were somewhat remote figures that could not be easily found or met by complete strangers. My status as a foreign graduate living and studying -but also working- abroad offered an interesting *carte de visite* ensuring I was not as threatening to them as another outsider. This helped me locate potential informants and carry out interview work.

Access is often problematic within research since it raises a number of ethical issues that cannot be separated from academic considerations. I had to use networks of friends, acquaintances and university contacts in order to reach the graduates. The process of managing entry into that specific social field already carried important indications on the context inquired by the research. Entry was made difficult by the



relative invisibility of the graduates and my inability to meet them directly in their working environment.

There were, in fact, several obstacles preventing me from access within their field. Hammersley and Atkinson describe entry as a pragmatic and analytical tool helping to narrow down the research:

In many ways, gaining access is a thoroughly practical issue. As we shall see, it involves drawing on the interpersonal resources and strategies we all tend to develop in dealing with everyday life. But the process of achieving access is not *merely* a practical matter. Not only does its achievement depend upon theoretical understanding (...) but the discovery of obstacles to access, and perhaps of effective means of overcoming them, themselves provide insights into the social organisation of the setting.<sup>1</sup>

The fieldworker's perceived identity is very important when aiming at successful entry. I examine this aspect in the next part where I show that my identity as a foreign graduate studying, living and working abroad not only creates a sense of recognition and ease around the interview process, but also a form of intellectual challenge and exchange generating freer dialogue with the graduates.

It is worth bearing in mind that the graduates are individuals often freshly experiencing cultural change and transition as well as the novelty of their professional contexts. They are vulnerable figures who are still testing their new grounds and coming to terms with the changes affecting their identities. My understanding of their

current living situation as foreigners working abroad encourages them to share impressions and opinions throughout the interview process.

My initial strategy was to target global corporate businesses and select specific companies employing foreign graduates within their departments. I decided to contact the Human Resources Department of an international IT firm whose European headquarters are located in Scotland. Even though I already had a graduate connection in the company before approaching them officially, several telephone calls and attempts at requesting an appointment remained unfruitful. I therefore realised that an indirect approach would be required generate and facilitate results as far as finding the graduates and ensuring data collection were concerned.

Presenting oneself as a graduate researcher within the field of corporate business looking for informants creates ethical complications as well as a heightened sense of paranoia from business organisations. Acting as an academic researcher did not, in fact, generate the warmest welcome. The graduates themselves were sometimes wary of the interview process and initially doubtful of my real intentions.

In Mario's case, I noticed an uneasy response as I placed my tape recorder on the table before the interview took place.<sup>2</sup> Experiencing such reservation and wariness from the graduates themselves within an informal interview context made me aware of the extent of the gatekeepers' power and the level of control granted by their position. The fact that Mario had replicated the gate-keeping policy of his company

before the interview took place was revealing of the bias such organisations often adopt towards academic researchers. In their analysis of “blocked entries”, Atkinson and Hammersley explore the level of authority exerted by gatekeepers:

Whether or not they grant entry into a setting, gatekeepers will generally, and understandably, be concerned as to the picture of the organisation that the ethnographer will paint, and they will have practical interests in seeing themselves and their colleagues presented in a favourable light. At least, they will wish to safeguard what they perceive as their legitimate interests. Gatekeepers may therefore attempt to exercise some degree of surveillance and control, either by blocking off certain lines of inquiry, or by shepherding the fieldworker in one direction or another.<sup>3</sup>

When looking at international corporate companies, access becomes a strong challenge within research. My entry into corporate worlds was therefore indirect as I had to use networks of friends, acquaintances and graduate contacts in order to reach my informants. As far as education and other working contexts are concerned, entry was made possible by social networks of graduates working and living abroad. I also had previous contacts with friends working who had met foreigners looking for jobs abroad. I went back to France in order to carry out research and managed to meet foreign graduates working for international companies after several weeks of patient networking finally paid off.

One of the advantages of using alternative social networks is the avoidance of gatekeepers and their strict policies of data protection and privacy of their employees and organisation. As gatekeepers always condition and limit entry, using alternative



networks made sense and proved a wise decision in research terms. Time limitations also meant that data had to be collected quickly and made a fast approach essential. Establishing a relationship of mutual trust with my informants in a short time was therefore central when collecting valuable information. This implied making the scope and intentions of my research clear and unambiguous from the very beginning. I normally tried to inform “my networks” of the research background first and let them approach the graduates to test the waters. This parallel approach was a strategic decision emphasising the fact that I was in some ways related to the graduates themselves. It also had an influence on data collection and meant that the graduates were then more comfortable exchanging ideas and talking about their private experiences. Such openness can be, for instance, seen in Chiara’s interview where she evokes her relationship to a Frenchman while working abroad. In communicating one’s aims as a researcher, one has to achieve a relative degree of trust and find the right ways to introduce oneself and protect informants:

Once people come to know the researcher as a person who can be trusted to be discreet in handling information within the setting, and who will honour his or her promises of anonymity in publications, access may be granted that earlier would have been refused point blank.<sup>4</sup>

Discretion and protection demand that the privacy of the graduates be protected throughout the thesis. Names -as well as geographical locations- were changed to give the interviews a level of anonymity. This degree of anonymity is central since it

allows ones to approach the graduates both as a social entity and individuals sharing their stories and private experiences. Chemistry and luck are also key elements within research that have very little to do with planning or strategies. Empirical work is not only analytical, but also instinctive as it implicates the researcher as person and how he or she may be perceived.

In his analysis of the research process, Fetterman is keen to emphasise the relevance of luck and unscientific “chaos” to successful data collection:

The more organised the ethnographer, the easier is his or her task of making sense of the mountains of data collected in the field. (...) The reality, however, is that ethnographic work is not always orderly. It involves serendipity, creativity, being in the right place at the right or wrong time, much hard work, and old-fashioned luck. Thus, although this text proceeds within the confines of an orderly structure, I have made a concerted effort to ensure that it also conveys the unplanned, sometimes chaotic, and always intriguing character of ethnographic research.<sup>5</sup>

An instinctive and somewhat “alternative” indirect approach was therefore required in my exploring the experiences and lives of graduates working abroad. It also meant relying on chaos and “serendipity”. Gaining entry required an imaginative, pragmatic and often time-consuming perspective using elements directly related to my personal history as a graduate still living and working abroad. I was potentially in a position to meet graduates who could identify with my path. This is an important dimension illustrating one of the research claims that encounters between different cultures have a “mirror-like” element enabling communication. Acting as a possible “mirror-

image” within the research process if a central aspect I would like to turn to in the second part of the methodology.

My position as a researcher made me engage with nine individuals whose dilemmas and backgrounds bore an uncanny<sup>6</sup> resemblance to my experiences as a foreign graduate living -and working- abroad. If my profile helped in approaching the right informants for data collection, there was, in fact, an underlying competitiveness within the interview process where the graduates were confronted with a PhD student and therefore encouraged to reflect upon their experiences and backgrounds in critical and analytical ways.

Engaging in a dialogue with the graduates primarily justified the choice of tape-recorded interviews which took place within informal settings and mimicked the relaxed style of ordinary conversation. This did not, however, minimise a certain level of expectations on both parts when engaging in an active process of cultural and personal analysis while rising up to the “challenge” of the interview. There was therefore a key tension between the informal, conversation style data collection and the situation itself where graduates were confronted with the researcher as an academic reflection of themselves and their background.

The sameness and familiarity made, in fact, for powerful circumstances pushing the graduates to perform and present themselves in the best light, even when they were going through difficult phases or encountering major obstacles.



Privileging a dialogic approach and freer exchange with the graduates implied a necessary distancing from theories of language and research analysis related to the notion of powers and its social, economic and cultural implications.<sup>7</sup> I felt that empathy and willingness to embrace the graduates' experiences, successes and difficulties were more important than a measured and controlled account of residency abroad. I did not aim at a quantitative account of graduates living and working abroad, but decided to focus on personal portrayals of difference and professional contexts instead. Such an approach to research can be defined as qualitative<sup>8</sup> and employs: "methods of data collection and analysis that are not quantitative, and aiming towards exploration of social relations" as well as transcribing: "reality as experienced by the respondents."<sup>9</sup> My position as a multilingual graduate enjoying intercultural experiences and interviewing individuals I could easily relate to formed an integral part of the research and ensuing bias. As Fairclough puts it: "interpretations are generated through a combination of what is in the text and what it "in" the interpreter"<sup>10</sup> In order to give more room to the graduates in engaging with my personality and experiences, I made sure the interviews were not too structured and left room for longer descriptions and relevant impressions. Opting for a dialogic approach meant that a series of intercultural encounters were orchestrated between researcher and informants whereby experiences of difference could be described, exchanged, analysed and discussed whether it be in professional, cultural, social or private contexts. The interview format offered interactive interactive and loosely structured descriptions and examinations of the graduates' working environments as



well as their perception of cultural difference and exchange *in progress*, shaped by flux and affected by change.

The graduates can be defined as individuals encountered at an interesting stage of their identity which is influenced by being a foreigner, working life in a new context and residency abroad. They are new to their professional surroundings and sense cultural transition and change in perceptive and tangible ways. The graduates are not “established foreigners” and sometimes discover the reality of the workplace for the first time. They leave the institution and are now expected to perform quickly and efficiently in their new posts. Their first professional steps abroad are combined with a sense of cultural introspection and reassessment -as well as expressions of cultural or personal anxiety- forming a pivotal process shaping up their sense of identity as “working foreigners abroad”. The interview context offers the graduates a form of respite from the culturally unknown and professional struggles they have to deal with.

My ability to relate to their problems and experiences of cultural novelty offers the possibility of empathy<sup>11</sup> and takes into account the subjective dimension of intercultural encounters. As Geof Alred puts it: “Essential to the ability to mediate between cultures is sensitivity to the feelings of other people and the ability to empathise with their experience”.<sup>12</sup> The interview experience offers such mediation by allowing the graduates to reflect upon their experiences of difference in cultural and subjective terms.

As the thesis evolves towards a psychoanalytical exploration of cultural difference -as well as a cultural elaboration of the mirror stage in educational terms- the choice of interviews is therefore justified by a willingness to perceive and see the graduates as actors of social life and key protagonists of contemporary intercultural communication throughout residency and working life abroad. The interview format offers a unique *face-to-face* context where subjectivities can meet, exchange and re-evaluate impressions as well as opinions. The “personal interview”<sup>13</sup> -as Sarantakos names it- acts as a possible forum for reflection and cultural communication generating a dialogic process reconciling subjectivities as well as reasserting and contrasting them. By relating to my personal history as a graduate working, living and studying abroad, they were enabled to revisit their sense of identity and acknowledge similar patterns of cultural recognition.

If qualitative research favours the interview process as a loose and dynamic site of data collection, it also offers the possibility of differentiation and distinction. The interview is, in fact, a space of “tension (...) between subjectivity and objectivity”<sup>14</sup> where compromise and negotiation have to be reached. I argue that the interview process acts as a key metaphor for the graduates’ situation facing difference abroad in professional, cultural, social and subjective terms.

The ongoing dialogue they have with their new surroundings was replicated through the interview format and leads to a series of interesting reconsiderations of their sense of difference and identity. My position as a researcher was to act as a reassuring,

familiar mirror image the graduates could relate to and which allowed them to be more open about the difficulties and obstacles encountered during residency and working life abroad. Conversations -and interview work- offer, as Miller and Glassner put it the “means for exploring the points of view of our research subjects, while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality.”<sup>15</sup>

The graduates’ discovery of new professional contexts, cultural differences and personal conflicts were all elements I tried to capture within our informal dialogues and exchanges. Their experience of residency abroad can therefore be perceived as a complete work in progress where identities and subjectivities are responding to a multiplicity of discourses and influences shaping them.

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- <sup>1</sup> Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, *Ethnography, Principles in Practice*, p.175. 1983, Tavistock Publications, London and New York.
- <sup>2</sup> See *Appendix H* for introduction to *Mario's Interview*.
- <sup>3</sup> Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, *Ethnography, Principles in Practice*, p.175. 1983, Tavistock Publications, London and New York.
- <sup>4</sup> Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, *Ethnography, Principles in Practice*, p.71, 1983, Tavistock Publications, London and New York.
- <sup>5</sup> David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography, Step by Step*, p.2, 1998, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks. London, New Delhi.
- <sup>6</sup> I develop the uncanny impact of cultural difference in the final section where I reflect upon the "mirror-like" process of intercultural encounters.
- <sup>7</sup> See Foucault (1970; 1977; 2001)
- <sup>8</sup> See Bryman (1998) for his analysis of the key differences between qualitative and quantitative research.
- <sup>9</sup> Sotirios Sarantakos, *Social Research*, p.6, 1998, Macmillan Press, London.
- <sup>10</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, p.118, 2001, Pearson Education Limited, Essex.
- <sup>11</sup> See Weber (1947) and his analysis of *verstehen* -understanding- as an "empathetic understanding of human behaviour".
- <sup>12</sup> Geof Alred, "Becoming a 'Better Stranger': A Therapeutic Perspective on Intercultural Experience and/as Education" in *Intercultural Experience and Education*, edited by Geof Alred, Mike Byram and Mike Fleming, p. 19, 2003, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.
- <sup>13</sup> Sotirios Sarantakos, *Social Research*, p.35, 1998, Macmillan Press, London.
- <sup>14</sup> Tim May, *Social Research, Issues, Methods and Process*, p. 127, 2001, Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia.
- <sup>15</sup> J. Miller and B. Glassner, "The inside and outside: finding realities in interviews" in *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, edited by D. Silverman, p. 100, 1997, Sage Publications, London.



## **Part Three**

# **Graduates as Performers of Commodified Difference**

### **3.1. Introduction**

Commodification can be defined as the process whereby cultural difference is embodied, valued and exchanged in material and measurable terms. This means that graduates working and living abroad for the first time are engaged in the process of valuing their own cultural difference for specific professional, social and economic purposes. The introductory part of this chapter demonstrates how -within Western contemporary global<sup>1</sup> capitalism- there exists a history of difference commodification and fetishism which I explore through my analysis of the sociological works of Veblen (1994), Simmel (1997), Bourdieu (1984) and Baudrillard (1972). The introductory part of this section approaches difference in materialistic and reified terms through the use of the fashion metaphor and its exchange of fetishised others.<sup>2</sup> I use fashion theory since it deals with difference in objectified and commercial terms. Cultural difference plays an important part in the fashion system where difference is being valued, exchanged and consumed. My analysis of the fashion accessory in this chapter directly relates to the graduates' cultural and linguistic capital acting as a key display within their narratives of residency and work abroad. The fashion system also embodies a central contradiction

between conformity and distinction that is echoed in the graduates' experiences of cultural difference within their working environments.<sup>3</sup>

The graduates' cultural difference is a precious tool that can be measured and valued in professional and economic terms. It is, however, more than a mere tool enhancing the graduates' lives: one can also perceive it as an accessory denoting prestigious and distinctive social connotations such as internationalism, social mobility and differentiation. The accessory can therefore be understood as a performance of added cultural value which is identified and analysed within the narratives of semi-structured interviews I introduce in this section.

The main analyses in this chapter focus on the narratives of three graduates working within the field of globalised and corporate business. I chose to focus on corporate worlds since they can be identified as a key manifestation of the global paradigm. This part introduces, analyses and develops the graduates' interviews while bearing in mind the key notions of cultural efficiency and difference management within the field of International Management. In this context I examine the writing of Hofstede (1991), Adler (2002), Tung (1994), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) while coming to terms with the actual reasons for which difference *matters* in the business world. This section ends with a set of conclusions drawn from the interview data and theory analysed within the main part.

## **3.2. The Culture Accessory, Fashion and the Exchange of Fetishised Others**

Fashion within the Western world is a global industry as well as a leading social, cultural and economic discourse. One of the main consequences of globalised economics is the presence and diffusion of identical goods available for consumption. The discourse of style predominates within capitalistic societies<sup>4</sup> and advocates its constantly renewed production of “superfluous goods” orchestrated by international economics. Fashion is, in fact, a key activity and industry sector within capitalistic societies, even though fashion and style are not confined to them.

My approach to the fashion system focuses on the issues of social distinction, competition and the accessory.

### **3.2.1. Fashion, difference and social competition**

My interest in fashion theory primarily focuses on its material embodiment of social competition through a subtle articulation of cultural rejection and imitation. The fashion economy offers a dynamic interaction between social competition, conformity and the need for difference and distinction. Graduates are in working contexts that are not only competitive, but also homogenising. Whether it be banking, mass-produced cosmetics or snacks, graduates such as Mario, Chiara and Claire work for companies whose products and services are internationally visible



and available. This process of global diffusion and assimilation is not only important when examining the graduates' narratives of corporate business, but also highlights the relevance of false differentiation and personalisation inherent to the capitalistic and fashion logics. As soon as new fashions have found their way into society, it is time for the medium to recreate itself and produce fleeting moments of desire. As Baudrillard puts it in his analysis of the fashion cycle: "it is as though fashion were eaten away by a suicidal desire which is fulfilled at the moment when fashion attains its apogee."<sup>5</sup>

Not only does fashion promote and commodify social distinction and cultural difference, it also acts as a site of cultural and economic competition and negotiation. In his analysis of the fashion society, Simmel emphasises the competitive relationship stemming from the tension between belonging and differentiation:

Thus we see that imitation in all the instances where it is a constitutive factor, represents one of the fundamental directions of our nature, namely, that which contents itself with the absorption of the individual into the general, and emphasises the permanent element in change. Conversely, wherever change is sought in permanence, wherever individual differentiation and self-elevation above generality are sought, imitation is here the negating and restraining principle. And precisely because the longing to abide by that which is given, to act and be like others, is the irreconcilable enemy of those striving to advance to new and individual forms of life, social life appears to be the battleground upon which every inch is stubbornly contested by both sides.<sup>6</sup>

The life of graduates working abroad for the first time can be defined as an ongoing struggle between the need to conform to -and perform within- their business organisations and a desire to maintain their own sense of cultural difference intact. This tension is inherent within the fashion system where cultural difference is being produced, exchanged and fetishised for commercial purposes.

### **3.2.2. Fashion, fetish and cultural difference**

If the fashion economy strongly echoes mechanisms of social competition and differentiation within capitalistic societies, it also transforms cultural difference into a series of fetishised and commodified goods *speaking of* cultural and economic power. Simmel's analysis of the fashion society emphasises the importance of exoticism and difference within the exchange and consumption of material goods:

Among some primitive peoples it is reported that closely connected groups living under exactly similar conditions sometimes develop sharply differentiated fashions, by means of which each group establishes uniformity within itself, as well as differentiation from outsiders. On the other hand, there exists such a widespread interest for importing fashions from outside, and such foreign fashions assume greater value within a particular social circle, simply because they did not originate there. Even the prophet Zephaniah expressed his indignation at the aristocrats in foreign clothing. As a matter of fact, the exotic advantage of fashions seems to favour especially strongly the exclusiveness of the groups which adopt them. Precisely because of their external origin, these imported fashions create a special and significant form of socialisation, which arises through the mutual relationship to a point located outside the circle.<sup>7</sup>

On the one hand, this exchange of fetishised others performed by aristocrats is a revealing example of the central relationship existing between fashion, fetish and cultural difference. Fashion sells exoticism and cultural difference *at a price*. It *commodifies* difference by giving it tangible *value* on the market. The success of contemporary luxury conglomerates such as LVMH and the Gucci Group lies, in fact, in its promotion of French and Italian craftsmanship and design. Cultural difference *matters* within the fashion economy and its discourse of personalisation and uniqueness.

On the other, the fetish can also be directly related to the economics of appearance and social exclusiveness. The enjoyment of fetishised privileges is not to be experienced by everyone. The ownership of the fetish therefore has to be contained within specific social spheres and contexts in order to keep its exclusive characteristics. The fetish is, however, more complex than its performance of distinction lets on. In an attempt to come to terms with the complex history of the fetish, Baudrillard<sup>8</sup> traces its linguistic evolution:

Le terme “fétiche” qui renvoie aujourd’hui à une *force*, à une propriété surnaturelle de l’objet (...) ce terme a subi une curieuse distortion sémantique, puisqu’il signifie à l’origine exactement l’inverse: une *fabrication*, un artefact, un travail d’apparences et de *signes*. Apparu en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, il vient du portugais *feitiço*, qui signifie “artificiel”, lequel vient du latin *factitius*. Le sens de “faire” est premier, le sens d’imiter par des signes (...) De la même racine (*facio*, *factitius*) que *feitiço*, en espagnol: *afeitar*, “farder, parer, embellir”, *afeite*, “apprêt, parure, cosmétique”, le français “feint”, et l’espagnol *hechar*, “faire”, d’où *hechizo*, “artificiel, feint, postiche”. Partout apparaît



l'aspect de "fainctise", de truquage, d'inspiration artificielle, bref d'un travail culturel de signes à l'origine du statut de l'objet-fétiche, et donc quelque part aussi dans la fascination qu'il exerce.<sup>9</sup>

It is interesting to underline the magical -but also illusory- linguistic properties associated with the fetish. Artifice, semblance, appearance and pretence are all related to the fetish and its material embodiment of difference through perishable fashions and goods. Fetishised others within capitalism have undergone an ongoing economic process turning them into series of commodities that are produced, sold and exchanged in order to serve the market. This exchange of fetishised others does not only have powerful cultural connotations, but also seals the contract of social distinction. It is through the consumption and display of different goods that social groups assert their own economic power and position. It is also through the fetish that they can distance themselves from others and assert their own influence. Within the fashion economy, this performance is particularly visible in the consumption and ownership of accessories.

### **3.2.3. The accessory as weapon of social distinction**

In his analysis of fashionable women's taste, Veblen explores the prestigious connotations associated with the ownership and display of exclusive accessories:

The dress of women goes even farther than that of men in the way of demonstrating the wearer's abstinence from productive employment. It needs no argument to enforce the generalisation that the more elegant style of feminine bonnets go even farther towards



making work impossible than does the man's high hat. The woman's shoe adds the so-called French heel to the evidence of enforced leisure enforced by its polish: because this high heel makes any, even the simplest and most necessary manual work extremely difficult.<sup>10</sup>

Veblen's analysis of ladies' footwear highlights the ways in which fashionable accessories are given a stylistic halo and distinctive gloss of social differentiation and economic privilege. In this sense, accessories can be perceived as powerful social messages sent to others with a desire to *include* or *reject* them. Accessories act as social barriers and potent signifiers reproducing social divisions and inequalities.

It is, in fact, not surprising that Veblen's analysis prioritises the accessory as discriminatory vector for social and cultural meaning(s). On the one hand, fashion accessories have a visual impact making them powerful statements about the fashionable woman's taste and her social class. On the other, they hint at a life of leisure and luxury bearing distinctive aristocratic undertones.

The accessory is the ultimate fetishised embodiment within the unnecessary -but highly differentiated- realm of capitalistic consumption and display. As far as the graduates' are concerned, their performance of the accessory can be defined in linguistic and social terms.

The graduates I introduce in this section are multilingual, educated individuals who do not come from deprived or underprivileged backgrounds. They have enjoyed the

benefits of advanced education, international travel, work and residency abroad. They speak several foreign languages and are often fluent in them. They *display* specific social, cultural and economic privileges through -for instance- their performance of foreign languages and residency abroad. In this sense, both their linguistic skills and working lives can be read as accessories of social, economic and cultural capital displaying their belonging to a comfortable, educated and international social group. The linguistic accessory is, in fact, a central metaphor for the socioeconomic power of the graduates. Their knowledge and performance of foreign languages can be understood as major cultural and economic capital enabling and facilitating their working lives abroad. In his analysis of linguistic capital, Bourdieu highlights the profitable value of linguistic signs:

In other words, utterances are not only (save in exceptional circumstances) signs to be understood and deciphered; they are also *signs of wealth*, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and *signs of authority*, intended to be believed and obeyed.<sup>11</sup>

Wealth and authority are, in fact, two important features characterising the lives of graduates working for international corporate businesses abroad. The graduates' career choices and environments are often aspirational when underlining the importance of professional and financial success. One of the graduates I spoke to told me he was giving himself three years to be one of the directors of the company, and that he would resign if he failed.<sup>12</sup> The graduates' display of linguistic authority is also important in cultural and fetishised terms. Whether it be in the context of

tourism, corporate business or education, the graduates' linguistic skills amount to a significant cultural capital giving the accessory its central distinctive features.

The next part introduces, analyses and problematises the graduates' narratives in the context of international corporate businesses. It also introduces and explores relevant literature within the field of International Management.

### **3.3. Difference as Material and Valued Form**

The aim of this second main part is to introduce my empirical data as well as reflect upon the notion of the accessory and difference as reified forms while referring to selected writings within Sociology and International Management. One of the central goals here is to show how the experiences of graduates working for international corporate businesses are embodied within a discourse of materialism, fetishism and commodification. I propose to show how the profit-driven discourse of contemporary global capitalism bears a notable influence on how the graduates approach and relate to their experience(s) of cultural difference when living and working abroad for the first time. My exploration of the meanings graduates attach to cultural difference and residency abroad is illustrated by sociological and management readings focused on the notions of efficiency and shock.<sup>13</sup> I introduce and analyse the narrative of a twenty-seven year old Italian woman working in France for a major food conglomerate named Vu for the purpose of the analysis.

### **3.3.1. “Managing culture shock”: the struggle(s) of a graduate working and living abroad for the first time**

This data analysis is twofold. On the one hand, it approaches residency and work abroad as a traumatising and challenging event that has to be “managed”. On the other, it explores the related management literature positing difference as possible danger and threat. These two central strands of interpretation echo each other, while complementing Chiara’s<sup>14</sup> narrative.

Chiara graduated from business school in the north of Italy and got her “big break” when signing with an international food conglomerate business based in Paris. Chiara works as a *commerciale* -a term that can be loosely translated as “saleswoman”, even though this English word does not really encapsulate the various duties required by her position. Chiara is responsible for specific business segments allocated to her by the company. She has to implement and follow the evolution of Vu products across France as well as expanding and looking after her clients’ “portfolios”. She was given a company car as soon as she started working and travels across her territories regularly in order to ensure sales are steady and the interests of her company are being promoted.

If Chiara seems to enjoy the status and comfort given to her by her new position, she is, however, clearly critical towards her job as she states that: “my work is not



creative in any way”<sup>15</sup> and that: “[her] job itself is not that stimulating either”<sup>16</sup> What she stresses repeatedly, however, is her loneliness in a large city and inability to meet people she feels comfortable with. If Chiara believes that: “it is work that gives you social status and a place in society.”<sup>17</sup>, most of her narrative actually focuses on her struggle(s) as a lonely young professional woman in a country she finds culturally alienating. In this sense, her experience is a perfect example of what Furnham and Bochner describe as culture shock when examining the difficulties encountered by expatriates relocated abroad for professional purposes.<sup>18</sup>

Chiara evokes a couple of incidents during our discussion where strong feelings of confusion and helplessness arise. At several times during the interview, she makes generalising statements such as: “The thing that strikes me about Paris is how lonely people are here!”<sup>19</sup> and: “I am not getting it at all! He is buying me a thousand francs watch and dumping me instantly! I do not get French men at all!”<sup>20</sup>

Her tone is often angry and annoyed when discussing professional or personal encounters. Her exposure to cultural difference and working life in France has, in fact, reinforced her own sense of cultural identity: “I am Italian and think in Italian ways”<sup>21</sup> as well as intensifying feelings of incomprehension when faced with others:

I cannot seem to be able to relate to their [the French] way of thinking. My mental structure is different from theirs. I react in different ways to things. With my French boss, for instance, I do actually spend quite a bit of time not understanding where he comes from. He just confuses me half of the time! He escapes my understanding I guess.<sup>22</sup>

This escape of understanding is hard for her to accept, as she cannot relate tried and tested cultural formulae to her new working and personal contexts abroad. She is faced for the first time with a cultural enigma she cannot decipher and deal with cultural conflict and alienation. I suggest that her approach to cultural difference and the ways in which she attempts to deal with cultural complications are partly influenced by management discourse she was exposed to during business school. Her reference to “mental structure” as well as feelings of cultural alienation as a foreigner establishing her career abroad can be related to Hofstede’s analysis of “cultural programming” and his perspective on culture shock:

The foreigner usually experiences some form of *culture shock*. As illustrated over and over again in earlier chapters, our mental software contains basic values. These have been acquired early in our lives, and they have become so natural as to be unconscious. (...) The inexperienced foreigner can make an effort to learn some of the symbols and rituals of the new environments (words to use, how to greet, when to bring presents) but it is unlikely that he or she can recognise, let alone feel, the underlying values. In a way, the visitor in a foreign culture returns to the mental state of an infant, in which he or she has to learn the simplest things over again. This usually leads to feelings of distress, of helplessness, and of hostility towards the new environment. Often one’s physical functioning is affected. Expatriates and migrants have more need for medical help shortly after their displacement than before or later.<sup>23</sup>

Chiara’s lack of the right “cultural software” when dealing with the French as well as her return to an infancy stage involving various states of helplessness and incomprehension are clear in her narrative: “At least when I am in my own

environment back home I can relate to people and understand what they do. Here I feel lost, like a kid trying to work out everything. I just do not know how I should behave.”<sup>24</sup>

Her general depiction of life and work abroad posits cultural difference as a problem she tries to come to terms with while admitting to a failed sense of integration when referring to herself as a: “cultural alien”<sup>25</sup>. Finding solutions is, in fact, not always possible when living and working abroad for the first time. Although I emphasise several times during the interview that such feelings of incomprehension and helplessness might imply an opening up towards a greater sense of cultural acceptance and awareness, I am, however, aware that management discourse does not always privilege long term “strategies” by aiming at what Laurent names the “quick fix”<sup>26</sup> approach.

The quick fix approach aims at a rapid and efficient integration of workers living abroad for the first time while stressing business outcomes at the expense of critical awareness and cultural relativism. This often implies cultural generalisations as well as the use of cultural stereotypes in order to arm expatriates with the necessary tools helping them manage others.<sup>27</sup> Difference should, in fact, not prevent ambitious professionals from achieving their company goals as well as develop their own professional potential within the organisation. This productive approach to cultural difference that tries to come to terms with the complexities generated by cultural



difference is exemplified by Hofstede's presentation of his corporate cultural seminars:

The awareness and general cultural knowledge course I helped to design takes three days. It uses an intercultural business game, exercises, lectures, case studies, and group discussions. It has been attended by experienced expatriates, and they, even more than the novices, found the course useful: it enabled them to re-interpret their experiences. The main message is that you and I have a culture and that people who were brought up elsewhere have cultures which in more-or-less predictable ways differ from ours. This message can be transferred and digested [sic] in three days.<sup>28</sup>

This simplified approach to cultural difference emphasises cultural predictability while showing limited abilities for self-criticism and awareness. Who are the "you and I" Hofstede refers to here? Are they white middle-class expatriates speaking the "global language"? What culture do they actually stem from? And can "culture" be organised by scales of predictability and patterns?

I would argue that some of the literature within the field of International Management does, in fact, aim at a reduction of cultural difference through its simplification and ongoing categorisation. What Chiara's struggle shows throughout the interview is the *impossibility* one is confronted with when dealing with cultural conflict and (mis)understanding. This impossibility to understand, rationalise and predict patterns of behaviour operates as a recurring and central problem within her exposure to and interaction with French culture. Her relationship with her boss is a



good example of her yearning for predictable behaviour and simplified understanding:

I do not understand what his motives are or what exactly he wants from me. I mean I tried to tell him about it and I think he realises I do not understand his ways, but I am finding hard to communicate since I never really know what goes on in his head. There is, in fact, a communication problem between us, although I speak his language. It is terrible!

*These kinds of misunderstandings occur quite often though. Sometimes you just cannot avoid them. People can be on a completely different wavelength from yours and it gets harder trying to relate to them.*

Ok, that can happen once or twice. But it just cannot happen all the time and become the rule.<sup>29</sup>

Chiara's longing for a magical rule of cultural interpretation does nothing but emphasise the very impossibility of secure readings when confronted with cultural difference. She may speak French to her boss, but does Chiara actually *speak* his language? Her belief that cultural rules and patterns can be easily identified and dealt with accordingly is echoed within Adler's "productive" analysis of cultural stereotyping:

It is true that labelling people from a certain ethnic group as "bad" is not ethical, but grouping individuals into categories is neither good or bad—it simply reduces complexity to manageable proportions. Negative views of stereotyping simply cloud our ability to understand people's actual behaviour and impair our awareness of our own stereotypes.

*Everyone* stereotypes. [...] In conclusion, some people stereotype *effectively* [my emphasis] and others do not.<sup>30</sup>

Adler's belief that cultural complexity can be managed and her use of totalising statements such as "everyone stereotypes" finds a resonance within Chiara's narrative.<sup>31</sup> One notices that what Chiara finds unbearable is the lack of understanding and arising conflicts generated by life and work abroad within a demanding working context where she is, however, successful.<sup>32</sup> There is therefore a clear imbalance and contradiction between her professional progression and cultural stagnation. Her demanding schedule and long working hours also have the effect of increasing her cultural impatience and decreasing the time she can actually allocate to cultural discovery and curiosity. As she puts it at the start of the interview: "Here I have to admit I feel quite lonely most of the time. Since I work long hours as a "*commerciale*" for Vu, it is difficult finding time outside work to meet other people."

I approach Chiara's case as an example of cultural alienation as experienced by graduates working within competitive corporate and international businesses. The graduates may be successful in material and professional terms, their cultural sense of discovery and personal growth is, however, not facilitated by the demands of their working lives and contexts. Chiara shows -like other graduates I came across- an awareness of this when she states that: "people think they have a good job, they are young and willing to make some sacrifices somewhere."<sup>33</sup> The sacrifices she evokes here are often cultural or private and form a central paradox within the life of the graduates working abroad for the first time. Sacrificing cultural curiosity and

interpersonal relationships adds a problematic twist to the successful projection of professional and material capital performed by the graduates. If their exposure to cultural difference is beneficial -and also useful- in professional and material terms, they are nevertheless prevented from establishing a critical dialogue with difference escaping the notions of profit and value. They are also isolated figures through their dedication to professional success. The next part identifies and analyses mechanisms of cultural exchange, commodification and fetishism through an examination of Chiara's descriptions and depictions of interpersonal relationships taking place during her first few months in France.

### **3.3.2. "It is because we are all different that we have so much to exchange with each other."<sup>34</sup>: commodification and fetishism within Chiara's narrative**

I am interested in the ways Chiara relates intimate and interpersonal events to valuing, commodification and fetishistic materialism. I intend to show how materialism and capital both influence her perception of and response to cultural difference as well as condition her relationships with others. This part investigates the all-pervasive valuing of cultural and personal encounters within the economics of intersubjectivity.

Exchange, commodification and fetishism are pervasive in Chiara's narrative since one easily moves from the professional sphere to fetishised depictions of intimate and interpersonal relationships "contaminated" by the discourse of exchange and

value. This implies that certain relationships experienced by Chiara during residency abroad are described, assessed and qualified in material and measurable terms. It also means that these relationships are inseparable from material objects having a high fetish quotient such as designer goods.

Chiara describes her short-lived relationship with a fellow *commercial* in the following manner:

I met this guy here recently who works for Marimma (a famous pasta company) and thought: "Great! Here is someone who can relate to what I do and understand my work since he has a very similar job!" We had a dinner date which went well. He drove me back home and that was it. Then he invited me to have dinner at his place. Nothing happened but he was very friendly and nice to spend time with. (...) We started dating but the problem was that I started getting really bored after a few weeks. He just worked, went home and watched football most nights. I mean he had a great flat, a collection of watches, smart shoes and a comprehensive collection of DVDs, but after a month I started feeling like part of the furniture, you know?<sup>35</sup>

On the one hand, Chiara's assessment of the "Marrima guy" is primarily influenced by work concerns when underlining that dating someone in the same profession should facilitate mutual understanding. This factor is stressed in her previous analysis of a failed relationship where work is perceived as a major cause for break up:

Well, one of the main problems was that he did not understand my work. He did not understand why I worked so much and had to wake up at five in the morning to drive up



north to meet some clients in a supermarket. It is obviously quite hard when you are with someone who cannot understand your ambitions or desires.<sup>36</sup>

On the other, if work appears to be one the main criteria for partner selection, it is, nevertheless, not the most significant one. Not only does the “Marimma guy” understand Chiara’s ambitions and desires, he also comes with the trappings of corporate success including a (company) car, an impressive flat and -most importantly- the right accessories such as: “a collection of watches, smart shoes and a comprehensive collection of DVDs”. She also describes a holiday spent at the family home in Cannes that places their relationship under a rather privileged and comfortable auspice.

It is hard to tell if the accessories actually *matter* more than the person in her narrative since Chiara allocates significant space to descriptions of material goods and possessions. Her insistence on materialism and social value culminates in the description of their break up operated through a significant exchange of fetishised “designer goods”:

Then his birthday came up, and although I did not feel very motivated, I bought him a *Coloniali* fragrance gift box. Have you heard of that make?

*No.*

They are specialised in body products and fragrances for men and women. I got him a nice gift box with aftershave, soap and bodywash. It cost about 60.000 lire I think [about 20 pounds]. Well...he got me this (showing me the watch on her wrist).

*Nice.*

An APC watch that is worth about 1.500 francs [about 155 pounds]. I asked him if he got it for me because he did not like the one I had before, but he did not give me a precise reply. I told him I would call him later to meet up and he told me he was sorry, but that we would not actually meet up again.

*Was that a leaving gift then?*

It did not make much sense to me at the time, but I forgot about it when my parents came over to visit from Verona (...). I tried calling Xavier several times but he was impossible to reach. I finally spoke to him inviting him to spend time with us, but he said he was too embarrassed to come. I mean, I do not want to sound money obsessed here, but would you buy someone a thousand francs watch after five weeks? Would you buy someone you hardly knew a thousand francs watch if you did not care about them? I mean, would you give that to someone and dump her the same day?<sup>37</sup>

What is striking in Chiara's description is that the end of the relationship -and ensuing confusion on her part- is organised around the exchange of branded goods read as signs of value and (possible) appreciation. Her struggle is, in fact, not being able to understand how giving such a present may stand for a separation: "Would you buy someone you hardly knew a thousand francs watch if you did not care about them?" If her repeated emphasis on -and prominent display of- her expensive break up designer watch echoes Marx's analysis that: "There is a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things."<sup>38</sup>

Chiara's ongoing reference to the fetishised realm of branded products firmly entails a commodified understanding of intimate -and also intercultural- relationships mediated around the marketable notions of consumption, exchange and ownership display. I think the "Marimma break up" is a key episode within her narrative since it posits the accessory -the fetishised designer watch- as a central interpretative tool towards intercultural and intersubjective relationships experienced throughout work and life abroad.

If her own evaluation of the relationship translates itself into the cheaper purchase of a fragrance gift box, her belief in commodity fetishism nevertheless confronts itself to the end of the affair. Her evocation of price tags and visible fetishism of commodities does not protect her from the actual reasons for the split. There is confusion taking place here that is provoked by her direct equivalence of material exchange to human relationships. Chiara is indeed preoccupied with money and status since she assesses her own intersubjective encounters and personal worth through the accessory and its social, economic and cultural weight. Her reading of fetishised goods is therefore a privileged -but alienating- form of cultural interpretation that does not, however, prevent her from experiencing -inside and outside the professional sphere- recurring feelings of incomprehension and confusion.

Chiara's description of Xavier is itself commodified and "contaminated" by the weight of the object, its omnipresence and signifying strength(s). His relative

absence as an actual person throughout her narrative complements Baudrillard's following analysis of the advertising discourse within contemporary capitalism:

The high point of this magical litany of personalisation is achieved with the following injunction: **Personalise your own home yourself!** This 'over-reflexive' expression (personalising oneself...in person etc.!) tells the real story. What all this rhetoric says, floundering about unable to say it, is precisely that *there is no one there-no person*. The 'person' as absolute value, with its indestructible features and specific force, forged by the whole of the Western tradition as the organising myth of the Subject-the person with its passions, its will, its character (or banality) is absent, dead, swept out of our functional universe.<sup>39</sup>

If advertising establishes the object as a substitute for the person's characteristics and traits, a fetishised discourse also operates on the informants' level establishing materialism and exchange as key factors facilitating intercultural analysis. I have shown, however, that this discourse has limitations exemplified by Chiara's personal struggle and alienation. Her adoption of a fetishizing discourse aiming at an efficient analysis of intercultural encounters leads, in fact, to ongoing conflicts that can neither be solved nor managed. Chiara's cultural impatience and demands within her relationships can be related to the process of ephemerality<sup>40</sup> orchestrated by contemporary capitalism. The gradual disappearance of the person as a humanistic and non-profitable figure -as well as the increasing speed of economic exchange defining the global sphere- have affected personal and cultural relationships. As Harvey puts it:



In the realm of commodity production, the primary effect has been to emphasise the values and virtues of instantaneity (instant and fast foods, meals, and other satisfactions) and of disposability (cups, plates, cutlery, packaging, napkins, clothing, etc.). The dynamics of a 'throwaway society' (...) began to become evident during the 1960s. It meant more than just throwing away produced goods (creating a monumental waste-disposal problem), but also being able to throw away values, lifestyles, stable relationships, and attachments to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being.<sup>41</sup>

High disposability within contemporary capitalism is an industrial and cultural process whereby ephemeral fashion and accessories play a key part as transient and signifying protagonists of the global.<sup>42</sup> Stability is a precarious state for the graduates in both professional and cultural terms as they experience cultural transience in competitive working contexts not actually designed to assist them:

They put me in a hotel, gave me my company car, told me about the area I had to work in and that was basically it! I saw my boss once a month and had to manage on my own. I had to find a flat, open a bank account and all the rest without anyone's help. I did not have anyone I could call really. I could not call my boss and tell him I was finding it hard and felt low.<sup>43</sup>

The instantaneity shift implies a faster turnaround of relationships and contracts as exemplified in Chiara's narrative displaying a paradoxical sense of impatience *and* anxiety. The throwaway society is governed by speed and demands fast adaptation to changes, whether they be cultural, professional or private. The graduates' fetishised referencing to commodities and accessories can therefore be read as a reaction to

cultural instability and transience privileging materialism as a reassurance strategy. The fact that graduates evolving within competitive corporate businesses are subject to levels of stress proportional to their relative sense of cultural isolation often turns life and work abroad into a demanding and difficult experience in both cultural and private terms.

On the one hand, Chiara's willingness to find quick fix solutions to her problems prevents her from coming to terms with cultural conflict as a positive and perhaps *necessary* step towards heightened mutual understanding and awareness. On the other, her fetishised reading of intercultural encounters leads to feelings of helplessness and confusion *making her* a typical victim of culture shock.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, I perceive Chiara as an alienated performer of difference exchange and cultural commodification, unable to establish durable and "non-valued" (cultural) relationships throughout life and residency abroad. She is an alienated individual in the sense that her working conditions actually prevent her from experiencing the kind of cultural encounters she may be longing for.

The second main part of this section introduces the narrative of Mario, a twenty-seven year old Italian man working for an international corporate cosmetics company based in Paris. The next part introduces and explores the notion of global experience through an analysis of the discourse of internationalisation as well as an inquiry into the meanings of cultural decontextualisation as experienced by the graduates. My analysis also problematises global exchange while coming to terms with the reasons

for which culture actually matters within the business world. Mario's narrative of his working and personal experiences is complemented by an analysis of selected writings within the field of International Management exploring the global paradigm and its cultural and economic implications. I also examine Mario's interview in terms of social and cultural distinction and demonstrate how residency abroad and linguistic capital act as key accessories within his narrative.

### **3.4. "Living the Global": an Analysis of the Discourse of Internationalisation and Efficiency within Corporate Worlds**

The global is a problematic concept since it is not always precisely defined by the thinkers who refer to it. One may, however, consider the *benefits* of global economics as applying to the lifestyles of privileged Western individuals whose cultural and economic capital stands for social distinction and exclusiveness. Graduates working for the first time within international global corporations can, in fact, be perceived as global actors within an increasingly internationalised network of economic exchange and production. They possess cultural, financial and social resources making them the ideal candidates for the promotion of corporate global business. The internationalisation of the world economy implies that "thinking global" is not a choice but a necessity:



As globalisation evolved from a buzzword to a pervasive reality, demand increased for executives sophisticated in managing the complexities of global business. Government and corporate managers need to be able to think globally. They need to be able to work domestically on global projects as well as abroad on expatriate assignments and business travel. Global business has become so important that companies can no longer afford to consider candidates for executive positions unless they have had global experience.<sup>45</sup>

Global business requires a cultural adaptability and -as Adler puts it- a sophisticated outlook in order to achieve goals and outcomes. The sophistication of global economics also implies the ability to defend the interests of international and corporate businesses while bearing in mind the complexities generated by cultural difference. I choose to focus on the analysis of the narrative of a twenty-seven year old Italian graduate living and working for an international cosmetics corporation in France in order to define the parameters and requirements of the global experience.

**3.4.1. “My aim is to become the director of an international company before I turn thirty and I am willing to sacrifice a lot in order to achieve that.”<sup>46</sup>:  
the global narrative of a twenty-seven year old Floral product manager**

The intentions in this part are twofold. On the one hand, I approach Mario’s narrative of working for the Floral corporation abroad as a global tale of internationalism and cosmopolitan success. I demonstrate how his discourse can be approached as a global narrative in terms of the concepts and places he associates himself with. I also investigate the implications of the global village in economic, social and cultural



terms. On the other, I contrast Mario's narrative of cultural ease and adaptability to the harsher realities of the corporation and its organisation. The analysis of his professional ambitions and motivations behind residency abroad- tries to come to terms with the discourse of success and reasons for which culture matters within the business world.

There are several instances during the interview where Mario clearly inserts his narrative within globalised fragments involving life and residency abroad as well as a network of friends and connections sharing nomadic, international and comfortable Western lifestyles. As he puts it:

We [Mario and his friends] all have international profiles given the university and internship experiences we had before working. I think eighty percent of my friends live and work somewhere between France, England, Italy and the United States; New York, Paris, London.<sup>47</sup>

I suggest Mario speaks the global language of Western, mobile and privileged nomadic identities defining his experiences of life and work abroad as well as his friends'. He also states that: "We understand each other really well even if we meet up in London or Milan for the weekend."<sup>48</sup> This entails that the Western capitalistic metropolis now operates as a space of cultural equivalence where individuals coming from similar economic and educational backgrounds enjoy instant recognition and identification. ."<sup>49</sup> This entails that the Western capitalistic metropolis now operates as a space of cultural equivalence where individuals coming from similar economic

and educational backgrounds enjoy instant recognition and identification. It is also interesting to note how Mario name drops prestigious names of Western capitals as if they were signs of cosmopolitanism, sophistication and international success. Regular name-dropping occurred within Chiara's interview as well when she referred to holiday destinations and designer goods. It can be perceived as a conversational strategy whereby the graduates associate themselves to places of privileges and branded commodities intertwined within their narratives of working life abroad. The logics of name-dropping are, in fact, important within contemporary capitalism where status, performance and branding are inseparable from the economics of intersubjectivity and social competition<sup>50</sup>. There is a competitive streak in Mario's narrative that is not solely related to the nature of his work and ensuing pressure. He makes it clear from the start that he wants to be interviewed in French instead of Italian. Although he is aware of the fact that I am a Modern Languages graduate in German and Italian and that his mother tongue is Italian, his insistence on conducting the discussion in French places our encounter under a competitive and performance-led auspice. He also emphasises the distinctive fact that he belongs to a group of happy few being able to enjoy the fruit of international careers abroad:

*And is that [working life abroad] commonplace amongst the people you studied with?*

It depends. The persons who chose my programme did it, too. (...) But it is not that normal: in Italy there are not many people who do that sort of thing.

*Is it a small world then?*

Yes, it is a small group indeed.<sup>51</sup>

Not only does Mario include his narrative within the rarefied and exclusive group of Western graduates working for international businesses abroad, he also shows an acute -and pragmatic- understanding of the social, educational and economic factors having led him to his current position within Floral:

*And are the business schools located in bigger cities such as Rome and Milan?*

Yes they are. I guess they are more open and forward thinking. When you study at one of these famous business schools, it often implies you will get a job for a big company straight away, because these companies know about the schools and they know that the people who studied there can live and work abroad. If you come from a small business school in Italy, then you will struggle trying to get a job in France.

*And was the internship easy for you to get?*

Yes, it was very easy. Finding an internship and work contract were both greatly facilitated by my study period at CHE [an exclusive business school based in Paris]<sup>52</sup>

This sense of social and cultural ease displayed by Mario can, however, be contrasted with my previous analysis of Chiara's narrative and her ongoing struggle and conflicts when confronted with the French and their culture. One is presented here with an opposite dynamics of cultural integration and relative "blandification" where the notions of shock, confusion and alienation have been erased from Mario's vocabulary of cultural exchange:

*And as far as being intercultural is concerned, how comfortable do you actually feel here?*

*Was there any shock for you when you arrived?*



No, not at all. I had quite a few experiences abroad before working here. I went to High School in the U.S., spent seven months in Vienna in Austria for an Erasmus programme organised by my business school and then wrote my dissertation in China. Staying there was more of a shock actually! Then I did my military service in Manchester in England. I spent a lot of my life abroad and being in France is just like being in Italy for me. Of all countries I have lived in, France is the closest to Italy.”<sup>53</sup>

Mario’s experiences are inscribed within a context of cultural transience and mobility making the very notion of culture shock obsolete. His language of cultural ease and adaptability makes him an ideal “global agent” and is, in fact, key within the global paradigm and its promoted discourse of all-exchange and all-equivalence, described by Baudrillard as “total promiscuity”<sup>54</sup> and identified by Tung in the following passage:

In the age of supersonic travel, the contacts between people of different cultures and nations are widespread. With the increasing cooperation amongst nations in the fields of commerce, education, health, and development, cross-national contacts are likely to be even more numerous and extensive in the future. This implies that there will be a further increase in the demand for individuals who can function effectively and efficiently in a foreign environment.<sup>55</sup>

The global discourse of increasing cultural promiscuity and cross-nationalism cannot be separated from the logics of the market breeding more international exchange *and* expatriates -and graduates- working abroad for the first time. The graduates’ privileged experiences of life and work abroad are, in fact, facilitated by technological developments -such as flying, mobile phones and the Internet-



emphasising the instantaneity and speed of economic transactions within the global village. When discussing reverse culture shock and asking about his impressions after frequent returns home, Mario stresses that: “When you live abroad and go back home, you start finding everything small, do you not? When I go back to Milan I feel like I am in the countryside, you know.”<sup>56</sup> The shrinking process affecting the global village leads to a weary -and somewhat blasé- appreciation of cultural difference that affects the graduates within Western capitalistic environments.<sup>57</sup>

Tung stresses a key factor giving an indication as to what kind of profile is required from graduates embarking on the global journey: cultural difference and foreign contexts have to be dealt with effectively and efficiently. Cultural efficiency is an essential requirement within international corporate business and implies pragmatic and results driven approaches to cultural difference as exemplified by Hofstede’s cultural software theory and three-day culture programmes. The shrinking process works at the expense of long lasting cultural exchange since it privileges immediate results and short-term strategies. If this was a problem for Chiara -and what I called her cultural impatience and ongoing sense of confusion- Mario speaks the language of global equivalence where cultural conflicts and antagonisms have been brushed aside in order to focus on the internationalisation of the market and its expansion across the globe. Mario speaks Italian, French, English and German fluently. He went to High School in the United States and wrote his business school dissertation in China before completing his military service in England. He possesses the cultural, linguistic and social capitals allowing him to “ride the wave”<sup>58</sup> of global

exchange with ease and confidence. As Baudrillard argues, the law of the market is now the central code dictating all other forms of exchange within the capitalistic world:

A revolution has occurred in the capitalist world without our Marxists having wanted to comprehend it... This mutation concerns the passage from the form-commodity to the form-sign, from the abstraction of the exchange of material products under the law of general equivalence to the operationalisation of all exchanges under the law of the code.<sup>59</sup>

If efficiency requires immediate ease and cultural adaptability anywhere within the global village, residency abroad is, in actual fact, made possible and facilitated by what Baudrillard names “general equivalence” under the reign of the global market. This implies that residency abroad itself can be approached as a key accessory within the graduates’ lives, echoing the discourses of novelty and distinction inherent in capitalistic economies. As Mario puts it: “I find it very interesting and enriching to live abroad and learn new things, getting to know a new culture that is different from mine.”<sup>60</sup> The discourse of the new is central within capitalism and its ongoing pursuit of renewed production and commodity creation. The fact that Mario stresses the thrill of cultural novelty is inherent in the logics of the fashion system -as previously examined in this piece- whereby commodities are constantly produced, worshipped, and deemed irrelevant after a short period of time. If Mario stresses the added value of residency abroad as an enriching process, he nevertheless admits to a sense of cultural conformity within Floral:

The higher the income, the more open-minded people are. There are a lot of clichés about Italians here but in Floral, for instance, the atmosphere is very open and you hardly get that kind of attitude from colleagues.

*But is there not more uniformity, too?*

Yes, true. Everyone has had previous experiences abroad and...

*Are people quite similar to each other then?*

Yes, they are.<sup>61</sup>

If Mario -perhaps unsurprisingly- believes that higher incomes encourage cultural openness and curiosity, he also shows a clear awareness of global imperatives when he states that: “in the future companies will need international and European managers to join them who are also multicultural and speak several foreign languages.”<sup>62</sup> His awareness of global demands placed on graduates working abroad for the first time is paired with a pragmatic -and somewhat simplified- perception of cultural difference. He often comes up with several generalising statements throughout the interview<sup>63</sup> culminating in a rather harsh -and somewhat smug- criticism of his homeland:

When I came back from the U.S., I realised how disorganised and anarchic things were in Italy, whereas order ruled in the States. That is obvious if you compare the road system for instance. If you are a pedestrian in Italy, you are lucky if you do not get killed crossing the street! Little things like that annoyed me. It just felt as if Italy were a Third World country at times.<sup>64</sup>

I suggest that describing Italy as a “Third World” country illustrates Mario’s desire to distance himself from his own background in order to echo the discourse of global lifestyles where efficiency and effectiveness are leitmotifs. The contradictory tensions expressed in Mario’s narrative between novelty/difference **and** uniformity/sameness offer a transition towards the analysis of the demanding context of the corporation and its constant emphasis on performance and success.

### **3.4.2. “Everybody is stressed; you just have to get on with it”<sup>65</sup>: managing pressure and efficiency within the corporate context**

The work hard, play hard ethics of the international corporation are inherent in Mario’s narrative of professional stress and paradoxical emphasis on cultural singularity and playful nature of his work. As he relates the various stages involving the production of new goods, he comes up with the following statement characterising the creative process in Floral:

*And how long does that take for your new products to come to life?*

It usually takes between three and four months. I basically enjoy myself for a couple of months, being creative and coming up with new concepts while working under a lot of pressure.<sup>66</sup>

It is worth noting here how pressure and play are often intertwined in Mario’s narrative of working life within the corporation. He underlines the fun dimension of his job even though he often works from nine in the morning until ten at night.<sup>67</sup> On



the one hand, Mario is aware that he can use the Italian card in useful and productive ways towards professional success and popularity within Floral. His perception of cultural difference as a playful and humorous touch lends his stressful working life an apparent -but important- gloss of facility and *divertissement*. On the other, even though he wants to be taken seriously and have credibility within the workplace, Mario nevertheless addresses the issue of otherness in seductive and powerful ways:

When you are Italian, you do get specific jokes about la mamma and macho men. You just have to get on with it but it can be heavy at times. But Italians are also perceived as talkative and friendly individuals, which is good. When you are German or English, there is a different kind of baggage you have to carry along.

*And do you play with that?*

Yes, of course. I use that to my advantage. I play with it. I had this meeting recently with the CEO board and people were laughing and clapping during my presentation. When you are a foreigner, you need to play that card and use it for your own benefit. But it can be annoying at times when people doubt your credibility. There are times when I do not feel like being funny and want people to take me seriously.

*Do you not feel a kind of pressure there, in the sense that people expect that kind of performance of you?*

No, not really. Having an accent, making mistakes when you talk and sounding different all create situations that are full of humour. At the end of the day, people would rather work with someone friendly than a complete bore.<sup>68</sup>

His reference to useful stereotyping here echoes Adler's emphasis on how to stereotype effectively and productively within the organisation. Mario shows a clear awareness of what his cultural capital can generate in front of a French audience as he asserts that: "When you are German or English, there is a different kind of baggage you have to carry along." He exploits his difference and singularity in order to give playful twists to his presentational meetings contributing to a heightened sense of cultural and professional performances. Mario demonstrates how national and cultural identities can be commodified as added surplus value while aiding his professional persona in significant ways. In other words, he knows what the stereotypes and performance are actually worth.<sup>69</sup> This cultural seduction results -as Baudrillard puts it- from an ongoing fascination in contemporary capitalism with play and performance: "What makes you exist is not the force of your desire (...) but the play of the world and seduction; it is the passion of playing and being played, it is the passion of illusion and appearance"<sup>70</sup> Is Mario's sense of cultural difference being *played at* or *playing for* him? In other words, I suggest that the seductive and reified play of cultural difference may alienate the graduates from their own singularity.

A clever use of cultural stereotypes does not, in fact, prevent them from the high levels of pressure generated by the corporation. As the discussion unfolds, it becomes clear that Mario goes through difficult times experiencing recurrent stress since he is faced with high expectations and constant assessment from the organisation:

Everything is designed to put you under pressure! The “*chef de produit*” has to present products to the whole hierarchy, ranging from the marketing director of the company to the French and European CEOs as well as the world director. It is mad! I do not know of any other business when you get to reach such high levels and that is very stressful. You only meet the world CEO three times a year, but if something does not work, then your career may be at risk. And if it works well, then you can speed up the whole process. You have so much work to do, so many presentations to write, that you do not always have time to be prepared for everything. And if something does not work out, then we are usually held responsible for it as we operate in the middle between all these different levels. That amounts to a lot of stress and is, I think, typical of companies such as Floral or Blocker and Tumble.<sup>71</sup>

On the one hand, Mario’s reference to another international corporate business operating in similar ways to Floral underlines the consistency of the corporate approach and its insistence on quick results, increased performance and constant productivity putting stronger pressure on its employees. The levels of stress experienced by him are therefore proportional to his constantly renewed production of ideas and innovations. On the other, one may also suggest that Mario’s narrative inscribes itself within a discourse of stress performing his professional status and achievements. Stress does not, in fact, solely operate as a *consequence* of Mario’s busy schedule and several responsibilities. It also acts as a key *belief* within Floral, where pressure is perceived as an ingredient inseparable from success: “Everybody is stressed; you just have to get on with it. The thing is, stress is not perceived as a negative thing in Floral. People believe in it. (*He starts laughing*)”<sup>72</sup>



Mario's ironic realisation that stress is part of the success narrative *speaks of* a relative sense of cultural alienation experienced by a foreign graduate working within an international corporate business abroad.

The alienation is threefold. Firstly, graduates such as Mario and Chiara are prevented from encountering cultural difference outside the workplace due to their extended working hours and stressful prioritised careers. Secondly, they often work with other foreigners coming from similar social and economic backgrounds, resulting in a sense of cultural homogeneity and "blandification" that can be generated by global economics. Thirdly, the graduates evolving within corporate worlds are alienated from their own sense of cultural difference as they use cultural seduction and performance as added surplus value to their professional profiles.

This process of cultural enclosure within the corporation is clearly visible in Mario's descriptions of friendships and bonds made through his working life with other foreigners:

*But what happens then if you are telling me that you work very long hours and do not have much time for anything else? How does that affect your experience of life abroad?*

Well, you end up working with the same people for so long that...

*They become your friends?*

Yes, sometimes they do. Working for a foreigner is also a way to integrate oneself within a new society. I have the chance to be in contact with about three thousand people because of my work, and out of these three thousand, there may be two or three people I



may get very close to. For instance, there are two people working in marketing I consider my best friends here. We go out, have some breaks during the day, leave work at ten and go for dinner together or something... We even go clubbing or travel together.<sup>73</sup>

Such statements seem to exclude the very possibility of cultural life and encounters outside the corporation acting as a self-referential, narcissistic and self-sufficient bubble of cultural equivalence and standardisation. As a working environment, the corporation fulfils the needs and ambitions of individuals such as Mario who prioritise the advancement of their careers at the expense of personal development through cultural interaction. The main paradox therefore lies in a *performance* of intercultural exchange and global status that limits itself to the valuing of difference as opposed to a *dialogue* engaging cultures with each other. Floral encourages its employees to socialise and interact with each other in order to prevent their professional focus from faltering. The logics of play and distinction within the organisation come to embody its competitive and inclusive environment. In his analysis of the culture fetish and its commodification within capitalism, Bourdieu highlights the relationship existing between social competition and cultural capital:

Culture is a stake which, like all social stakes, simultaneously presupposes and demands that one take part in the game and be taken in by it; and interest in culture, without which there is no race, no competition, is produced by the very race and competition which it produces. The value of culture, the supreme fetish, is generated in the initial investment implied by the mere fact of entering the game, joining in the collective belief in the value of the game which makes the game and endlessly remakes the competition for the stakes.<sup>74</sup>

If joining the corporate game and competing within the organisation is a powerful drive within Mario's narrative of professional success and ensuing pressure, it nevertheless comes at a price. There is an absence of cultural training provided by the organisation meaning the graduates often have to manage themselves. The harshness of the corporation is visible in its criticism of employees as well as their draining schedules:

I was being asked impossible things, my stress levels were too high and I was sometimes working until three in the morning for two weeks without anyone showing appreciation of my work or trying to help me motivate myself. If something does not work out, you are being criticised for it straight away, but if something is working, you are not being told anything. It is hard...but then it goes away. There were also times when I thought to myself, here I am, working all the time, being twenty-seven and questioning what my life is about, usually coming up to the conclusion that it was a crappy life where I did nothing but work all the time. (...)

*I guess you also realised everyone was being treated the same regardless of nationality.*

Yes.<sup>75</sup>

The corporation aims at the maximisation of the graduates' productivity by placing them in an environment where the discourses of cosmopolitanism and professional success make up for the cultural homogenisation and standardisation accounting for its success. The dynamics of play and competition offer the graduates a *semblance* of intercultural exchange that is, in fact, contained within the walls of the corporation,

but not experienced outside it. In this sense, the narcissistic context of the corporation where the graduates instantly relate to other individuals stemming from the same educational and social matrix echoes the self-centred and egocentric discourse of its employees. As Mario puts it:

The thing is, I have to perform as well as a French person and I am judged on my results. My aim is to become the director of an international company before I turn thirty and I am willing to sacrifice a lot in order to achieve that. I am ready to work until four in the morning every night for a month and never go out, do nothing apart from work in order to have success. I love being abroad, too. The things I can tolerate here I could never tolerate back in Italy. I enjoy living abroad and it is my choice to be here. It is as if I felt more alive here somehow, since there is no sense of routine in my life, whether this feeling translates in positive or negative terms.<sup>76</sup>

There is a heroic element in Mario's narrative that is inseparable from the discourse of corporate success and its emphasis on performance and sacrifice. Mario's choice of feeling more alive and experiencing the highs and lows of the organisation can be read as a superhuman narrative of power and control against all obstacles. This impression is reinforced by his previous statement in the interview that he is the: "creator and conductor for each product"<sup>77</sup> underlining his God-like abilities to constantly come up with new concepts and increase the profits of the organisation. Mario nevertheless emphasises the importance of his parents' support giving him a much-needed sense of stability and the ability to cope with a whimsical and ruthless working environment.<sup>78</sup> Harvey's postmodern paradigm of high disposability and



throwaway relationships is, in fact, well illustrated within the functioning of the corporation and its merciless treatment of professional failure:

*Are there people who fall apart at the seams?*

Oh yes! I have been in Floral for a year. There are twelve “*chefs de produit*” and nine have already left because they could not deal with the company stress any longer.

*And how are people “thanked for” then?*

Well...People are sacked and yet they are not. One basically makes them understand that they can stay if they wish, but they will have little opportunity to progress in their careers.

*So if there is a crisis, it is the individual who gets the blame, not the organisation itself.*

The thinking behind it is that the individual should be capable of dealing with stress.

Everyone is stressed because the world CEO stresses the European CEO who stresses the French one who stresses the marketing director and so on and so forth...<sup>79</sup>

Mario's narrative of cultural ease and adaptability has therefore to be understood as what he wants to put forward as opposed to the rules of the corporation and its pragmatic managing of foreign employees. If Mario speaks a global language of social, economic and cultural privilege, he can nevertheless be read as a product of his professional environment and emphasis on efficiency, productivity and performance. His adoption of the global could undermine the importance of the role cultural difference could actually play in his life. His narrative is -in this sense- similar to Chiara's who nevertheless experiences cultural conflict and confusion while trying to manage them without much success.



Chiara's and Mario's experiences of working lives abroad encourage one to examine the issue of cultural decontextualisation and its relevance to the contemporary global paradigm. The third and final main part of this section focuses on the narrative of an Irish graduate working for an international IT company in Germany. The analysis prioritises the no man's land of corporate worlds while drawing a set of conclusions on the relevance of culture to international businesses.

### **3.5. Cultural Decontextualisation, Privilege and the Accessory: the Narrative of a Graduate working for an International Firm abroad**

This final section returns to the notions of privilege and the accessory while exploring the process of cultural decontextualisation applying to the working lives of graduates evolving within international businesses. I have shown in the two previous parts how the graduates' experiences of cultural difference are embedded within a discourse of materialism and commodification turning residency abroad into a professional and social advantage reinforcing their own sense of distinction and cultural power.

There is, however, a key paradox operating at the core of Chiara's and Mario's narratives which results in a sense of cultural isolation and alienation created by the combination of their working conditions and high personal ambitions. If they are

powerful in economic and social terms, these graduates are nevertheless prevented from experiencing difference outside the workplace and engaging in a fruitful and critically aware interaction with others. This turns their discourse into a performance of intercultural experiences that barely conceals difficult working conditions and the relative impossibility of communication with individuals outside their professional contexts. On the one hand, Chiara's fetish of material accessories *speaks of* an ongoing valuing of cultural experiences that cannot be conceived outside the competitive and profit-driven discourse of International Management. On the other, Mario's adoption of a global language implies socialising and travelling with colleagues, therefore enclosing his experiences of otherness within a professional sphere generating "blandified" sameness behind a veil of internationalism.

Here I examine the culture problem within corporate worlds while focusing on the narrative and experiences of a twenty-five year old Irish woman who worked for a Californian IT firm in Eastern Germany. Lara's narrative differs from Chiara's and Mario's in significant ways. Firstly, Lara had already returned from Germany when I interviewed her and expressed her desire to pursue academic research at the time of our interview. She was disillusioned with the conditions of global business and realised she could neither dedicate her life to it nor approve of its goals. Secondly, she analyses her experience of working life abroad for a Californian IT company in ironic, detached and critical ways distinguishing her from the two previous graduates. Thirdly, her perceptions of privilege, materialism and difference have a

political bias that is somewhat removed -and different- from the global discourses of profit, efficiency and all-exchange.

A central focus within this final section is the idea of decontextualisation and cultural dislocation affecting the graduates working for international businesses. There are no structures set in place to make them feel more comfortable or integrated within their cultural surroundings. They are expected to perform straight away, regardless of the cultural context they have been placed in. The graduates can therefore be perceived as decontextualised individuals taken out of their cultural habitat and environment. The global experience also generates a world of cultural standardisation and equivalence following the law of the market. The next part introduces and analyses Lara's narrative in detail while reflecting upon the notions of the accessory and privilege within her narrative of working life in East Germany.

### **3.5.1. A different kind of privilege: critical awareness and cultural discovery in Lara's narrative of working life abroad**

Lara's narrative displays a critical understanding of her cultural capital setting her apart from Chiara's and Mario's immersion into the discourses of capitalistic success and professional stress. In Chiara's case, I have shown how her approach to intercultural and intersubjective encounters was partly taking place within the fetishised and commodified realm of branded goods. Mario's adoption of a global language and working life abroad also formed a powerful social and economic accessory reinforcing his cultural capital as a middle-class, white and Western



graduate. His linguistic skills, cosmopolitan friendships and work for an international corporation are accessories *speaking of* distinction, privilege and exclusiveness.

I examine and analyse a different kind of accessory as featured in the narrative of a twenty-five year old Irish woman I interviewed a few months after her return from East Germany where she had worked for a Californian IT company. Lara's narrative has a critical stance that distinguishes her from the two previous graduates I introduce in this section. Her answer to the first question concerning her working life abroad clearly differs from the graduates' previous versions:

*So what was it like working there then?*

Creepy. (*Mutual laughter*) It was a big IT business with some kind of family ethics that I found irritating to be honest.<sup>80</sup>

Lara's first account of working life abroad is rather critical and sets a very different tone to our discussion from the previous interactions experienced with graduates working abroad within the field of international business. Her criticism of family ethics within the workplace displays an awareness and understanding of global organisations that has a pronounced political stance. Even though Lara shows an adaptability to her working environment and professional demands, she is nevertheless "in tune" with the "non-working" cultural environment she evolves in:

*And how did you cope with working so much? Did you have any time for yourself?*



*Did you want to learn something about the culture you were in?*

Yes, I tried. I was lucky that my flatmate was East German and worked as a librarian. That meant there was something real there! We talked about literature and I got to know her friends quite well. I guess it kept me grounded in a way and that was important considering the sort of job I had. I was meeting successful executives at work while my flatmate's unemployed mother lived alone. She was middle-aged, with few skills, and was rejected everywhere she went.

*Was there a lot of unemployment where you were working?*

Yes, it was quite bad. If you are a middle-aged woman with few skills...<sup>81</sup>

Lara's decision to interact with others outside work and discover alternative cultural realities acts as a powerful contrast to her working life showing the usual signs of global success. The fact that she stresses life outside the workplace as a real experience emphasises the culturally artificial and fake context of international businesses abroad. "Keeping grounded" here is therefore inseparable from the cultural discovery of others not sharing the same background, circumstances or beliefs. Long working hours, absolute dedication to the company's goals and cultural confinement within the business sphere are all typical signs -or symptoms- of international success as encountered earlier on:

*And how many hours did your team work weekly?*

A lot! It was a minimum of sixty a week, but plenty of people were actually doing more than that. Some of them never went on holiday either and seemed to have no life outside work. It is funny because I always thought I was working very hard, but when I compared myself to other people, I realised I was not even close!

*Did people actually work from Monday to Sunday then?*

Yes.

*Wow! Did they work every Sunday, too?*

Yes, they did. I always felt like I was being a bit dishonest though... Well, not dishonest really, but when I saw what other people were getting paid for the number of hours they put... A lot of them were paid in stock options and could have lost everything very quickly. But that is also the nature of the E-business and its constant changes and fluctuations.<sup>82</sup>

If Lara's evocation of her working schedule echoes Mario's description of Floral's corporate organisation and its emphasis on complete dedication and demanding schedules, her analysis of her own distanced position within the company nevertheless differs from Mario's narrative of playful success emphasising the powerful and fun aspects of his demanding career. Lara's evocation of her own "dishonesty" -and the dishonest treatment of its employees by the company- adds a moral dimension to her narrative of working life abroad setting the international business experience against a background of inequality and injustice lived by those not enjoying the benefits and pleasure of the global village. The fact that individuals are not only expected to perform within corporate environments regardless of their moral or political opinions, but also not to take on external social and economic circumstances is, as Barnett suggests, a problematic vision of business morality:

The issue is one of delivery: can she or he be trusted to deliver the goods (literally)? (...) 'Self-reliance' thus takes on moral overtones. It is not just a matter of managing one's work operationally or even of monitoring oneself according to performance indicators; it is also a matter of taking on the human virtues sought by this fluid corporate environment. Companies look to individuals to handle themselves in ways that are appropriate to the company concerned.<sup>83</sup>

The efficient and profit-driven morality of the organisation could therefore replace humanistic and political concerns as expressed by Lara's narrative of working life abroad. I suggest that a graduate's cultural isolation from and ignorance of external circumstances may also be favoured by the organisation. The issue is therefore to try and maintain the profit-driven values of the global village *as well as* the depth and relevance of intercultural encounters.

Adopting an appropriate behaviour within international business contexts is a difficult task for critically and culturally aware graduates such as Lara who see injustice and alienation inside and outside the workplace:

*And how do you look back on that experience now?*

Well, I suppose there was a team atmosphere and I enjoyed getting to know my flatmates' friends and family.

*Have you kept in touch with them?*

Yes, I have. We are very close actually! I guess I became more tolerant in certain ways of how much more traditional and patriarchal such societies can be. You get used to that

kind of thing, men always wanting to get the bill and so on. I guess I felt very disillusioned as far as work was concerned and felt rather alienated from day one.

*Why do you think people worked so much then? Why were they willing to sacrifice their free time and chance to discover another culture?*

Well I guess it is an industry where people get really sucked into their jobs and technological changes. It is also a very fast-paced environment where one has to keep up with constant changes and adjustments. I guess some people there are passionate about what they do, which is fair enough if that is what you really want to do, but when you work twenty hours a day... Is it alienated labour and does it really belong to you? I think this is what upset me the most.<sup>84</sup>

Lara's direct reference to alienated labour makes a powerful critical contribution to the assessment of graduates' lives working for international businesses abroad. She is also clearly disillusioned with global economics and its reproduction of social inequalities as well as alienating -and alienated- practices. Her emphasis on cultural tolerance and relativism is key in the context of International Management and its treatment of cultural difference as a measurable and categorised tool. As Urry puts it:

These [globalised] scapes generate, for late twentieth-century 'humans', new opportunities and desires, as well as new risks. The former include cheap overseas travel; forming internationalised 'new sociations', especially via the Internet; obtaining consumer goods and lifestyles of 'the other'; employing global imagery; participating in global cultural events; listening to 'world music'; and so on. The latter includes AIDS; Chernobyl; cultural homogenisation; the loss of economic national sovereignty; migration; being exiled; and asylum seeking.<sup>85</sup>



Following Urry's analysis, it is tempting to envisage graduates working for international businesses abroad as results and products of the global paradigm as well as successful -and alienated- actors within globalised scapes. They can, in fact, be perceived as globalised exiles experiencing cultural homogenisation behind the glitzy gloss of internationalism and global consumer lifestyles. Global discourses are, after all, dominant within contemporary Western societies and their emphasis on simultaneous exchange and productivity. The graduates do not, however, respond to the global paradigm in uniformed and predictable ways. Lara's interview shows a willingness to resist the "blandification" of the global *as well as* an acceptance of it operating as a central paradox within her narrative. This ambiguity affecting the graduates' experiences is also visible in how others respond to their critical ways:

*That means you could live anywhere and have the same kind of experience I guess.*

Absolutely. Cultural discovery is irrelevant in that case. It is interesting because people get sucked into this whole work culture and fabricate this lifestyle fantasy, probably because they are individuals running away from their backgrounds or motivated by personal reasons. The funny thing is that people tended to find me threatening at work.

*Really? And why?*

Well, a lot of it was about knowledge I guess. People were a bit shocked when they found out I had near native fluency in German for instance. They always thought I was American most of the time. That upset me a lot actually! (*Laughter*) I think people felt quite scared if you were too critical or showed too much interest in what was going on. Sometimes it helped trying to make them believe I was thick instead of the opposite. And then there were other times when I felt I could really be myself and people responded to

me in very positive ways. I guess I was very pleased about that, too! A lot of problems there had more to do with being a woman that coming from a foreign background and working abroad.<sup>86</sup>

Lara's subtle irony and realisation that cultural discovery is, in fact, irrelevant to the global paradigm is supplemented by a gendered analysis of how she is perceived at work reinforcing what can be called the graduates' acute sense of duplicity. I perceive the graduates working for international businesses abroad as individuals having to come to terms with the clashes created by the ongoing frictions between their own sense of critical awareness and the demands of the organisations they work for. Chiara, Mario and Lara all have to deal with different kinds of struggles and problems, whether these be cultural, social or private. The graduates' experiences of working lives abroad have therefore to be understood in terms of ongoing conflicts affecting their sense of wellbeing and cultural growth as individuals.

Duplicity generates *ways of being* that may appear contradictory at first, but that are, nevertheless, not mutually exclusive. If Lara is, for instance, clearly aware of the power granted by accessories in the form of linguistic skills, knowledge of the organisation and intelligent criticism, she also plays the "stupid woman part" when required. This sense of duality and pragmatic ability can also be perceived as a defence mechanism against the pressure and conformity generated by the organisation as well as its expectation of rapid and tangible results. Lara's desire for and insistence on not being identified as one of them evidences a certain discomfort on her part as well as a refusal to blindly adopt the company's values: "I was really

trying to push the whole “I am not from California you know, I actually grew up in a “poor” European country.” card. (*Mutual laughter*) I had to wear second-hand clothes, too.”<sup>87</sup> Lara’s resistance to the Californian law of profitability and cultural equivalence is nevertheless complemented by a sarcastic and pragmatic awareness on her part of what such experiences could actually be worth:

*It also leads us to the following key question: do you think your German speaking skills have increased the value of your cultural capital as a worker?*

*(Smiling knowingly).* I hope so. I am very good at selling myself anyway. (*Mutual laughter*) Just look at my CV and you will see...<sup>88</sup>

The graduates’ position is, in fact, a difficult one when evolving in the context of international -and corporate- businesses abroad. On the one hand, they are individuals whose critical abilities have been developed throughout their learning at university or business schools. On the other, they have to come to terms with the dominance of a global discourse dictating their working lives abroad. Evolving as foreign graduates within such controlled and stressful working contexts does, in fact, question the whole relevance of residency abroad and whether or not the conflicts experienced by them can actually be solved. When asked if she perceives her being foreign as a plus for her career, Lara’s answer is ambiguous:

It is hard to say. I guess I was able to challenge people’s preconceptions about Ireland and was interested in trying to subvert the usual stereotypes. I guess that, within the workplace, I was also the least devoted individual in the whole company, which meant I still found time outside work to meet up with people and discuss things together. Things



that mattered so much to other people and worked as some sort of substitute for cultural identity never appealed to me.<sup>89</sup>

It comes across that Lara's decision to privilege the outside world and cultural discovery actually *works against* the functioning of the organisation and what she identifies as its offer of a substitute for cultural identity. Lara also stresses her own lack of productivity compared to her colleagues, leading to the *actual possibility* of interactions with cultural others. The fact that the graduates are taken out of their usual context and thrown into a standardised environment of cultural equivalence leads to the necessary examination of their experiences as decontextualised throughout residency abroad. This process can be defined as a new form of cultural shock generated by conformity and sameness as opposed to difference and singularity. The next section introduces the logic of decontextualisation inherent in contemporary capitalism and how it affects the graduates's ownership and display of cultural accessories.

### **3.5.2. The logics of decontextualisation within contemporary capitalism: examining residency and work abroad as fetishised accessories**

This final section approaches residency and working lives abroad as decontextualised accessories performed by the graduates. I started this part with a use of the fashion metaphor and underlined how one of the key processes within the fashion economy is an exchange of fetishised others embodying social distinction and economic power. I also showed how fashion was a central discourse within capitalism and its



ongoing production and consumption of branded goods. The accessory therefore has important functions within capitalism as it embodies a variety of cultural, social and economic signs that can be read accordingly by those in the know.

It also signifies a form of belonging facilitating social recognition and perpetuating class differences between cultural groups. The graduates consume, own and perform accessories as well as understand their meanings: this is clear in Chiara's narrative of interpersonal encounters strongly echoing her preoccupations with professional success and fetishised materialism.

This concluding part approaches residency abroad as a commodity and powerful -yet alienating- accessory performed by the graduates. The privileges of global experiences and working lives abroad are, in fact, not for *everyone* and travel retains exclusive and distinctive connotations displayed by the graduates. Even though she shows an acute awareness of how the organisation works, Lara still fulfils its expectations:

*What kind of basis did they hire you on then?*

I was hired on the basis of my previous working experience within them and the fact that I had proved myself earlier on. They also knew I would be flexible and would not mind travelling back and forth to California if required.<sup>90</sup>

If one perceives graduates as exchanged commodities within the dominant discourse of global economics, one also understands that their decontextualised experience of cultural difference is logical and beneficial within the fetishised economics of

intersubjectivity inherent in contemporary capitalism. The decontextualised effect, is, in fact, a key process within capitalistic production and consumption:

Of course, the best examples of the diversion of commodities from their original nexus is to be found in the domain of fashion, domestic display, and collecting in the modern West. In the high-tech look inspired by the Bauhaus, the functionality of factories, warehouses, and workplaces is diverted to household aesthetics. The uniforms of various occupations are turned into the vocabulary of costume. In the logic of found art, the everyday commodity is framed and aestheticised. These are all examples of what we might call commoditisation by diversion, where value, in the art or the fashion market, is accelerated and enhanced by placing objects and things in unlikely contexts. It is the aesthetics of decontextualisation (itself driven by the quest for novelty) that is at the heart of the display, in highbrow Western homes, of the tools and artifacts of the “other”: the Turkmen saddlebag, Masai spear, Dinka basket. (...) In all these examples, diversions of things combine the aesthetic impulse, the entrepreneurial link, and the touch of the mortally shocking.<sup>91</sup>

Appadurai’s analysis of fetishised and consumed others leads to a set of central questions within this first section. One can perceive the graduates as diverted commodities taken out of their cultural contexts by the organisation and placed within functional working contexts of cultural standardisation. I suggest that they may also reproduce their own decontextualisation through the display and ownership of linguistic and cultural accessories. In her description of one successful colleague, Lara stresses the worship of commodities standing for cultural and social power:

*I guess people would also want to maintain certain lifestyles, which is why they worked so much.*

Yes. Some management guys went a bit over the top with the money actually. I remember this guy who ordered a customised Porsche with his name embroidered on the seats.

*Like some status symbol in an Eighties, conspicuous, kind of way.*

Yes. It was fairly in your face and blatant most times.<sup>92</sup>

I argue that the graduates living and working abroad within international and corporate businesses are commodities engaged in the consumption and display of branded goods and experiences standing for their success and achievements in global terms. In this sense, the graduates come full circle from their being produced as global commodities to their own ownership and display of fetishised accessories, whether they be material, linguistic or experiential.

The graduates perform a sense of internationalism and exchange they have yet to experience given the restrictive and controlling conditions they work in. I suggest their often -but not always- illusory performance of cultural exchange and cosmopolitanism is a central accessory masking the competitive and stressful working environments they evolve in. Behind the gloss of global working families and cultural projections lies a very different reality in times of business crisis:

*Were you under a lot of pressure?*

Yes, but that was more... It is the nature of the industry, as you always try to get your product out on the market before other companies do. If someone else has the idea first.



then you lose copyrights opportunities. This explains why there is so much pressure to come up with new ideas all the time. You also have to secure certain markets and reinforce your presence there. The problem is, I did not take the whole thing too seriously, however stressful it became at times.

*Right.*

There was this interesting combination of Californian efficiency and willingness from the East Germans to acquire that new technology which meant extended working hours and spending most of your life at work! I think the company offered a substitute or projection for some kind of cultural identity there that made individuals feel like they were part of a big technological family. People felt protected and sheltered by the firm I guess. It was a community, but when times started getting hard, people were competing against each other and that really showed.<sup>93</sup>

The leading discourse of global equivalence and narcissistic recognitions within the workplace does not conceal the harsher reality of the organisation and its competitive and performance-led functioning. Lara's narrative clearly shows the limitations of the big technological family and how the organisation performs as a cultural substitute for decontextualised graduates immersed in a stressful working environment of monitored performance and tangible results. The family discourse can therefore be read as an attempt to distance the graduates from the alienating circumstances they are performing in. Promoting work ethics as something *beyond* the working life partially justifies the stressful demands imposed by the organisation. As Lara argues, being producers of alienated labour does not prevent her colleagues from being happy with their work:



*And was there anything such as cultural induction programs to welcome you within the company at first?*

No, not at all. The thing is, the working ethic is so strong that not much else is required. My impression was that people were quite happy to work there, regardless of the stressful conditions and bad salaries. Even though employees were controlled and monitored, they still felt like they belonged somehow.<sup>94</sup>

This confirms the belief that individuals working within international corporate environments are expected to fit the demands and nature of the organisation. It rarely works the other way round. The idea of working ethics is therefore questionable within global business and raises the issue of social and cultural responsibility within such environments. As Sethi puts it:

Good ethics is good business, we are told. We would not be discussing this topic if this statement were true. Business people, being rational, would need little prompting from outsiders to strive for ever-higher standards of socially responsive behaviour. All empirical evidence and economic logic indicate otherwise, however. Under conditions of rising competitive intensity and an uncontrollable free-rider problem, companies cannot and will not do well.<sup>95</sup>

This analysis leads us to the final part of this section reflecting upon the reasons for which cultural difference actually *matters* within the business world. What role does cultural difference play within the competitive ethics of global business? And why is the difference embodied by the graduates such a key accessory? I propose to come to terms with the dominance of materialism within contemporary capitalism while

exploring the notions of cultural commodification and alienation within international and corporate working contexts.

### **3.5.3. The reign of the object in contemporary capitalism: why culture “matters” within the business world**

Materialism and commodification can be understood as driving forces within the narratives of graduates working for international businesses abroad. Their experiences are, in fact, valued, exchanged and commodified in measurable and tangible terms. Chiara, Mario and Lara all display an awareness of what working lives abroad can be worth and what they can be exchanged for, despite the alienating and stressful conditions they often evolve in. Their involvement in competitive and results-driven working environments also entails an ongoing valuing of their own cultural capital as foreign graduates working abroad for the first time. The aim of this part is therefore to approach them as products of a global discourse of pervasive exchange resulting in the creation of “blandified” working contexts masking standardisation and homogeneity behind a gloss of internationalism and “global families”.

The main goal of international and corporate businesses is therefore to use differences productively and maximise the potential of foreign, educated and privileged graduates in order to reinforce the strength of the market and perpetuate its

dominance. This is clear in Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's analysis of how cultural differences can work wonders for the global market:

It is because we are all different that we have so much to exchange with each other. In matters of culture, as in the relationship of the sexes, the difference can be the chief source of attraction. Italian design and Dutch engineering can lead to conflicts, as we have seen; they could also lead to a product made in heaven.<sup>96</sup>

This promiscuous exchange of fetishised differences ultimately benefits the realm of commodity production where others are managed and controlled in order to serve the purposes of the global market. This goal is supplemented by a belief in universal systems of production and cultural equivalence generating standardisation and homogeneity on a global scale:

There is a theory that internationalisation will create, or at least lead to, a common culture worldwide. This would make the life of international managers much simpler. People point to McDonald's or Coca-Cola as examples of tastes, markets and hence cultures becoming similar everywhere. There are, indeed, many products and services becoming common to world markets. What is important to consider, however, is not what they are and where they are found physically, but **what they mean to the people in each culture.** (...) The essence of culture is not what is visible on the surface. It is the shared ways groups of people understand and interpret the world. So the fact that we can all listen to Walkmans and eat hamburgers tells us that there are some novel products that can be sold on a universal message.<sup>97</sup>

It is interesting to underline that another central aim within the discourse of corporate globalised business is the unravelling of culture as some kind of secret formula leading to the production and consumption of more commodities worldwide. Culture is here to help production, not the opposite. Once cultural meanings are identified, categorised and deciphered, there will be nothing preventing the global village from flourishing, mushrooming and making more adepts. This is where the family discourse evoked by Lara acts as a powerful metaphor for the constant breeding of products by Mother Corporate. Such discourse within the field of International Management points to the triumph of the object and its dominance within contemporary capitalism. The graduates' narratives of working lives abroad within international and corporate contexts *speak of* social, economic and cultural privilege, alienation and commodification. Their professional contexts objectify them as international actors of global economics encouraged to value their own experiences of residency and work abroad in commodified, measurable and exchangeable terms. Are the graduates not worth it after all? The organisation has to generate some kind of benefits and added value for the sacrifices made and working hours spent making life outside work almost impossible.

Experiencing and valuing global experiences marks a turn within capitalism and its ongoing commodification of cultural difference. The privilege of being objectified as a graduate working abroad for the first time stands for the reign of the object and its dominance on all-exchange and all-production, whether these be cultural, social or



economic. This shift is analysed and identified by Baudrillard in the following passage:

In our philosophy of desire, the subject retains an absolute privilege, since it is the subject that desires. But everything is inverted if one passes on to the thought of seduction. There, it is no longer the subject which desires, it is the object which seduces. Everything comes from the object and everything returns to it (...) For the subject is fragile and can only desire, whereas the object gets on very well even when desire is absent;<sup>98</sup>

The objectification shift accounts for the graduates' sense of alienation and constant pressure within harsh and ruthless working environments. The possibility to grow and increase one's own cultural potential through residency abroad is therefore not easily achievable. I argue that Lara manages to discover another cultural reality and increase her acceptance of cultural others *because* she does not conform to her colleagues' dedication to the company and performance ethics.

Such sets of conclusions lead one to the central question of how relevant working contexts are to the graduates' cultural experiences of residency and work abroad. If this first part focused on the narratives of graduates working within international and corporate businesses for the first time in their lives, it is necessary to test the dominance of the global paradigm against other working contexts where foreign graduates are encountered.

The second section of this thesis turns to the working context of Education and analyses the narratives and experiences of foreign graduates using their linguistic and educational skills through residency and working life abroad. The central aim within the next section is therefore to question the relevance of the global discourse and find out if it also applies to graduates evolving within the field of Education.

□

<sup>1</sup> The term global is problematic since the benefits of the world economy are not actually enjoyed by everyone. I consider the graduates' journey as a global one since one of the key features of their lives is the possibility to live and work abroad in a context of international business. There are, however, several limitations to the global paradigm I do not examine here but that are worth bearing in mind when referring to such terms.

<sup>2</sup> See Simmel (1997).

<sup>3</sup> See also Barthes (1990).

<sup>4</sup> See Bourdieu (1989) and Lipovetsky (1989, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p.88, 1993, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi.

<sup>6</sup> *Simmel on Culture, Selected Writings*, edited by David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, p.188, 1997, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi.

<sup>7</sup> *Simmel on Culture, Selected Writings*, edited by David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, p.191, 1997, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi.

<sup>8</sup> See translation in endnotes.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une Critique de l'Économie Politique du Signe*, p.98, 1972, Éditions Gallimard, Paris.

"The word fetish, which today applies to a *force*, a supernatural property of the object (...) this word has undergone a curious semantic distortion, since it originally signifies exactly the opposite: a *fabrication*, an artefact, a work of appearances and *signs*. Appearing in France in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, it stems from the Portuguese *feitiço* meaning "artificial", which comes itself from the Latin *factitius*. The meaning of "to make" is the first, of imitating through signs. (...) From the same root (*facio, factitius*) as *feitiço* one finds in Spanish *afeitar*, "disguise, adorn, embellish", *afeite* "finish, finery, cosmetics", the French "feint" and the Spanish *hechar*, "to make", where *hechizo*, "artificial, simulated, false" stems from. This aspect of "fakeness" and rigging appears everywhere, this artificial inspiration being, in other words, a cultural work of signs creating the status of the object-fetish, and also somewhat through the fascination it exerts."

My translation.

<sup>10</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p.68, 1994, Dover Publications, New York.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p.66, 1991, Polity Press, Cambridge.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix H Mario's Interview, 2001, Paris.

<sup>13</sup> See Hofstede (1991), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), Adler (2002) and Bochner and Furnham (1986).

<sup>14</sup> All names have been changed for ethical reasons.

<sup>15</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.4, 2001, Paris.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See Furnham and Bochner (1986).

<sup>19</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.2, 2001, Paris.

<sup>20</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.8, 2001, Paris.

<sup>21</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.9, 2001, Paris.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organisations, Software of the Mind*, p.209, 1991, McGraw-Hill Book Company, London.

<sup>24</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.8, 2001, Paris.

<sup>25</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.3, 2001, Paris.

<sup>26</sup> See Laurent (1989).

<sup>27</sup> See Hofstede (1991) and Adler (2002).

<sup>28</sup> Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organisations, Software of the Mind*, p.232, 1991, McGraw-Hill Book Company, London.

<sup>29</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.9, 2001, Paris.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy J. Adler, *International Dimensions of Organisational Behaviour*, p.83, 2002, South-Western, Ohio.

<sup>31</sup> For further analyses of stereotyping and cultural differences see Hall (1993; 1966; 1973; 1990).

<sup>32</sup> The unbearable dimension inherent in intercultural communication and encounters is developed and examined in the final section introducing psychoanalytical readings of cultural difference.



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- <sup>33</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.2, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>34</sup> Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture, Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*, p.186, 1997, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London, Sonoma.
- <sup>35</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.6.7, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>36</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.6, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>37</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.7.8, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>38</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital, a Critique of Political Economy*, p.77, 1970, Lawrence and Wishart, London.
- <sup>39</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, p.71, 1998, Sage Publications, London.
- <sup>40</sup> My coinage.
- <sup>41</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, p.211, 1990, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- <sup>42</sup> See also Bauman (2000).
- <sup>43</sup> Appendix C Chiara's Interview, p.4, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>44</sup> See Furnham and Bochner, 1986.
- <sup>45</sup> Nancy Adler, *International Dimensions of Organisational Behaviour*, p.336, 2002, South-Western, Ohio.
- <sup>46</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.19, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>47</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.3, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>48</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.8, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>49</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p. 8, Paris, 2001.
- <sup>50</sup> See Klein (2000).
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.4, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p.88, 1993, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi.
- <sup>55</sup> Rosalie L. Tung, "Selection and Training of Personnel for Overseas Assignments" in *International Management*, edited by Rosalie L. Tung, p.345, 1994, Dartmouth, Aldershot, Brookfield USA, Hong Kong, Singapore and Sydney.
- <sup>56</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.9, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>57</sup> See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, 1990, Blackwell, Oxford for his analysis of "space time compression" defining contemporary Western societies.
- <sup>58</sup> See Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997).
- <sup>59</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, p.12, 1975, Telos Press, St. Louis.
- <sup>60</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.3, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>61</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.6.7, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>62</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p. 3, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>63</sup> See pages 6, 8 and 10.
- <sup>64</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.8, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>65</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.17, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>66</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.12.13, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>67</sup> See Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.14, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>68</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.9.10, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>69</sup> One of the main advertising slogans of Floral is, in fact, based on the notion of worth and added value conferred by its products.
- <sup>70</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p.139, 1999, Pluto Press, London.
- <sup>71</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.15, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>72</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.17, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>73</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.17.18, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>74</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction, a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, p.250, 1984, Routledge, London.
- <sup>75</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.19, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>77</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.13, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>78</sup> See Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.20, 2001, Paris.



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- <sup>79</sup> Appendix H Mario's Interview, p.17, 2001, Paris.
- <sup>80</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.3, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>81</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.6.7, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>82</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.5.6, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>83</sup> Ronald Barnett, "Critical Thought in a Corporate World" in *Higher Education, A Critical Business*, p.122, 1997, Open University Press, Buckingham and Bristol.
- <sup>84</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.8.9, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>85</sup> John Urry, "Contemporary Transformations of Time and Space" in *The Globalisation of Higher Education*, edited by Peter Scott, p.6.7, 1998, Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia.
- <sup>86</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.9.10, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>87</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.7.8, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>88</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.12, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>89</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.10, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>90</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.8, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>91</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things, Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, p.28, 1986, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne and Sydney.
- <sup>92</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.6, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>93</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.4.5, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>94</sup> Appendix E Lara's Interview, p.11, 2002, Glasgow.
- <sup>95</sup> S. Prakash Sethi, "Moving from a Socially Responsible to a Socially Accountable Corporation" in *Is the Good Corporation Dead? Social Responsibility in a Global Economy*, edited by John W. Houck and Oliver F. Williams, p.86, 1996, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham and London.
- <sup>96</sup> Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture, Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*, p.186, 1997, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London, Sonoma.
- <sup>97</sup> Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture, Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*, p.3, 1997, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London, Sonoma.
- <sup>98</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p.111.112, 1999, Pluto Press, London.

## **Part Four**

# **Graduates as Practitioners within the Field of Education**

## **4.1. Introduction**

This second part examines and analyses the narratives of graduates working abroad within the context of education. As we saw in the previous part, working environments shape graduates' perceptions and treatment of cultural difference and interactions. Further examination of other working contexts is required in order to find out if the global paradigm is as prevalent in other fields of graduate employment as it is within the international corporate organisation.

Turning to educational working contexts after considering international corporate businesses can be explained for several reasons. Firstly, one has to see how the global processes of difference valuing and fetishised commodification may apply to other professional contexts in order to find out if they still operate as dominant discourses for graduates involved in other fields. Secondly, examining diverse working environments will help understand what factors influence the graduates' understanding of cultural difference according to their working contexts. I propose to look at how the graduates working within the field of Education abroad may be affected by the global experience and compare their experiences to the graduates' involved in business organisations. The focus of this part is therefore to find in what ways are the graduates' experiences of cultural difference may be altered by their

professional lives. Thirdly, I choose to focus here on graduates involved in the field of Modern Languages teaching and learning, since language can be perceived as a central tool -and displayed accessory- aiding the graduates' professional success and achievements abroad. Languages are essential skills required throughout residency and work abroad and are therefore central within the graduates' experiences of cultural difference. I examine how teaching one's own language within educational contexts may affect one's perception of one's own cultural background as well as increase cultural awareness. The notions of cultural reflexivity and relativism are key points of inquiry within this section analysing the narratives of foreign graduates teaching modern languages abroad. The interview samples featured in this chapter deal with individuals working at different levels of the British educational system, whether it be university, secondary or primary school.

The theoretical framework in this section focuses on Byram's concept of the "intercultural speaker"<sup>1</sup> while relating to Kramsch's conception of the "native speaker".<sup>2</sup> Byram and Kramsch are both key figures within their field and their theories directly relate to the dilemmas and difficulties encountered by foreign graduates teaching languages and other subjects within the classroom. Their work is based on practical observations and analyses of the teaching process and is therefore important for an understanding of graduates teaching abroad for the first time.

On the one hand, Byram's work can be perceived as a re-creation of Modern Languages by turning to Cultural Studies as a potential complement to Language



Teaching and Learning. Ethnography, sociology and linguistics are fields he uses in order to enhance critical understanding and awareness of cultural difference. One of his strongest beliefs is that culture cannot be understood outside language. Difference cannot therefore be conceived outside the linguistic sphere and intercultural communication and understanding within the context of Language Teaching and Learning. If Section One showed that linguistic fluency is vital for graduates working and living abroad for the first time, language is, however, not enough to fully comprehend cultural difference under Byram's analysis.<sup>3</sup> Linguistic proficiency is, in fact, not sufficient in achieving mutual understanding and improved communication between cultures. One's understanding of cultural difference cannot limit itself to the linguistic sphere and is enhanced by what Byram (1998) calls *savoirs* -or knowledges- facilitating and strengthening mutual understanding and respect. The *savoirs* are a set of pragmatic and intellectual actions leading to the embodied voice of the "intercultural speaker" whose main role is to develop, facilitate and improve intercultural understanding through the use of language and cultural self-awareness. Understanding in difference therefore requires a critical awareness of the self as well as a set of linguistic and intellectual skills enhancing communication and exchange.

On the other, Kramsch's (1998) work helps challenge preconceived ideas regarding the teaching of foreign languages and the taken for granted status of the native speaker. As an academic practitioner within the field of Language Teaching and Learning, she questions notions and perceptions of cultural authenticity within the context of the classroom. I use her work when examining my empirical data and the

notions of identity and nationality as experienced by foreign graduates working abroad within educational contexts. Kramsch was also instrumental in pushing languages in the direction of Cultural Studies while highlighting the key relationship between culture and language.<sup>4</sup>

I work with the authors' contributions while analysing the graduates' narratives. I look at how their theories may be applied to the experiences of the graduates teaching abroad for the first time and find out if these individuals necessarily qualify as Byram's "intercultural speakers". I also examine how their role as teachers and language assistants within the educational system affects their understanding and reception of cultural difference in possible significant ways.

This part tackles these key concerns while relating them to the core concept of reflexivity introduced in this section. Reflexivity is an important concept within the field of Language Teaching and Learning as well as in (Higher) Education. As far as Byram's understanding is concerned, one can -for the time being- define "reflexivity" as a set of behaviours and attitudes helping us come to terms with difference in critical and non-judgemental ways.<sup>5</sup> Reflexivity requires cultural openness and curiosity as well as self-criticism and analysing one's point of view first. It can be understood as the ability to approach cultural difference in constructive, aware and open ways. It implies the kind of cultural relativism and tolerance displayed by Lara in Section One. Reflexive thought can be perceived as a process engaging us in reciprocal relationships with others that are mainly defined by

mutual respect and awareness. They are not valued relationships aiming at cultural transactions or added surplus value. Reflexive relationships can operate in personal, humanistic and uncommodified ways.

I examine the possibility and impact of the “reflexive touch” within the leading context of global capitalism. I also suggest that the graduates involved in the sphere of education may not be as radically different from those involved in the business sphere, since the global paradigm of efficiency and productivity may have affected them in notable ways.

I begin my inquiry into educational working environments with an introduction to the narrative of a German language assistant working at a British university. By examining the notions of reflexivity and cultural awareness featured in Byram’s work as well as his analysis of tourism, it is possible to relate them to the previously introduced paradigm of global experience within Section One.

## 4.2. “Aiming at reflexivity”?: Byram’s “Intercultural Speaker” and Model of “Intercultural Communication and Competence”

Byram (1997) indexes three key aspects: the five “savoirs”, the “intercultural speaker” and the notion of “intercultural communication and competence”. His work advocates a necessary *rapprochement* between foreign language education and cultural studies.<sup>6</sup> His theory of “savoirs” and shift to the notion of the “intercultural speaker” have been complemented by Zarate’s theory of “savoirs interprétatifs” (1993), as well as Kramsch’s critique of the “native speaker” (1998).

Byram identifies five *savoirs* -or knowledges. They form a set of attitudes encouraging foreign language students and learners to build up a more accurate and critical understanding of cultural difference. He suggests five types of behaviors leading to the acquisition of intercultural communication and competence. Key headings within *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* express the five *savoirs* in the following way:

### **Knowledge**

of self and other; of interaction: individual and societal (*savoirs*)

### **Skills**

interpret and relate (*savoir comprendre*)

### **Education**

political education, critical cultural awareness (*savoir s’engager*)



**Skills**

discover and / or interact (*savoir apprendre, faire*)

**Attitudes**

relativising self valuing other (*savoir être*)<sup>7</sup>

One can identify four main areas of knowledge from this classification: the personal, relational, practical and political. Firstly, it is important for students reflect upon their own culture and background in order to engage with difference in constructive ways. This can be defined as critical understanding as it implies examining oneself first before engaging with others. Being receptive to otherness therefore entails a necessary distancing from oneself and one's judgments and values. "Critical cultural awareness" -as Byram names it- is a key process affecting the lives of the students *and* graduates experiencing residency abroad. Coming into contact with cultural others often implies that the graduates will revisit their own sense of cultural identity and examine it more critically. Byram (2001) maintains that cultural relativism and awareness leads to the acquisition of a critical knowledge which offers a more complex perception of difference. If cultural objectivity forms an ideal that cannot always be reached, critical awareness of difference nevertheless encourages students and graduates to move beyond the obsolete us/them dichotomy freezing intercultural understanding through narrow binaries. The interview samples featured in this section focus on this notion of de-centering and how cultural relativism may or may not affect graduates living and working abroad for the first time. The analysis also bears in mind the relevance of the global discourse and the ways in which it may affect graduates working within the field of Education.

#### **4.2.1. Graduates working and living abroad as “cultural tourists”: an analysis of Anke<sup>8</sup>’s interview**

Byram establishes a clear difference between the tourists and the sojourners and I use his analysis while relating to the global experience of residency and work abroad. Tourism is a negative word in his vocabulary since it entails a commodified, fetishised and commercial approach to otherness. He favours the concept of the sojourner instead that he perceives in the following way:

The experience of the sojourner is one of comparisons, of what is the same or different but compatible, but also of conflicts and incompatible contrasts. The experience of the sojourner is potentially more valuable than that of the tourist (...) Where the tourist remains essentially unchanged, the sojourner has the opportunity to learn and be educated, acquiring the capacity to critique and improve their own and others’ conditions.<sup>9</sup>

Byram’s understanding of the standard tourist experience is that it essentially provides individuals with a fantasy of commercialised difference that does not aim at challenging their own sense of cultural belonging and self-awareness.<sup>10</sup> The tourist journey can be identified as a key discourse within the global village with its emphasis on fast travel and cultural immediacy. While Byram would argue that the tourist experiences difference on a commercial and moneyed basis, he or she is, however, often isolated from exposure to difference and sees it from a distance. I

propose to examine Anke's narrative in the light of Byram's criticism of the tourist experience. A tourist *consumes* but is not directly involved in cultural phenomena the way sojourners are. Byram perceives the tourism industry as a profit focused activity which is part of a wider dominant discourse within capitalism aiming at the commodification of cultural difference through its exchange and consumption.<sup>11</sup>

Anke is a "Lektorin" at a Scottish University within a Languages Department. Her narrative works on several levels of understanding related to the demands of her working environment. Firstly, her experience of cultural difference is shaped by her interactions with colleagues who are often foreign, too. Secondly, her working life abroad can be related to tourism and the global paradigm in significant ways. Thirdly, one can understand Anke's narrative as being -to a certain extent- one of cultural tourism. The first part of my data analysis therefore focuses on elements of her narrative related to the tourist experience. The second uses Byram's critique of the commercial while exploring Anke's professional and cultural motivations.

One of the first things that strikes one about Anke's arrival to Britain was that she was immediately welcome by fellow members of her department:

*So how did you find getting on with things and finding a flat?*

It has been quite easy because Klaus [a tutor at University] picked me up at the train station and basically showed me around the University, around town.

*And you felt kind of comfortable.*

Yes, yes. I met Hans [a lecturer at University] on the first day for dinner. I went to different parts with them together. Yes, he told me how to look for flats, what to do. I just arrived and he showed me around, I did not have to find my way around on my own, because I was being shown. That was really...that was brilliant!

*So, it was fairly stress-free coming here and finding...*

Yes, yes.<sup>12</sup>

During her first day on foreign soil, Anke has already met two Germans who are the first people she came across. The transition from Germany to Britain is smooth while her narrative alludes to the facilitated experience of global culture. The traumatic symptoms of culture shock<sup>13</sup> experienced on arrival do not therefore apply to Anke's first contact with Scotland. This could be perceived in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, Furnham and Bochner's theory of culture shock approaches difference as a problem to be managed and dealt with accordingly. Within the global sphere, cultural differences are not as prominent due to the expansion of the global market and its diffusion of identical goods abroad. On the other, cultural shocks within the global village are less likely to occur due to cultural standardisation and "blandification". We may recall that the cultural homogeneity defining Western capitalism was also inherent in Mario's previous depictions of his working environment within Section One.

The fact that Anke rarely experiences conflicts or problems throughout her stay in Scotland may however result in a lack of exposure to Scottish culture. I examine in the following analysis how Byram's assumption that the sojourner gains positive



learning from conflict and tension is challenged by Anke's apparently seamless narrative of residency and work abroad.

There are only minor traces of conflict to be found in her narrative. When evoking her Scottish landlord, she is faced with little understanding when flooding occurs on the premises:

*Have you moved ever since you arrived?*

No. Last week there was a problem there. My landlord said: "Can you move out today?" although I signed a six-month lease. It kept raining through my ceiling ever since I came back after Christmas and I obviously complained about that everyday to keep them going sort of thing: "Do something! I am not prepared to pay the complete rent if there are problems all the time. Am I allowed to move out if you don't do anything?" And she passed that on to the landlord and I had him on the phone for the very first time. He just said: "You didn't pay your rent!" "Yes, I did." And he said: "Well you can move out tomorrow if you want to!" Fine, I will have to look for something else first, ok...I had friends looking for something at the time but one of them was in a real rush because she had to leave her flat, so we started looking for a flat for three people, but it is quite hard right now with this multiple occupancy thing.

Most three-bedroom flats do not have a licence. We could not find anything and then I found out that they actually had the roof repaired on the day that he told me that I could move out. So the roof has been fine now, no problem there anymore. I just stayed there and the other two girls moved in a two-bedroom flat. It was a bit of a hassle and I was quite annoyed, but...<sup>14</sup>

This is an important episode in Anke's narrative since it relates an event that is culturally and materially frustrating. Her overall experience of work and residency abroad seems, nevertheless, to be a positive one as she claims feeling rather comfortable in her new surroundings. The somewhat over-dramatic and disturbing effects of culture shock do not appear to apply to Anke's personal experience of Scottish culture. She is therefore within a context of cultural difference that is actually not so different.

Anke *manages* cultural difference in a confident -yet distant- manner. She may not speak the global language as clearly -and perhaps conspicuously- as Mario does, she nevertheless socialises with other foreigners and seems removed from interactions with other Scots. Although the levels of stress she is exposed to are not comparable to the ones experienced by the graduates working within international and corporate business contexts, she nevertheless makes it clear that work is a priority in her life. She appears in *control* but slightly *removed* from experiencing difference. When asked about friendships made five months after her arrival, she reveals most of them are foreign:

*Have you had time to socialise with people and make new friends?*

I spend a lot of time with colleagues really, from the German department. I also know someone from the Celtic department. We have these German Stammtisch you know every other week. Some people I met there from time to time.

*So would you say you are mostly with foreigners or...*

Yes. It is weird though, but...

*Have you made friends with Scottish people, local people?*

Not that much so far. My flatmates are Scottish and I get along great with them. Sometimes we sit in the kitchen together, watch TV, but not as often as I thought in the beginning. They are nice and we get along really well, so...No problem really.

*You have not really clicked or something?*

No, they are much younger than me. I am by far the oldest in the flat and they are the usual partying type as well so...They drink a lot over the weekend, go to the Union, that sort of thing.<sup>15</sup>

Anke's life within an international bubble of cultural equivalence and identifications is not that *different* from a "standard" tourist experience where one is in contact with difference but also distanced and removed from it. Anke is also involved in events organised by her department where she gets to meet other individuals she can easily relate to. This relative facility when dealing with cultural contact has undertones similar to the cultural standardisation and cosmopolitanism encountered within corporate and international working environments.

Anke spends more time with foreigners since she relates to their values and lifestyles better than the British. Her criticism of the drinking culture shows, for instance, how her lifestyle and age group fundamentally differ from her flatmates'. She also advises in the interview that she arrived in Britain in August 2003 but did not travel around the area until December when she had the opportunity to go to a neighbouring large city with a German colleague.<sup>16</sup> Her interactions with British culture therefore seem

limited, apart from the contact she has with her students and flatmates. In this sense, her experience is similar to Chiara's and Mario's whose social and personal lives revolve around their working environments. This is mainly explained by the graduates' decision to emphasise their careers at the expense of other non-related activities. The fact that she decides to travel around Britain with a colleague of her own nationality is also significant and *speaks of* the global experience the way Mario's trips with foreign colleagues do, too.

The informants' ability to adapt to new cultural and professional environments as quickly as they can may -or may not- turn their experiences of cultural difference into manageable and profitable assets. Whether it be in the contexts of International Management or Education, foreign graduates working abroad need to display skills of cultural facility making transition and change as easy and smooth to deal with as possible.

#### **4.2.2. Valuing cultural difference: a critical analysis of Byram's non-commercial ideal**

In his conception of cultural difference within the educational sphere, Byram advocates principles whereby difference is protected from being abused, exploited and commodified. In *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, Byram uses his binary framework of outsider/insider to make this stance clear:



*Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.*

Objectives:

- (a) willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or profitable.

The intercultural speaker is interested in the other's experience of daily life in contexts not usually presented to outsiders through the media nor used to develop a commercial relationship with outsiders; is interested in the daily experience of a range of social groups within a society and not only that represented in the dominant culture.<sup>17</sup>

Byram's theory demands that "intercultural speakers" seek relationships with otherness outside the commercial and commodified sphere preventing them from truly engaging with difference. This critique of the commercial is problematic when looking at graduates working and living abroad for the first time. Firstly, their identities as cosmopolitan and international workers are mainly constructed through their working lives and contributions to contemporary capitalism. Secondly, the graduates show an awareness of the exchange value of professional careers abroad and are provided as a result with a social status and cultural capital opening up other opportunities in the global village. If this aspect is essential for graduates working for international companies and corporate businesses, the benefits of residency and work abroad within the educational realm are also notable. The benefits of residency and work abroad are nevertheless not always as clear-cut as they may seem. When asked

about the possible impact of Anke's British experience on her career. one gets a mixed answer:

Yes and no. I think CV wise this time is ok, but it is not the best as I am teaching German, since it is not my subject. That is why I think staying on for a second year might be for me an easy and pleasant option, but career wise, it is not the most clever thing to do. If nothing works out there, but it works out here, then fine. If things work out differently, then I will have to decide what I really want to do, because I am feeling very comfortable over here. But obviously, if I want to go back to University in Germany, I will have to do so soon.<sup>18</sup>

Anke's reply shows how the move can make sense "CV wise", despite her reservations regarding the prospects of an academic career. It is interesting to see how she emphasises the pleasantness and facility of working life abroad within her narrative. Her feelings of cultural ease may -or may not- be explained by the dominance of the global paradigm and its reassuring -yet predictable- cultural all-equivalence? One wonders if Anke has reached the comfort zone of global exchange where difference does no longer act as a radical discourse. Her narrative ultimately demonstrates how residency and work abroad can have a specific *value*, as exemplified in her reference to the curriculum vitae and ensuing professional self-valuing.

Byram's critique of the commercial therefore has limitations when dealing with working contexts where cultural difference acts as a key currency of exchange. Anke's dedication to her career in Education does not prevent her, in fact, from an

awareness of the value granted by difference and working lives abroad. Her narrative also highlights an understanding -and acceptance- of global culture generated by capitalism and the spread of the market. When discussing cultural difference within the West, she comes up with interesting ratios that are not *that* removed from the discourse of International Management:

In Western culture, when you think of it, the music, the books and films are all almost by now a common thing. I would say that only probably thirty percent of the culture that you experience is really connected with your own language and country. Around seventy-percent I would say is shared between all the Western nations, between Europe and America. It is quite obvious in food and music, literature a little bit less. The films and music are amongst the first things people consume in terms of culture. It is only a matter of two months before the release date. Stuff like that is very international by now. The way you live in a town with its supermarkets and restaurants and being able to go out without much effort really is the same way of life wherever you are. In rural areas, you need a car and have to drive for ten kilometres to find a large venue or whatever. It is more difficult to do things. You will probably go for different kinds of... I think you will appreciate things more.<sup>19</sup>

Anke's evocation of an international culture can be understood in contrasting ways. On the one hand, her conception of Western culture as a measurable entity of supermarkets, Hollywood films and global music has consumerist undertones emphasising the universal goals and achievements of the single market. On the other, her portrayal of a culture defined in terms of consumption and internationalism - which she interestingly identifies as an ongoing transaction between Europe and



America- gives her own experience of working life abroad a global flavour echoing the narratives analysed in Section One. Her claim that difference within the West is less prominent than sameness and similarity is interesting when coming from a foreign language tutor whose role mainly relies on otherness and its appeal. Her reference to a standardised cultural context within capitalism where life can be experienced without much effort seems ironically emblematic of residency and life abroad as a global experience. Difference is kept at a distance within her narrative. The fact that Anke's narrative relates to the standard tourist's experience -as Byram defines it- is revealing of the market and its successful efficient "managing" of culture difference. As Bauman puts it:

Efforts to keep the 'other', the different, the strange and the foreign at a distance, the decision to preclude the need for communication, negotiation and mutual commitment, is not the only conceivable, but the expectable response to the existential uncertainty rooted in the new fragility and fluidity of social bonds.<sup>20</sup>

Difference kept at a distance fits the life of the graduates in several key ways. Professional uncertainty is pervasive in what are often temporary contexts where stability and security are relative notions. One has to bear in mind that the graduates evolve within transient working environments where they are totally disposable. This particularly applies to language assistants such as Anke whose yearly contracts are not always renewed. Being faced with uncertainty and cultural change means that the graduates involved in educational contexts need to hang on to a sense of cultural



rootedness that is provided by their linguistic skills and ensuing authority as native speakers.

#### **4.2.3. Graduates, the “language accessory” and cultural representation: an examination of Kramsch’s critique of the “native speaker”**

One of Kramsch’s key contributions to the language learning and teaching debates is the questioning and challenging of the dominance and relevance of the native speaker’s voice within contemporary -and possibly Western- educational contexts. The rise of other voices and discourses within contemporary capitalism led to a re-evaluation of dominant historical and theoretical discourses questioning the binaries developed and maintained by Western rational thought. The importance of postcolonial theory<sup>21</sup> and its relevance to the field of Language Teaching and Learning encouraged interculturalists such as Kramsch to rethink the classroom process and examine the ideological issues inherent in the belief of the validity of the native speaker’s voice. In *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*, she introduces the issue of the “native speaker” in the following way:

For research purposes, it has been customary to view the linguistic development of a learner on an interlanguage continuum whose endpoint is a linguistic construct called the ‘native speaker’. Non-native teachers and students alike are intimidated by the native-speaker norm and understandably try to approximate this norm during the course of their work together. If, however, we consider language study as initiation into a kind of social practice that is at the boundary of two or more cultures, such a linear progression makes less sense.<sup>22</sup>

Kramersch perceives the norm of the native speaker as rather unsatisfactory and limited. One may wonder, in fact, how such an approach can reflect the multiplicity of identities and variations inherent in any culture. It is problematic to think that one may comprehend cultural difference through the exposure to a single voice.

I examine the central problem of cultural representation as experienced by graduates living abroad and teaching their mother tongue at work. I perceive their sense of cultural and linguistic authority as a key process resisting the demands of the global paradigm and ongoing emphasis on transience, standardisation and lack of stability, whether it be in cultural, professional or social terms. It is not clear whether the graduates involved in the field of Education display a sense of their authority as native speakers and use it accordingly as a powerful accessory. One needs to look at how they come to terms with being identified as the cultural representatives of their countries and if Kramersch's perception of the native speaker is -within the graduates' narratives- as outmoded as she think it is.

#### **4.2.4. Language teaching as cultural promotion: coming to terms with the graduates' authority as native speakers**

Language is an essential gateway facilitating the comprehension and promotion of cultural difference. This belief is an essential part of language teaching and learning. When Kramersch stresses: "the inseparability of language and culture (language *in*

culture, language *as* culture and other combinations), as constituting a single universe or domain of experience.”<sup>23</sup>, she also echoes Byram’s analysis of the language/culture dynamics.

In her portrayal of her role as language assistant, Anke shows an awareness of acting as a cultural mediator in the classroom:

*Now, talking more specifically about your job and the fact that you are a foreign language assistant, do you feel different when dealing with British students in your classes? How do you feel they perceive you? Are you aware in a way that you are a kind of a German image for them? Are you amused by the clichés and what they any think about Germany? Did you discover these things doing that job?*

Well, I knew that coming and teaching the students I would be as one of the few German people they ever meet and that I would obviously be important for them and I felt a bit awkward about that.

*Why?*

Obviously it has to do with German history to be honest. I mean they probably have grandparents who hate Germans, so they probably have certain ideas, probably negative ideas about Germany. I felt that I would have to be very polite indeed and very cautious with what I say not to offend anyone. I was very much aware that I would have to watch everything and be careful. But there was never any questions concerning Germany’s historical past or anything.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to see how Anke approaches the issue of cultural representation with a reference to her country’s historical past and the cultural impact she thinks it bears

on her students. This historical baggage is, in many ways, shaping her role as cultural mediator and encouraging her to give a positive image of German culture. Her feelings of awkwardness offer an interesting -but mixed- response to how she approaches her role as vector and acknowledged cultural authority. This ambiguity is pervasive throughout the interview and is a recurrent element when dealing with the delicate issues of cultural performance and representation. Being identified as a representative is a problematic process that heightens a sense of cultural awareness that can be problematic at times. If Anke is, for instance, aware of her authority as a native speaker representing Germany, she also plays with stereotypes in the classroom in order to enhance the promotion of her culture:

No, I think teaching here compared to teaching in Germany is...I am nicer over here. People here are generally nicer in the way they talk to each other, but also because I'm clearly...I sort of have to advertise my country and my culture, everything tending to do with it. So, I think the more positive I am, the more they will be comfortable with the language and the culture and the more interest they will develop. Being strict then could therefore put them off German and German culture. Obviously you cannot have everyone liking you so...

No.

All least when you are friendly they say: "Ok. At least not all Germans are horrible."

*So you are aware that they will see you as a kind of representative of your culture, which is quite interesting I think. You are in this position where you are teaching something and at the same time you are conveying a sense of identity to other people.*

Yes.



*Depending on which angle you get, you have a possibility there to be a different person, which is quite strange.*

Yes. What I basically try to convey...They have certain ideas about the Germans. When I am too late for a class, obviously I will talk about the stereotype that Germans are very punctual. It can make the class quite funny really, we have a good time with that and people tend to laugh a lot more than usual at the jokes I make. By now, the students are aware that I am making these jokes, in a good mood most of the time. I can do my grammar teaching in this way, using funny examples and working in a relaxing atmosphere. I usually do that anyway, but over here I try to do that even more. There is something positive in class. I recently did something on stereotypes and it was really good, as they showed an awareness of them in class.<sup>25</sup>

One deals here with the complex issues of authority and power bestowed upon the native speaker. Kramsch's view is fairly unequivocal when reassessing the "native speaker" norm as biased and unsatisfactory:

Who is entitled to speak for whom, to represent whom through spoken and written language? Who has the authority to select what is representative of a given culture: the outsider who observes and studies that culture, or the insider who lives and experiences it? According to what and whose criteria can a cultural feature be called representative of that culture? <sup>26</sup>

It is, nevertheless, undeniable that Anke uses her authority as a native speaker by freely playing with stereotypes and addressing certain issues that could have a negative impact on the students' perception of German culture. Her use of jokes and

humour is, for instance, an interesting pedagogic tool influencing the students' original preconceptions of Germany. The fact that Anke agrees with the statement that teaching has the ability to influence and shape individuals may reveal an awareness of her own power as a cultural representative. It also demonstrates her own positive assessment of her linguistic skills as key signifiers of cultural authority and power within her professional role.

In this sense, I perceive her performance of German culture as a key accessory within her working context, granting her with a sense of cultural stability and agency resisting the transience and instability of her surroundings. What is left of the graduates' sense of identity living and working abroad for the first time if not their own language and authority as foreign teachers? It is therefore questionable how much Kramsch's bias actually challenges the authority of the native speaker authority within language teaching by presenting us with pertinent -but often unanswered- series of questions. In her exposure of the privileges associated with the "native speaker" norm, Kramsch raises more problematic issues around the notion of cultural authority than she answers them:

Indeed, one acquires native speaker rights through a competence acquired in school. Some scholars therefore suggest using the term 'proficient or competent-user' rather than 'native speaker'. But the next question is: *Who* evaluates the competence of the competent-user? Who judges the social acceptability of the educated language user's way with words?<sup>27</sup>

If her critique of the native speaker works in theoretical terms, the power and authority given to the native speakers/graduates are still valued and therefore relevant to the teaching and learning of language as well as their global experience of increasingly standardised environments within contemporary capitalism. It is precisely *because* she is a native speaker that Anke's ironic portrayal of her own culture is accepted and taken into account by her students. Being a native speaker paradoxically makes it easier for her to come across as a self-critical teacher demonstrating an understanding of how understandings of cultural difference can be shaped.

It is, however, not only the issue of cultural authority that appears ambiguous and problematic in Anke's account of life and work abroad. Her reference to advertising and her willingness to convey a positive image of her country give strong managerial -and global- undertones to her professional context. Anke's bias that her work should tend towards the cultural promotion of all things German is understandable. What is, nevertheless, interesting is that she uses the verb "advertise" in order to describe it.

There are two key elements within the field of advertising making her choice of words paradoxical. On the one hand, one of the main goals of the advertising industry is to increase the sales of products by creating images and slogans directly associated with them. These images and slogans are constructed and fabricated in order to create aspirational ideals justifying capitalistic ideology. Advertising is all-pervasive but illusionary; it creates false situations through a manipulation of reality.



I argue that Anke's portrayal of German culture is a form of advertising aiming at the production of an attractive, positive and aspirational concept students will be drawn towards. Anke's positive and efficient production of her own cultural difference therefore imitates the retouching used in advertising images enhancing reality with an artificial and subliminal gloss. On the other, advertising is a leading discourse in the global village justifying its ongoing celebration of the object. It aims at increasing profits and helps generate more sales within the single market. Its sincerity and honesty are therefore questionable. Advertising is aimed at individuals but cannot be separated from commodification and the never-ending production and diffusion of Western commodities. What is advertised goes through a process of reification and becomes a valuable -and valued- object operating within the realm of consumption.

Advertising is not only the offspring of capitalistic production and the privilege of international corporate businesses. I argue that Anke's teaching method -which promotes cultural difference by giving it a consumer-friendly, desirable face- is part of what Debord (1970) describes as the ongoing spectacle orchestrated by capitalism. In Anke's case, cultural difference is being modified and reified in ways that echo Byram's view of the tourism industry and its flattering portrayal of faraway places. My aim here is not to discuss Debord's theory extensively but to bear in mind the influence of advertising techniques on the teaching of languages. Anke's approach to teaching cultural difference within the classroom can be understood as a direct consequence of a performative shift affecting Higher Education and which was first



identified by Lyotard (1979). Students are expected to perform on a regular basis and therefore be subject to continuous schemes of marking and assessment influencing their perception of how learning actually *matters*. As Lyotard puts it:

La question, explicite ou non, posée par l'étudiant professionneliste, par l'Etat ou par l'institution d'enseignement supérieur n'est plus: est-ce vrai? mais: à quoi ça sert? Dans le contexte de mercantilisation du savoir, cette dernière question signifie le plus souvent: est-ce vendable? Et, dans le contexte d'augmentation de la puissance: est-ce efficace? Or la disposition d'une compétence performante paraît bien devoir être vendable dans les conditions précédemment décrites, et elle est efficace par définition. Ce qui cesse de l'être, c'est la compétence d'autres critères, comme le vrai/faux, le juste/injuste, etc., et évidemment la faible performativité en général.<sup>28</sup>

His analysis of the commodification of knowledge orchestrated by the state and institutions relates to Anke's teaching experience in fundamental ways. Lyotard describes the performative shift as an efficient and pragmatic approach to knowledge and education turning them into valuable -and saleable- products. This implies that knowledge is now valued and that the organisation of Education follows patterns developed within the field of Management. Lyotard identifies this process as a performative competence that can be assessed, measured, evaluated and managed according to specific criteria. Anke's public-relations approach to language teaching echoes this fundamental shift that affects language tutors within Universities. Her teaching has to generate fast and measurable results. In her description of the students' attitudes towards cultural knowledge, Anke nevertheless deplores their lack of interest for certain aspects of German culture:

*I just wanted to ask you about the students' motivations when they come to study German here? What do you think it is they have in mind before they start?*

It is a very good question. Some of them probably do it because it was the best subject they had at school. I do not think they have a real concept of Germany as a country that is different. So... Yes. It is really hard to say. With a lot of them, I do not feel there is a real interest in the culture. When I was in Germany I took English first and foremost because I really liked the language and what I knew about the culture then interested me as well, but I am not sure people over here know as much about German culture that I knew about British culture then. I think there is still quite a large gap from their side to ours, whereas in Germany you learn more about America and Britain. When you do the language, cultural studies is part of it. It is not only the grammar bit, it is not only language, there is quite a lot.

*Is it more like applied languages in a way, acquiring the skills in order to achieve something else?*

I think it is a good idea, and on the increase, that because of the European Union, people here should learn a foreign language. Some years ago it was not such a popular idea. This idea for me is on the increase. But it does not really have anything to do with a deep interest in the literature or the culture. So... When I was reading British literature, I remember this was something I wanted to go on studying. But I do not sort of think they have ever read a narrative text in German really when they come to university. We do literature at school really. We even did Shakespeare. I think it is quite difficult for them to read. They often get the content across but not the interpretation of texts.<sup>29</sup>

There is, however, a central contradiction in Anke's narrative between, on the one hand, the need for providing a more consumer-friendly service and, on the other, the

loss of certain ideals and standards evoked in her analysis. This paradox reflects the current state of Higher Education and how the global paradigm may have had consequences on its organisation

#### **4.2.5. “Managing the Institution”: discourses of efficiency and cultural productivity within Higher Education**

British Universities have a privileged position in cultural terms and attract foreign students and graduates for several key reasons. The first one is that English is recognised as the official global language. It is the linguistic currency *du jour*. It is, in fact, an advantage for English speaking Universities to provide teaching and lecturing in the world language. Gaining an education in English ultimately offers potential students -and future graduates- more opportunities within the global economy.

Another effect of globalisation is that British Universities have had to rethink and revamp themselves in order to attract overseas and foreign students to their institution. Anke’s customer service approach to teaching languages within the classroom can therefore be perceived as a natural extension of management strategies shaping the University in global times<sup>30</sup>.

There are, in fact, substantial benefits for British Universities to become global institutions. As Bruch and Barty put it:



UK institutions want international students for two main reasons: they believe that internationalisation adds educational and cultural value to the institution, and they want the cash value accruing from full-fee paying international students.<sup>31</sup>

As universities become aware of what profits and surplus value can be generated *through cultural difference*, they have to try and be as *attractive* as possible to foreign students and graduates willing to contribute to their international profile. Anke's retouching of Germany can, for instance, be perceived as a key global teaching process enhancing the qualities of her background at the expense of critical cultural analysis. This positivistic shift within Education promotes cultural products such as foreign languages in competitive and sometimes aggressive ways. British universities are increasingly aiming at customer satisfaction and improved services for students who have to pay for an expensive education. This is particularly true for overseas students whose fees are very high.

In her analysis of the marketing and management of courses, Kinnel stresses the "nature and strength of the competition" as well as an increase of "promotion and publicity"<sup>32</sup> in order to make British Universities better players within the global game. British universities do not only compete against each other but also show an awareness of the value and profitability generated by cultural difference. Academic institutions are therefore keen to raise their profile and increase their global desirability. As far as their students and graduates are concerned, expecting



measurable and profitable outcomes following a costly educational service is understandable, if not guaranteed.

These issues are highly problematic and raise recurrent concerns around the notion of the global and its ongoing marketisation of Western societies, including (Higher) Education. The social, economic and cultural position enjoyed by the graduates working and living abroad for the first time must not distract one's attention from other realities created by the global. As Cormeraie puts it:

Diversity is celebrated in a way that must not disturb the late capitalist order. Mass refugeeism, human trafficking, exploitation and exclusion are consigned to amnesia, and the new global migrants, nimbly riding the waves of culture, do business in the 'global village'<sup>33</sup>

While the graduates I encounter enjoy global experiences within cosmopolitan, international and privileged working environments, I suggest that the profit-driven law of the global market makes its mark on Education and other aspects of Western societies not normally associated with profitable commerce. Byram's ideal of a non-commercial understanding of cultural difference seems rather at risk when educational environments such as the University are faced with growing pressure to make profitable decisions. In his analysis of the discrepancies and inequalities affecting the functioning of the Institution in global times, Sadlak stresses the pragmatic efficiency of the global:

What remains problematic is how much those [less economically privileged] countries will be able to sustain their indigenous knowledge capacity in order to be able to produce educational software adequate to their own needs. It should also be pointed out that the globalised circulation of information might not be an all-inclusive partnership, especially in those cases when academic recognition and traditional not-for-profit circulation of knowledge within the academic community will be replaced by 'for-profit' activities.<sup>34</sup>

The discourse of profit inherent in the global could have direct consequences on the functioning of Higher Education changing its aims of critical and intellectual development through a consumer-driven approach treating students and graduates as happy clients of (Higher) Education. As far back as 1970, Freire had already denounced the ongoing marketisation of teaching in Education and ensuing lack of critical input in the following passage:

Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits.<sup>35</sup>

The ongoing self-valuing of universities and growing marketisation in competitive, global circumstances paradoxically diminish their educational worth in critical, political and cultural terms. Profitable and reified valuing of educational realms within the market works at the expense of intellectual and critical development, as well as its potential for societal and cultural change. The graduates are affected by

this shift since they are products of Higher Education showing an awareness of the exchangeable value of their education. As Baudrillard puts it:

The values of the university (diplomas, etc.) will proliferate and continue to circulate, a bit like floating capital or Eurodollars, they will spiral without referential criteria, completely devalorised in the end, but that is unimportant: their circulation alone is enough to create a social horizon of value.<sup>36</sup>

The marketisation and valued circulation shifts in Europe affect the graduates working and living abroad in parallel ways to the changes occurring within Education. In the previous section, I have shown how graduates working within international and corporate businesses were paradoxically prevented from cultural discovery by their demanding working schedules and focus on their professional careers. The graduates have to make a conscious effort in order to experience difference outside the workplace. Their global experience of cultural difference within international working environments defines itself by a contradictory lack of opportunities for cultural contact outside the workplace.

This restrictive -and culturally alienating- process can be understood as a key effect of the global and the impossibility to imagine and experience relationships outside the realms of profitability and valued exchange. If Anke's working context is privileged in economic and social terms, it nevertheless reinforces her impression of cultural homogeneity within Western societies. This leads one to the examination of other educational contexts perhaps not as privileged as the middle-class, affluent and

cosmopolitan University. One needs to look at what happens when one encounters graduates working within socially and economically deprived contexts while examining the impact of their cultural difference on learners. I suggest that cultural standardisation and homogeneity may not necessarily apply to all within the global village.



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<sup>1</sup> See Byram (1997).

<sup>2</sup> See Kramsch (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Section Three examines the limitations of language in further detail while relating them to psychoanalytical theories and narratives of multilingual graduates working and living abroad.

<sup>4</sup> See Kramsch (1993).

<sup>5</sup> Section Three develops the notion of reflexivity through an analysis of Barnett's contribution to the field of Higher Education.

<sup>6</sup> See Byram (1997; 1999; 2000; 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Byram, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, p.34, 1997, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.

<sup>8</sup> All names have been changed for ethical purposes.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Byram, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, p.1.2, 1997, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.

<sup>10</sup> See the analysis of Carla's interview in Section Three exploring the tourism context in further detail.

<sup>11</sup> See Byram and Zarate (1995) for a critique of exoticism within tourism.

<sup>12</sup> *Appendix A Anke's Interview*, p.2.3, 2004, Glasgow.

<sup>13</sup> See Furnham and Bochner (1986).

<sup>14</sup> *Appendix A Anke's Interview*, p.4.5, 2004, Glasgow.

<sup>15</sup> *Appendix A Anke's Interview*, p.6.7, 2004, Glasgow.

<sup>16</sup> See p.9.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Byram, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, p.57.58, 1997, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.

<sup>18</sup> *Appendix A Anke's Interview*, p.11, 2004, Glasgow.

<sup>19</sup> *Appendix A Anke's Interview*, p.15.16, 2004, Glasgow.

<sup>20</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, p.108, 2000, Polity Press, Cambridge.

<sup>21</sup> See Bhabha (1994) and Said (1978; 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Claire Kramsch, *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*, p.9, 1993, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Appendix A Anke's Interview*, p.12, 2004, Glasgow.

<sup>25</sup> *Appendix A Anke's Interview*, p.12.13.14, 2004, Glasgow.

<sup>26</sup> Claire Kramsch, *Language and Culture*, p.9, 1998, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

<sup>27</sup> Claire Kramsch, "The privilege of the intercultural speaker" in *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective*, edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming, p.21, 1998, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

<sup>28</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne, Rapport sur le Savoir*, p.84, 1979, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris.

"The question (overt or implied) now asked by the professionalist student, the state, or institutions of higher education is no longer "Is it true?" but "What use is it?" In the context of the mercantilisation of knowledge, more often than not this question is equivalent to: "Is it saleable?" And in the context of power-growth: "Is it efficient?" Having competence in a performance-oriented skill does indeed seem saleable in the conditions described above, and it is efficient by definition. What no longer makes the grade is competence as defined by other criteria true/false, just/unjust, etc. -and, of course, low performativity in general."

Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, 1984, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

<sup>29</sup> *Appendix A Anke's Interview*, p.16.17, 2004, Glasgow.

<sup>30</sup> See Urry (1998).

<sup>31</sup> Tom Bruch and Alison Barty, "Internationalising British Higher Education: Students and Institutions" in *The Globalisation of Higher Education*, edited by Peter Scott, p.21, 1998, Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia.

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Kinnel, *The Learning Experiences of Overseas Students*, p.14, 1990, Open University Press, Buckingham and Bristol.

<sup>33</sup> Sylvette Cormeraie, "Double Consciousness in Intercultural Communication: *Métissage* and the Fear of New Identifications" in *Revolutions in Consciousness: Local Identities, Global Concerns in 'Languages &*

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*Intercultural Communication'*, edited by Sylvette Cormeraie, David Killick and Margaret Parry, p.374, 2002, Leeds Metropolitan University.

<sup>34</sup> Jan Sadlak, "Globalisation and Concurrent Challenges for Higher Education" in *The Globalisation of Higher Education*, edited by Peter Scott, 1998, Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia.

<sup>35</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.53, 1970, Penguin Books, London and New York.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p.155, 1994, The University of Michigan Press.

### **4.3. Kramersch's "Native Speaker" versus Laura's Narrative: Examining the Meanings of Privilege**

Within the analysis of Anke's interview, I have shown that, however uncomfortable she claims she feels with being identified as a native speaker and cultural representative, she nevertheless enjoys playing with stereotypes and twisting students' perceptions of what German culture could be. Her narrative therefore echoes Mario's and his clever use of perceptions relating to his cultural identity. I suggest that Anke's use of humour and ironic distancing within the classroom also bear some influence over the students, shaping their approaches to and understandings of Germany and Germans. One can therefore argue that Anke feels she is *entitled* to play with her culture, since being a native speaker grants her with a special authority and freedom of cultural licence and interpretation. This authority is important when considering the context of transience and cultural change experienced by the graduates. In her critique of native speakers, Kramersch is determined to see them as fundamentally unable to address language in critical and reflexive ways:

Native users of a language, for example, do not view the linguistic sign as arbitrary; on the contrary, they view it as a necessity of nature.<sup>1</sup>



Her understanding of native speakers therefore entails a reflexive innocence and naïveté preventing them from addressing their own status critically. In other terms, the native speaker does not seem to show any awareness or understanding of the authority and power giving him/her the position and influence he/she enjoys. If this applies to Anke's narrative and claimed discomfort at her own status and students' perceptions of it, this is not so relevant to Laura's interview I explore in the next part.

#### **4.3.1. Higher Education as socioeconomic privilege: an analysis of Laura's narrative**

Laura's experience varies from Anke's in the sense that they do not act within the same working contexts. If Anke's workplace remains the University -described by Laura as a "separate world and very, very privileged"<sup>2</sup>- teaching at Secondary School within a deprived area of Western Scotland turns out to be more of a different and radical experience from life at university socialising with other foreigners in a language department. Her use of the word privilege therefore refers to what she perceives as a middle-class, comfortable -and possibly complacent- environment where the students' focus may not ultimately be on their studies:

*In what ways do you think it was privileged?*

Well, it was in terms of the pupils you have to deal with, the people generally you have to deal with who obviously have a very good character and a very good education and all open-minded and ready to learn. And I did find the students were a bit stifling, in the sense that it's all based on money spending and going out. But do not get me wrong, I really did enjoy the years I spent teaching Modern Languages at university but after that I really wanted to do something different.<sup>3</sup>



Laura has an interesting viewpoint since she can compare teaching at University to her experience of Secondary School. Her passage from the socio-economically privileged environment of the University creates a sense of shock when confronting resistance from pupils at Secondary School. She refers to Higher Education as a “pedantic”<sup>4</sup> environment she found unsatisfactory in both social and political terms. But Laura is equally critical of students and pupils she encounters through teaching. If she describes the University as a gilded cage, her portrayal of the deprived area she works in is also critical:

Well, to start with I had heard all sorts of things about secondary schools in Britain and how badly behaved they were because of the private system. I was really expecting the worst, especially after that the lady who employed me told me that it was not a great school and that there were lots of problems and it was not going to be easy. I have to say I was really down for the first two months because I did find it very difficult.

*What was difficult?*

It was just difficult to deal with the pupils. I had all sorts of problems, mainly discipline problems. Generally they just did not respond at all...

*How did they treat you?*

It was obviously lack of respect most of the time, not for all the pupils obviously but some of them with a lack of respect and testing my limits all the time, which is what seems to happen to any new teachers at school, particularly if you happen to be a young female teacher, with on top of that being French, having an accent and feeling that they could take advantage of that. They could start swearing using their own language just to make sure I would not be able to understand them. And most of the time I did, but to be

honest, most of the time, I did not react quickly enough, because I was not familiar with the discipline system and all of that.<sup>5</sup>

On the one hand, Laura has to establish her authority as a young foreign woman dealing with several classes of difficult children. On the other, she is faced with what I identify as real and radical difference. This is the *kind of difference* that can be distinguished from Anke's account of a comfortable, cosmopolitan and middle-class University context where her own sense of identity is neither attacked nor threatened.

Laura's experience of a different cultural reality can, in fact, be related to Lara's overall portrayal of Eastern Germany throughout her narrative and underprivileged individuals she got to know there. Both their accounts of cultural difference are therefore removed from the global and its all-equivalent and facilitated cultural adaptability and exchange. Laura's passage from the University to Secondary School is revealing of how the global paradigm does not obviously affect everyone in equal measures. I argue she experiences a higher level of difference within her working context since she encounters pupils who are not economically or socially privileged.

Her position and working environment also imply a higher level of personal and cultural exposure than Anke's situation within the classroom. Laura struggles with discipline and getting respect from her pupils while Anke is free to play with cultural stereotyping and perceptions in front of a more willing audience. The responses generated by Laura's pupils are, in fact, the subject of my analysis in the next part.

#### **4.3.2. Difference *within* and *outside* the classroom: conflicting otherness versus multiculturalism**

This part reflects upon Kramsch's portrayal of the multicultural Californian classroom while comparing it to Laura's experience of cultural conflict and radical difference within her working context. The native speaker debate promoted by Kramsch has to be reframed within economic, social and cultural contexts allowing theories such as Byram's intercultural speaker to become more desirable than the demands and constraints imposed by the native speaker norm. As far as Kramsch's theory is concerned, the "monolingual monoculture speaker" -as she names him/her- is "a slowly disappearing species or a nationalistic myth."<sup>6</sup> She also advocates the "intercultural speaker" as a more reflexive and achievable norm that is more desirable in pedagogic terms.

What is, however, problematic within her critique of the native speaker and defence of Byram's idea is that it only seems to apply to more privileged places of learning than Laura's such as the multicultural Californian classroom. Not all Californian classrooms are places of cultural privilege, but her writing nevertheless features problematic inclusive statements such as the following:

In the increasingly grey zones of our multilingual, multicultural societies, the dichotomy between native versus non-native speakers has outlived its use.<sup>7</sup>

In our days of frequent border crossings, and of multilingual multicultural foreign language classrooms, it is appropriate to rethink the monolingual native speaker norm as the target of foreign language education.<sup>8</sup>



Kramsch's multicultural, multilingual classrooms are places of cultural, social and economic privilege compared to Laura's working environment where cultural conflict, intolerance, deprivation and social struggle predominate. One may therefore wonder who exactly belongs to the "multilingual, multicultural societies" and enjoys "frequent border crossings" while actually benefiting from the societal "increasingly grey zones" described by Kramsch.

The pupils in Laura's classroom do not enjoy the benefits of global travel and cultural mobility the way students do at University through the Year Abroad and other exchanges aiming at the promotion of intercultural encounters. Cultural difference acts as a complete and radical shock for her pupils whose reactions offer no "greying" ambivalence of the kind:

*How do you feel then about the image you give them and the fact that, as you said, you are the real thing? What sort of image do you try to project of French culture?*

I do not think I do that at all because you cannot allow yourself to be French in that context. You cannot allow yourself to be too different otherwise they do not connect to you at all, and there is absolutely no communication if you decide to be too different, because they are quite narrow minded and they also have never learnt French as a subject. (...) Hardly any of them has ever been to France. Probably less than fifty percent have been to France.

*So do you feel really exotic then?*

Yes, in a way I think I am a bit exotic, you know, maybe in a teenager's way. Most of the pupils enjoyed the classes actually, apart from one where it did not go well at all because they could not accept the fact that I was French.



*Really?*

Yes. Some just thought the class was too French for them.

*A French class?*

Absolutely. They made absolutely no effort every time I was trying to tell them stories about French people, they just started to snigger and just undermine the whole thing completely.

*How do you explain that? How do you account for their lack of response?*

It is a mixture of being a teenager, being poor and being scared of anything different, as well as showing no interest for difference.<sup>9</sup>

What Laura's narrative *speaks of* is the ongoing strength and impact of radical difference and the cultural dilemmas faced by the native speaker thrown into such an environment. This is not the global environment of the cosmopolitan University as featured within Anke's narrative. It is not the place where cultural difference is understood as a highly valuable and useful skill. There are elements of shock and rejection within Laura's narrative encouraging a bias towards self-censorship. Her remark that being too French actually plays against the purpose of her work evidences the difficulties inherent in teaching classrooms of "monolingual monoculture" pupils whose cultural adaptability and material conditions have given limitations. Laura's version of the language classroom does not therefore have much in common with Kramsch's American embrace of multiculturalism:

In countries like the United States, where the majority of language students do not go abroad<sup>10</sup>, but where multiculturalism has become the hallmark of American classrooms, a pedagogy of the intercultural speaker is taking

the form of efforts to make classroom discourse itself more explicitly intercultural.<sup>11</sup>

Her analysis has to be reframed within a working and teaching context that is clearly different from Laura's. Kramsch nevertheless demonstrates, an awareness of the complexities inherent in strategies aiming at intercultural pedagogics:

We should not be unaware of the difficulties inherent in a true pedagogy of the intercultural speaker (see Kramsch, Cain and Murphy 1996). It is one thing to encourage students and teachers to become aware of others' and their own national identity; quite another to ask them to speak openly in class about their own ethnic, gender-related, race related, or class-related particularities. Both approaches can easily fall prey to reductionism, essentialism and stereotyping.<sup>12</sup>

Her depiction of often privileged, multilingual and multicultural classrooms does not, in fact, diminish or contradict Laura's efforts and successes when experiencing radical difference within and outside the classroom.

On the one hand, Laura becomes a figure of difference for the pupils and has to organise that difference in order to minimise its traumatic impact. Her description of the students' fear of her own otherness does nothing but reinforce the incredible power of difference within such surroundings and circumstances. In that sense, difference matters *even more* within deprived surroundings. The pupils' provocations and deliberate rejections of her teaching are also accompanied with an incredible sense of curiosity she refers to several times throughout the interview.<sup>13</sup>

On the other, this love-hate relationship to her embodiment and mirror-effect projection of her own difference echoes Kristeva's work in significant ways<sup>14</sup>, since

Laura is clearly responded to and identified as “the other”. It seems that the tougher the environment, the stronger the response:

*What do you think the students think of you then? Do you think they see you as being really French?*

Not really.

*No?*

Yes, there is a strong part of me as an image that is French and that is my main characteristic as a teacher in the school, since I am identified as “the French teacher” or “the French girl”, but on the other hand I am also a teacher and have to behave like one if I want to have any sort of relationship with them. And that is extremely important, being understood by them all the time and speak English to them and be interested in their personal life, too. And some of the pupils really respect that actually.<sup>15</sup>

I want to suggest that, although Kramsch’s model of multilingual and multicultural classrooms may at first appear to be more desirable, Laura’s account of her teaching experience shows how cultural difference still acts as a shocking and challenging force. This is an important point to bear in mind and an occurrence resisting the powerful cultural uniformity and standardisation of the global. Difference still matters within educational environments and can act as a powerful catalyst towards change. If Laura’s working environment is less accommodating than Kramsch’s Californian surroundings, the impact of her difference has a radical and shocking effect on the students that can be analysed as a powerful and challenging one. The conflicts rising out of her embodiment of difference have a fruitful impact on the pupils’ consciousness, even though such result is experienced through pain and exposure.



In her exchanges with the pupils, Laura experiences an extreme range of reactions, from indifference and rejection to excitement and refusal. If, on the one hand, Laura's subjectivity is attacked and threatened by the pupils' aggressive behaviour, they are, on the other, equally frightened and curious about her projected difference. The next section focuses on Laura's negotiation of these classroom conflicts while comparing her experiences to Anke's.

#### **4.3.3. Radical difference and heightened awareness: an analysis of Laura's role in the classroom**

This final section examines the graduates' potential as "intercultural speakers" and "ambassadors of difference" when working and living abroad for the first time. If Laura's experience can be perceived as a demonstration of the issues and difficulties encountered by cultural figures of difference, her teaching is, nevertheless, an achievement in pedagogic terms.

Laura's relative control of her "Frenchness" to accommodate the pupils while still provoking their curiosity can be related to Anke's use of ironic distancing as intelligent and adequate responses to their respective teaching context. One of the key roles played by the graduates working abroad within Education is that of negotiation and strategy. They not only have to demonstrate adaptability to unknown cultural environments, but also need -in the working context of Education- to use their intercultural skills in the classroom.



If the behaviour and attitudes of graduates evolving within the field of Education make them potential actors within intersubjective encounters between cultures, what is, nevertheless, fascinating is their own personal negotiation of clashes of difference occurring in the classroom. The graduates' negotiation of their own sense of difference within the workplace is, in fact, a key line of inquiry within my research, since the graduates are subject to the pressure of performing within unusual cultural surroundings. When asked if she ever plans to go back to Higher Education, Laura's answer is unequivocal:

Not really. I now feel more comfortable now with my teaching in this country. I have had a really challenging year but now I really enjoy it. It also has to do with the fact that I now have pupils in my class who had British language teachers before, which makes it a completely different approach to the First Year pupils who are fresh and not so much subject to peer pressure. Just teaching pupils at different levels of their schooling years just completely shows you the difference. I have been shocked, for instance, by the fact that certain pupils had really strong religious and racist opinions. There is racism towards Asians, for example. I was also shocked by the fact that they start drinking so early, sometimes from the age of 12 and end up really drunk so young, which is something that does not exist so much in France.<sup>16</sup>

In many ways, Laura's account of her teaching can be perceived as culturally aware and reflexive, therefore approaching Byram's ideal of the intercultural speaker. It is also interesting to notice how she achieves this by underlining her status as a French language teacher and native speaker. One could argue that it is precisely her reflexive sense of difference that allows her to face the students and teach with confidence. This is evidenced in her ability to speak their language while keeping her difference intact.

If Laura's statement evokes satisfaction through challenges, it also displays a critical angle on her working environment in both cultural and social terms. Her awareness of racism and drinking amongst Scottish youth are two examples of how aware she is of her cultural context. This critical awareness and analysis of the problems affecting the pupils does not, however, distract her from her pedagogic and political aims. As she puts it:

There was a school in the private sector, right next to where I live, where they were looking for someone doing the same job part-time. It happened a few months ago and I was going to apply for it, because my relationship with the pupils was not so great at that time. I also had the commuting, which meant spending ages driving to work every day. And then I decided not to, mainly for ideological reasons, just the fact that I did not want to work in a private school. And if I was going to be a teacher, it was not necessarily to work in a deprived area, but in the state sector. I did not really feel that pupils should pay for their education.<sup>17</sup>

Laura's determination and political beliefs distinguish her from Anke in several ways. Laura's awareness of the pupils' deprived surroundings and socioeconomic inequalities gives her teaching a political edge that is not so prominent in Anke's account. Anke's portrayal of the cosmopolitan, comfortable and middle-class classroom radically differs from Laura's working context. Her narrative emphasises a fundamental belief in teaching and pedagogy as a challenging and demanding practice:

*Do you think some pupils come out of your class feeling challenged and thinking twice about what you say? Do you think that, by just being who you are, you actually challenge them? It sounds a bit like that anyway, because it feels as if*

*they do not really know where to put you.*

Yes, you have to be challenging. They enjoy it. That is what they like basically.

The teaching is all about challenging and creating something to solve this little information gap and then be willing to move forward basically. It is about trying to give them more knowledge about things they want to know about really.<sup>18</sup>

Laura's realisation that pedagogic results can be achieved through conflict, suffering and patience is an interesting standpoint in educational and intercultural terms. Her depiction of her classrooms can be contrasted with the dominance of the global and its emphasis on cultural homogeneity. Her attempts to "reduce the gap" in her working context is a pedagogic mission aiming at an improvement of intercultural communication and encounters. She challenges the students' initial conceptions of cultural difference by using her own cultural awareness as a key tool. I argue that it is *precisely because* she experiences fear and aggression that Laura's difference may have a tangible effect on the pupils. What, in fact, *makes a difference* is Laura's negotiation of elements that should have played against her. Conflicts and initial rejection can therefore be perceived as consolidating steps towards a more critically aware appreciation of cultural difference.

Laura's paradoxical embodiment of difference through her native speaker status echoes Kristeva's portrayal of the Foreigner while emphasising the limitations of Kramsch's educational theory.<sup>19</sup> If Kramsch's model is valid within her own teaching environment, it does not, however, apply to other places of learning such as Laura's where difference may have an impact. Her experience also underlines the limits of the "global village" in similar ways to Lara's narrative of cultural difference outside the workplace. Kramsch's critique of the native speaker norm does not necessarily find resounding echoes in Anke either, since she uses her difference and linguistic



authority as powerful tools within the classroom. I argue that both women display a strong sense of their own difference serving the purpose of teaching while fitting their respective working environments.

The third part of this section examines the experiences of Serge training to become a Primary School teacher In Western Scotland while examining the cultural dilemmas of foreign graduates working and living abroad. It introduces and problematises the figure of the foreigner through a detailed analysis of his narrative.

#### **4.4. The Foreign Graduate as Figure of Difference within the Realm of Education**

This third and final part examines the figure of the foreign graduate working and living abroad for the first time while exploring the contributions of Cultural Studies to the field of Modern Languages. The notion of the foreign graduate as a figure of projected difference contributes to the analysis of Serge's narrative who teacher trains in Central Scotland. Foreign graduates teaching within the working context of Education are perceived as figures of otherness and often use their sense of cultural difference towards their teaching goals.

The Year Abroad is a unique opportunity for university students to engage with others in fruitful and constructive ways while keeping a critical perspective on cultural difference. Residency abroad affords the possibility of developing cultural



relativism and openness while improving the students' linguistic skills. It still differs from working life abroad and begs a detailed examination of the professional contexts graduates are involved in. If being other is an essential prerequisite when teaching languages, the tangible difference projected by the graduates does not prevent them from cultural analysis and critical understanding. Foreign graduates occupy a privileged position in cultural terms since they work and live abroad within diverse professional contexts. They are confronted with difference within *and* outside the workplace. They are living figures of difference as well as analysts of it. This is particularly relevant to language teaching as a professional context where graduates may reconsider and reflect upon their own cultural difference in critical and reflexive ways. Reflexivity therefore involves the ability to look at oneself critically and act upon it in the classroom context. It adds a critical dimension to self-perception and self-analysis.<sup>20</sup>

The main cultural problem lies in how much exposure the graduates are granted given the demands of their working schedules. In Section One, my analysis of Lara's narrative demonstrates how graduates working for corporate businesses have to make a conscious effort in order to interact with cultural difference outside the workplace. The graduates acting within the realm of Education enjoy a privileged situation since their teaching abroad often gives them a unique insight into the cultural workings of their surroundings. This does not mean, however, that they do not experience a sense of cultural homogeneity inherent in the "global village". My analysis of Anke's experience of life and work abroad underlines how the global paradigm affects individuals as well as the institution. In Laura's case, I showed how the graduates are able to resist the force of the global through their choosing to experience cultural

environments that are not so privileged. In my subsequent analysis of Serge's interview, I develop my analysis of reflexivity while examining the graduates' potential for cultural analysis when working and living abroad.

The process of reflexivity cannot, however, be separated from experiencing a certain sense of cultural confusion. I argue that it is precisely this state of confusion that allows the graduates to be culturally open and more aware of difference. By looking at others within new cultural contexts, the graduates get to look at themselves and deconstruct their own cultural make-up, too. This process is eminently reflexive and affects students living abroad as well as graduates.

#### **4.4.1. Language Teaching and Learning as reflexive practice: retracing recent developments within the field of Modern Languages**

Students engaging on their Year Abroad and sojourning away from home may be exposed to cultural difference and challenging circumstances. Through living, studying -and sometimes working- during their Year Abroad, they are temporary foreigners having to deal with similar problems encountered by the graduates working abroad for the first time. These difficulties can be related to cultural adaptation and integration as well as coming to terms with the ways in which their own difference is perceived abroad.

The contribution of anthropology and ethnography related methods and practices to the teaching and learning of languages has been a fairly recent addition to the curricula of institutions. Innovative courses have been created around the Year

Abroad -such as the Ealing Ethnography Programme in England- while proving successful, enriching and challenging. Writing-up the ethnography of the Year Abroad is a key process aiming at the concrete realisation of reflexivity in an educational context. In “Cultural practice in everyday life: the language learner as ethnographer”, Barro, Jordan and Roberts introduce the relevance of ethnography to language studies in the following way:

The method of ethnography provides the link between the experiential and the intellectual and the year abroad provides the opportunity to undertake an ethnographic project. The Ealing Ethnography programme was developed spanning three years and had the following aims:

Develop some innovative methods of teaching and learning cultural studies for advanced language learners.

Explore the transfer of other methods of teaching from other disciplines (particularly anthropology).

Develop methods of assessing cultural learning as a result of the year abroad.

Establish greater integration of the year abroad into the undergraduate curriculum.

The programme consisted of three parts:

- one semester-long module in the second year of the BA called ‘Introduction to Ethnography’;
- an ethnographic study during the year abroad;
- writing up the ethnography in the foreign language on the students’ return in the final year.<sup>21</sup>

On the one hand, the necessity of an ethnographic approach can be explained by a desire from practitioners in the field to help students challenge cultural categorisation and essentialism. Ethnography provides the students with a critical perspective on residency abroad and their experiences of cultural difference. On the other, the



students become empowered foreigners engaging with difference on an active and critical level. This dual process also applies to the graduates in significant ways. Working life abroad within diverse professional contexts means that they are not only involved in the world of work, but also dealing with their new surroundings in critical ways. As Malinowski puts it, that “Meaning (...) does not come (...) from contemplation of things, or analysis of occurrences, but in practical and active acquaintance with relevant situations.”<sup>22</sup>

One of the key contributions of Cultural Studies related disciplines such as ethnography to the field of Modern Languages has been an ongoing -and proactive- involvement with cultural difference leading to a more detailed and critical appreciation of residency abroad. The Ealing Ethnography programme introduces students to key anthropological and ethnographic notions. The aim of the course is not, however, to aim at an exhaustive knowledge of the field, but to combine theoretical knowledge with the daily experiences of the Year Abroad. This combination of fact and theory leads to the students’ writing of a final ethnographic report on their return home. As far as the graduates are concerned, there is no definite shelf life to their experience of life and work abroad. Their commitment to their working contexts distinguishes them from student learners since the Year Abroad and other educational exchanges have specific time and format limitations not constraining them.

The graduates’ involvement with the professional sphere implies an active interaction with their surroundings that does not, however, prevent them from critical analysis. Graduates and students are ultimately empowered by encounters with cultural difference led in reflexive and critical ways. If the graduates’ dedication to their



working contexts makes them privileged actors of intercultural exchange, the ethnographic project nevertheless allows students to engage in cultural analysis:

Once in the field, abroad, the course takes on a new significance. Unlike their 'non-ethnography' peers, these students feel they have a specific purpose for being there and can immediately put to use the ethnographic methods learnt, as well as drawing on their newly acquired habits of reflection and reflexivity in locating themselves in relation to the new community. Their ethnographic projects help to establish patterns of relationships within this community (...) By contrast, the non-ethnographers tend to make their projects book-based. One of the strongest responses from the ethnography group was the sense of ownership of their projects; the feeling that the data collected and analysed is all theirs and not driven by the authority of books and lectures.<sup>23</sup>

Cultural reflexivity and reflection affect graduates and students in parallel ways. The ownership experienced by the student learners throughout their Year Abroad can be likened to the graduates' realisation of the impact of their difference within working contexts. This is particularly true of the two previous narratives examined in this section. Anke's and Laura's awareness of their own difference shapes their teaching in fundamental ways while questioning their own appreciation of cultural others. The reflection is therefore a reciprocal, mutual process whereby teachers and learners get to assess their own position critically through exposure to cultural difference. Reflexivity triggers a reevaluation and deepened understanding of one's personal, social and cultural identity. The graduates' reworking of self operated through professional contexts is a parallel process to the critical layers generated by residency abroad for student learners.

Reflexivity can be defined as a “combination of the experiential and intellectual”<sup>24</sup> turning the process of *being foreign* into a culturally and socially committed act. Graduates working within the field of Education abroad are encouraged to reflect upon their sense of identity critically as well as use heightened cultural awareness within the classroom. Being *interculturally aware* therefore entails an active process of critical understanding aiming at a fuller and more intricate analysis of cultural difference. In order to fully investigate the notion of awareness shaping the graduates’ experiences and narratives, I now turn to an exploration of Crawshaw’s “Interculture Project” while reflecting upon the process of cultural narration as attestation.

#### **4.4.2. Cultural narration as attestation: Crawshaw’s “Interculture Project” and intercultural awareness**

The Interculture Project is a three-year study (1997-2000) looking at residency abroad while developing a focus on the notion of intercultural competence. One of the key goals within the project is to facilitate and develop intercultural learning and understanding while recording the students’ experiences through diary entries and cultural incidents. In the website dedicated to the introduction, findings and outcomes of the Project, intercultural awareness is approached in the following way:

Intercultural awareness is very different from cultural awareness. Instead of being a fixed representation of another culture, intercultural awareness is a non-judgmental awareness of the existence of difference which entails a commitment to an ongoing, reflexive process of discovery and acceptance of these differences. This process of discovery must involve both reflection on the host culture and reflection on the self.

Reflection on the self and on one's own culture plays an important part in developing intercultural awareness, since students who develop a curiosity about the cultural factors which influence themselves and about the cultural differences within their own society can come to realise both that cultural factors are real and affect people's behaviour, and that no culture is homogeneous, nor deserving of blanket evaluations (positive or negative).

Reflection on the host culture should be encouraged in the spirit of opening up, rather than closing down interpretations, since it is necessary to encourage awareness and acceptance of difference, while avoiding the creation of stereotyped representations.<sup>25</sup>

The aims of the Interculture Project reflect Byram's non-judgemental approach to intercultural competence and awareness while specifically dealing with the Year Abroad and its impact on the students' critical learning. The project emphasises the dual and reciprocal nature of intercultural exposure while advocating a sense of openness when experiencing cultural difference abroad. If the previous parts of this section highlight some of the limitations inherent in Byram's educational ideals of "intercultural speaker" and non-commercial approach, the Interculture Project goes one step further by examining cultural incidents affecting undergraduates working and living abroad for the first time:

An English Language Assistant in Austria, Jane was working with the teacher Hans and his class. Every week they'd practice a different sound with the pupils; this week it was 'u' as in *cup*, *gull*, *hut*. After Jane had read the first couple of examples Hans stopped her, asked the group how she was reading and agreed with them her accent was Northern. He asked if she would mind using a Southern pronunciation. 'Yes she bloody well would'- she thought! The more she thought about it the more annoyed she was. Hans said 'They



will copy you. They repeat what they hear'. Jane knew her accent wasn't too strong. She resolved that in the future she would not be bullied into altering her accent. Hans could find another method if he wanted.

WAS JANE RIGHT OR WRONG?<sup>26</sup>

Jane's pronunciation dilemma is reminiscent of Laura's difficulties in the classroom and experience of the pupils' diffidence and rejection. This incident is an interesting embodiment of the complexities shaped by reflexivity and self-analysis. The fact that Jane is uncomfortable with a student's criticism of her accent posits the issue of cultural representation as a problematic one. Her unexpressed annoyance at Hans' comments is also revealing of the frustrations encountered by foreign graduates involved in the field of Education abroad. Crawshaw's use of such situations can be perceived as a key contribution to the field of Language Teaching and Learning through his positioning of difference within a concrete professional context. If it is up to Jane to turn the incident to her advantage, it is interesting to see how private cultural dilemmas can be triggered by the professional context of the classroom. On the one hand, Jane wants her accent to be identified and acknowledged by the students. On the other, her annoyance at having to adopt a non-regional English accent betrays the extent to which she projects and embodies her own culture before the students. Such incidents can be related to my previous analyses of interviews where graduates working within the field of Education identify and acknowledge the problematic issue of cultural embodiment and representation.

In a journal article focusing on the dynamics between language, cultural difference and narrative, Crawshaw introduces Ricoeur's key concept of attestation:



He [Ricoeur] sees the subject as lying at its core, not simply in the sense that the subject initiates the discourse but in the further cyclical sense that the narrative becomes the vehicle -what Derrida had referred to as *présence*- whereby the subject is defined in the eyes of the world. The active process of narration, Ricoeur refers to as *attestation*, a potent figure which connotes affirmation, testing, bearing witness to and giving evidence of the self.<sup>27</sup>

If students' diaries written during residency abroad can be perceived as key steps towards achieving a more reflexive and tolerant understanding of cultural difference. I consider the graduates' narratives as acts of cultural attestation whereby their sense of difference and interaction with others can be reflected upon and analysed. Semi-structured interviews offer the graduates the opportunity to think about work and residency abroad in critical ways as well as consider the complex issue of cultural difference.

Ricoeur's attestation process is reflected within the conversations shared with foreign graduates trying to come to terms with the problems generated by working contexts and cultural identity. This reflection is quite important for the graduates involved in the field of Education since it has direct effects on their teaching and the learners' reception of their embodied difference. Through the context of the semi-structured interview, graduates are given the space to explore, reassert and reevaluate their own sense of identity as well as establish its reciprocal -and often ambiguous- relationship to their working environments.<sup>28</sup>

Through the writing of diaries abroad, students engage on a similar reflexive process of ongoing exchange *in dialogue* with their own selves as well as difference *outside*. The writing gradually leads to a more careful appreciation of cultural difference by taking one's own standpoint into consideration. Writing about one's feelings about and impressions of cultural difference is indeed a process of projection engaging the students in an ongoing negotiation with their surroundings. The graduates also project their own sense of identity within the semi-structured interviews detailing their experiences of working life abroad and cultural difference.

#### **4.4.3. Desire for difference: Serge's narrative of working life and residency abroad**

In her detailed historical portrayal of foreigners entitled *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, Kristeva depicts the foreigner's life abroad as an ongoing articulation of contradictions and conflicts created by a sense of cultural difference that is being simultaneously threatened and asserted. She perceives the problematic identity of the foreigner as an organisation of potential cultural chaos or realisation. Each graduate introduced in this thesis is a foreigner experiencing unknown cultural contexts who has to deal with conflicts and difficulties inherent in processes of belonging and integration.

Foreign graduates are displaced individuals having to come to terms with a sense of identity that is characterised by ongoing tensions and negotiations. This complex organisation of difference makes them interesting -but ambivalent- figures in cultural terms. Ambiguity and paradox are key notions for the graduates who, such as Serge,

are foreigners building up their careers abroad. Although he has previously lived in London and Edinburgh before moving to the West of Scotland, Serge's intention to become a teacher at Primary School is an important motivation behind his change of scene. His decision to move to Scotland is also influenced by boredom and a desire for cultural change.<sup>29</sup>

Kristeva's analysis of the foreigner as figure of cultural ambivalence and contradiction enables reflection on cultural desire as a key factor motivating the graduates living and working abroad for the first time. It is mainly through their embodiment and performance of difference abroad that foreigners become figures of desire. In Section One I examine, for instance, how Mario uses his cultural difference in seductive and playful ways. There is an *attraction in difference* that I want to examine and analyse in the next sections.

Serge's story combines a desire for cultural integration as well as a strong defence of his own singularity and uniqueness as a foreigner. This key paradox is recurrent within our dialogue and echoes Kristeva's approach to the complex psyche of the foreigner:

*And when you get back to France, how do you think you will experience it?*

I am not sure. I am not looking forward to it anyway! I am a foreigner here amongst the British.

*And is that a status you enjoy?*

Yes, completely.

*Why?*



Because, in a certain way I am separated, not in the margins since I am integrated but...

*Does that mean you still feel different in a way?*

Absolutely. And I keep that sense of difference, too. When I am in France, I will be just like any other French person, although I will have lived a long time abroad. I will be fluent in English, but still French.

*So difference here is not something difficult for you.*

In the contrary! I cultivate it in a way.

*Is it not heavy to bear sometimes?*

No, never.<sup>30</sup>

There is a rejoicing and undeniable pleasure in Serge's experience as a foreign graduate living and working at Primary School abroad. The foreigner's *bonheur* -as Kristeva puts it<sup>31</sup>- is organised around the central contradiction of a desire for integration *as well as* a fear to lose one's sense of cultural difference. This key tension shapes foreign graduates working abroad in significant ways and frames most of their cultural concerns and dilemmas. When asked about the pupils' parents' perceptions at his Primary School, Serge comes up with the following assumptions:

*But from what you told me, there is a sense of pleasure in difference that is, nevertheless, confronted with a certain uniformity, since your professional life would not differ so much from one place to another. I am therefore interested in your vision of difference as something individual and personal, even private.*

Well, my vision is an ambivalent one. I keep my difference wanting integration at the same time. I want people to perceive me as different, but also treat me as someone from here. When I start teaching next year, I want my English to be perfect, because I do not want parents thinking that because their son has a French teacher, there may be



something missing. I do not want them to treat me differently and I do not want them to think that because I am French I am not serious, or that my English is not good enough to teach them to their kids. It is therefore always ambivalent, on the edge, like a knife. I do not want people to use that difference against me in a way. In my private life, I cultivate that sense of difference but I want it to stay an advantage in my professional life, and not the opposite. It is obvious that, even though I am familiar with Scottish history, I do not have the in-depth knowledge of someone who has grown up and lived here.<sup>32</sup>

Serge's desire to be separated and not "just like any other French person" is confronted with his anxieties as a foreigner teaching Scottish children for the first time. He worries about the parents' reactions and how his difference might be received. This combination of pride and fear forms a good example of the foreigner's ambiguous psyche and contradictions. Serge himself describes his cultural situation as ambivalent and on the edge. His reference to the sharpness of knives is also a powerful metaphor hinting at the suffering and pain associated with cultural displacement and leaving one's culture behind.

Serge's rejoicing in his sense of difference comes at the price of cultural confusion and paradox. The space of the foreign graduate working and living abroad is therefore shaped by identifications and reflections emphasising narcissistic satisfactions as well as cultural vulnerability. Foreigners are exposed and powerful individuals at the same time, made fragile *and* strong by their newly found sense of difference. The next part turns to the foreigner's desire to assert his or her own cultural singularity in recognisable ways.

#### 4.4.4. The foreign graduate living and working abroad for the first time as figure of cultural paradox and singularity

When it comes to the problematic notion of difference, Kristeva argues that, although the foreigner is being acknowledged as difference itself, “feeling foreign” often starts within.<sup>33</sup> The word *étranger* has, in fact, interesting dual connotations in French that are expressed by two words in English: stranger *and* foreigner. Being *étranger* does not therefore limit itself to nationality or identified cultural difference: one can feel an *étranger* within one’s own surroundings, family or friends. This sense of being foreign to one’s own cultural background is recurrent within Serge’s narrative:

*To sum it up, is the main motivation behind your stay here difference itself?*

Yes, completely. My motivation behind leaving France was also the chance to reinvent myself, since I had always lived there and felt that my friends perceived me in ways that were not necessarily how I saw myself. I wanted to be myself. It is strange thinking that I did not feel myself amongst my old friends since they knew me very well, but I sometimes felt their vision of me did not fit with how I saw myself.<sup>34</sup>

Kristeva argues that learning a foreign language -as well as, by extension, life and work abroad- grant foreigners with a “new body”<sup>35</sup> and abilities to understand and express themselves. Serge’s reference to cultural “reinvention” here evokes the impact of a linguistic process affecting the graduates’ sense of cultural, social and personal identities. Graduates living and working abroad for the first time are shaped by this shift and experience a newly found sense of cultural freedom helped by their linguistic, professional and personal achievements abroad. Residency and work abroad operate as tangible proofs of *cultural existence* outside their own contexts

accounting for a combined sense of pride *and* cultural vulnerability. One sees how Serge is already foreign to his own cultural environment since he never feels *fully himself* before cultural transition and change take place. His sense of completeness is therefore conditioned by a process of identification with British language and culture mediated through work and residency abroad. This necessary and determined reflection onto another culture is a compulsory step towards the acquisition of a new cultural body and linguistic performance. Graduates working and living abroad for the first time create a distinctive cultural persona that acts on cultural, social and personal levels:

*Do you think you identified with British culture from an early stage?*

Absolutely. I feel Franco-Scottish or at least have a culture in between the two. It is not the case really, since I have only been here for almost six years. I had a complete desire for integration from the start.<sup>36</sup>

Serge's mirror image and cultural longing is a projection onto British culture delivering him with new abilities to comprehend his own sense of difference. His desire for identification with another culture can be explained by an initial discomfort preventing him from being himself within his own surroundings. As Kristeva shows, there is something egocentric and self-centred about the foreigner's search for an identity that is often questioned and threatened. I have shown how the graduates are ambitious individuals who often put their desire for professional success first. Foreign graduates working abroad for the first time are engaged in an active process of cultural search and identity. Their dilemmas and conflicts complicate their sense of identity while opening up the doors of reflexivity and heightened cultural awareness.



On the one hand, there is a strong desire amongst foreigners for integration combined with a fear of losing one's own identity. On the other, there is a will to become part of an unknown society while retaining one's sense of singularity intact. This sense of cultural paradox generates contradictory feelings of pride and fragility that can be related to the acquisition of the new body and satisfactory problems it creates. If Serge argues that identifying with British culture allows him to become himself, he also emphasises what he renounces in order to let reinvention occur:

*But do you not think that your romanticised vision of France might not correspond with its current reality?*

Probably.

*The fact that you live here means that you can only follow French life from the outside.*

As a matter of fact, I hardly follow it anyway! It is a vision of France the way it was five or six years ago.

*Maybe what worries you in a way is not being able to find this again on your return.*

*You may not find what you left behind and be faced with a reality you may even dislike.*

Yes.<sup>37</sup>

Gaining the completeness of the new body therefore implies a significant loss, both in personal and cultural terms. Serge's current vision of France operates as a distant memory he might never encounter again. Identifying with the other's culture may work at the expense of one's original background: new bodies often imply forgetting the old ones. I argue that the graduates' sense of singularity and cultural superiority is, in fact, a process *speaking of* cultural loss and displacement. It is in this sense that graduates are privileged -but fragile- individuals evolving at the crossroads of several



cultural influences and discourses. In Serge's case, anxieties and concerns about his professional future show how culturally sensitive foreign graduates working abroad can be. If the graduates have a unique point of view given by residency and work abroad, their situation can also be precarious in cultural terms. The next part analyses Serge's personal motivations behind residency and work abroad as complete desire for the other translating into his private life.

#### **4.4.5. Dealing with cultural displacement: love for the other as remedy to change**

If desire plays an important part in the lives of graduates working and living abroad for the first time, they are also decontextualised and divided individuals split from their own cultural backgrounds. Love and relationships operate as key processes of cultural reconciliation minimising the potentially harmful effects of change.

The gradual discovery and ownership of a new linguistic and cultural voice opens up the gates of personal desires often acting within the realm of feelings and emotions. It is interesting to notice how, for instance, language teachers such as Laura often have partners born in the country they work. Embracing the other's culture encourages sentimental desire, too. Graduates embarking on relationships with foreigners abroad minimise the negative effects of cultural change and transition by finding stability within their private lives. Serge evokes Douglas -his partner- in our discussion while referring to their relationship as a key factor influencing his decision behind work and residency abroad:

*Do you think that being in a relationship with a Scot played a part, too?*

Of course! I met Douglas three weeks after coming here. And I have lived within this Scottish context for more than five years. The Scots have -like Brittany and Corsica- a strong sense of their identity that they want to maintain.

*And if there had not been this relationship, do you think you would have been as keen?*

I do not think it would have changed anything.

*It was a real desire then.*

Completely. I probably would not even be in Scotland by now! I would maybe go out with an English guy and not live here but I would have stayed in Britain anyway.<sup>38</sup>

It is interesting to see how Serge perceives and identifies with Scotland as a nation willing to retain and promote its own cultural independence and singularity. He recognises himself in his partner's culture when emphasising its sense of specificity. Although he argues his desire for British culture would not be affected by being single, it is interesting to note how he still evokes the possibility of a relationship with an English man had he lived in England. As far as Serge is concerned, relationships and cultural difference *speaks of* the same intensity of desire. His words echo Laura's narrative here and stabilising reconciliation of private and cultural dilemmas. Serge's love for and identification with Scottish culture finds a logical resonance in his relationship with a Scottish man. His sexuality is, in fact, another key factor shaping his own sense of difference:

*But do you not think you will be different anyway by having missed out on years of French culture and French life? Do you not think you will go back there and feel different anyway?*

I hope I will feel different. I think I will always feel this way. But it will be more insidious and less obvious.

*Is it only cultural this sense of difference that you have?*

It is at every level I think.<sup>39</sup>

His identification with the other's culture therefore works as an interesting metaphor for his own sense of sexual difference. Taboos and prohibitions are temporarily lifted through residency abroad while it delivers promises of new sensual pleasures and explorations. Serge's adoption of the other's culture is, in fact, developing along the lines of his relationship with a foreigner. In his essay on homosexuality and cultural difference, Hocquenghem<sup>40</sup> comes up with the following observation:

Oui, j'ai eu plus d'amants, plus d'amis, à l'étranger, de l'étranger, que je n'en aurai jamais parmi mes compatriotes. Peut-être même ne suis-je « homosexuel », comme on dit vilainement, que comme une manière d'être à l'étranger, je veux dire une manière de lui appartenir et d'être chez lui. Peut-être ai-je voulu l'étranger avant l'amant, et ai-je au moins trouvé là un langage qui déborde un peu la francité.<sup>41</sup>

There is a clear link for Hocquenghem between eroticism, sexuality and foreigners. His analysis approaches them as powerful figures of desire and longing. Identifications with and attractions to foreign friends and lovers therefore *speak of* one's own otherness and internal sense of difference. This dimension refers to desire *in difference* while establishing the *étranger* as a living metaphor for sentimental and sexual desire.<sup>42</sup>

This erotic dimension opened up by foreign graduates working and living for the first time raises interesting questions around the notions of language, difference and intersubjective encounters. If this section focuses on Education and the experiences of



foreign graduates working within educational contexts abroad, I now intend to move on to the narratives of multilingual graduates working in other professional contexts such as tourism, banking and administration. Section Three develops psychoanalytical readings of cultural difference while focusing on the limitations and ambivalent status of language(s) affecting the lives of graduates working and living abroad for the first time. Language is a fundamental tool and cultural process within the graduates' lives introduced and analysed in Section One as a distinctive and powerful accessory performing the graduates' awareness of their own social, economic and cultural capitals within their working contexts. I have shown in this second section how native speakers teaching their language abroad are invested with a sense of cultural authority empowering them as foreign individuals starting their careers in educational environments. I have, nevertheless, also emphasised their sense of cultural vulnerability and ambivalence triggered by cultural reflexivity and the need for self-questioning encouraged by cultural change and transition.

The next section introduces and develops the notion of the reflection as a key cultural process affecting the graduates working and living abroad for the first time. It examines and problematises Freudian readings of language as well as Lacanian interpretations of the mirror image by relating them to Barnett's analysis of reflexivity within the context of Higher Education. Section Three offers a deeper understanding of Kristeva's *étranger* while presenting an analysis of cultural difference as *escape* and indefinable force.



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- <sup>1</sup> Claire Kramsch, *Language and Culture*, p.20, 1998, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- <sup>2</sup> *Appendix F Laura's Interview*, p.2, 2004, Glasgow.
- <sup>3</sup> *Appendix F Laura's Interview*, p.3, 2004, Glasgow.
- <sup>4</sup> *Appendix F Laura's Interview*, p.2, 2004, Glasgow.
- <sup>5</sup> *Appendix F Laura's Interview*, p.6, 2004, Glasgow.
- <sup>6</sup> Claire Kramsch, "The privilege of the intercultural speaker" in *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective*, edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming, p.30, 1998, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- <sup>7</sup> Claire Kramsch, "The privilege of the intercultural speaker" in *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective*, edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming, p.27, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- <sup>8</sup> Claire Kramsch, "The privilege of the intercultural speaker" in *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective*, edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming, p.30, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- <sup>9</sup> *Appendix F Laura's Interview*, p.7.8, 2004, Glasgow.
- <sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note how this statement actually contradicts Kramsch's previous reference to "frequent border crossings". It is, in fact, not easy to evaluate in her writing who gets to cross the borders and who does not.
- <sup>11</sup> Claire Kramsch, "The privilege of the intercultural speaker" in *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective*, edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming, p.28, 1998, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- <sup>12</sup> Claire Kramsch, "The privilege of the intercultural speaker" in *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective*, edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming, p.30, 1998, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- <sup>13</sup> See *Appendix F Laura's Interview*, p.7.8, 2004, Glasgow.
- <sup>14</sup> See Kristeva (1988).
- <sup>15</sup> *Appendix F Laura's Interview*, p.9, 2004, Glasgow.
- <sup>16</sup> *Appendix F Laura's Interview*, p.12.13, 2004, Glasgow.
- <sup>17</sup> *Appendix F Laura's Interview*, p.11, 2004, Glasgow.
- <sup>18</sup> *Appendix F Laura's Interview*, p.11, 2004, Glasgow.
- <sup>19</sup> See Kristeva (1988). I develop her analysis of foreigners in Section Three.
- <sup>20</sup> Section Three compares the mirror reflection to critical reflexivity through an analysis of Lacanian psychoanalysis related to cultural difference.
- <sup>21</sup> Ana Barro, Shirley Jordan and Celia Roberts, "Cultural practice in everyday life: the language learner as ethnographer" in *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective*, edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming, p.81.82, 1998, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- <sup>22</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, "The problem of meaning in primitive languages" in *The Meaning of Meaning: a Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, edited by K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, p.325, 1923, Harcourt, Brace & World Inc, New York.
- <sup>23</sup> Ana Barro, Shirley Jordan and Celia Roberts, "Cultural practice in everyday life: the language learner as ethnographer" in *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective*, edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming, p.84.85, 1998, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- <sup>24</sup> Celia Roberts, Michael Byram, Ana Barro, Shirley Jordan and Brian Street, *Language Learners as Ethnographers*, p.3, 2001, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.
- <sup>25</sup> See <http://lancs.ac.uk/users/interculture/about.htm>
- <sup>26</sup> See <http://lancs.ac.uk/users/interculture/deliver11.htm>
- <sup>27</sup> Crawshaw and Allen, "Attesting the self: narration and identity change during periods of residence abroad" in *Language and Intercultural Communication*, p.106, 2001, Vol. 1, No. 2.
- <sup>28</sup> The Methodology reflects upon the duality and mirror effect of this dialogue as well as its implications on cultural analysis.
- <sup>29</sup> See *Appendix I Serge's Interview*, p.2, 2003, Glasgow.
- <sup>30</sup> *Appendix I Serge's Interview*, p.11, 2003, Glasgow.
- <sup>31</sup> See Kristeva (1988).
- <sup>32</sup> *Appendix I Serge's Interview*, p.13, 2003, Glasgow.
- <sup>33</sup> See Kristeva (1988).
- <sup>34</sup> *Appendix I Serge's Interview*, p.14, 2003, Glasgow.
- <sup>35</sup> See Gliserman (1996) for an analysis of language as a physical process of cultural identification.
- <sup>36</sup> *Appendix I Serge's Interview*, p.14, 2003, Glasgow.
- <sup>37</sup> *Appendix I Serge's Interview*, p.12.13, 2003, Glasgow.

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<sup>38</sup> *Appendix I Serge's Interview*, p.14, 2003, Glasgow.

<sup>39</sup> *Appendix I Serge's Interview*, p.12, 2003, Glasgow.

<sup>40</sup> See Appendix for translation.

<sup>41</sup> Guy Hocquenghem, "La volonté d'écart" in *Sociétés*, n.21, 1998, Paris, Armand Colin.

"Yes, I have had more lovers and friends abroad, from abroad, that I will ever have amongst my own countrymen. Perhaps am I even only "homosexual" -as one says clumsily- as a way to be abroad, a way to belong to him and experience his home. Maybe I wanted the foreigner before the lover, and even finding with it a language going beyond Frenchness."

My translation.

<sup>42</sup> See Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Amour Bilingue*, 1983, Paris, Fata Morgana, for an exploration of the symbolic interpenetration of love, language and cultural difference.

## **Part Five**

### **Graduates as Multilingual Foreigners**



## 5.1. Introduction

Section One approached difference as fetishised accessory while emphasising the dominance of the global and its law of material exchange and added cultural value inherent in the graduates' narratives. In Section Two I examined the context of Education and gradual marketisation of the institution while reflecting upon the notions of cultural authority and representation inside and outside the classroom. Both these sections offer insights into the prominence of the market as key cultural discourse while nevertheless examining alternatives to it as expressed by the graduates. Lara's and Laura's discoveries of less privileged cultural others in Section One and Two offer contrasting standpoints to leading processes of cultural commodification inherent in contemporary Western capitalism. Serge's narrative of singular difference analysed in the previous section exemplifies *being foreign* as a paradoxical, problematic and complex situation for graduates working and living abroad for the first time.

This section is organised around an exploration of the concept of language in theoretical and psychanalytical terms. I then move on to an analysis of three graduates' narratives focusing on this notion. I examine language as a key process shaping and affecting the graduates' experiences of working life abroad. Language is a commodified tool serving professional contexts *as well as* signs of cultural



authority and capital. It operates as key value for graduates working and living abroad for the first time, in global business and educational environments. Global economics imply cultural adaptability and flexibility in working contexts where the graduates are expected to perform accordingly and use their skills efficiently. One has to bear in mind that graduates are products of Higher Education. As far as working contexts are concerned, they are promising individuals who received degrees at university enabling them to start their working lives abroad. In a Western context of educational marketisation, this means that the graduates are highly sought after as employable individuals and valuable commodities. Employability has been a growing focus in recent years within British universities.<sup>1</sup> It is now embedded within the curriculum of the institution in order to meet the demands of the workplace and increase student numbers as well as develop efficiency and policy within British university departments in order to maximise the employability of its future graduates.

If graduates working and living abroad for the first time are committed to their successful -and often demanding- careers, they also have potential as cultural analysts and “intercultural speakers”, to paraphrase Byram.<sup>2</sup> Their approach gives them an interesting position in cultural terms, since residency and work abroad allow them to reconsider their own sense of difference as well as explore new cultural avenues. Cultural discovery is, however, restricted by the demands of their working lives and lack of time for encounters outside the workplace. In their narratives of working life abroad, the graduates shape their own understanding of difference through mimesis, pragmatism or resistance. Each person has his or her own specific strategies when dealing with the powerful side effects of the global *as well as* cultural transition and

change. I perceived the graduates' difference as a possible alternative to the cultural standardisation and homogeneity inherent in contemporary capitalism.

This section develops a psychanalytical understanding of difference as undefinable, unreachable and uncommodified form. It examines the paradox of language while reflecting upon difference as a compulsory -and difficult- part of one's relationships with and understandings of (cultural) others. It posits difference in the graduates' narratives as a radical and irreversible force addressing and resisting cultural commodification and standardised valuing within Western societies. It also relates the key process of reflexivity to the mirror reflection while examining its relevance to Lacanian discourse.

## 5.2. Reflexivity and Reflection: fusing Psychoanalytical Thought and Theories of Higher Education

Psychoanalytical theory perceives otherness and difference as *escape*. Difference is what the subject cannot fully come to terms with, in the Lacanian sense (1966, 1973). Wright defines the Lacanian subject as: “split, as distinct from the humanist ego, which is seen as single, sovereign and undivided”<sup>3</sup> as the acquisition of language marks the entry of subjects into a symbolic realm of understanding and interpretations mediated by differences articulated by the linguistic sphere.<sup>4</sup>

The *problem with difference* is that it is impossible to reify, categorise or isolate and therefore remains a challenging process within communication and relationships. Language itself has specific limitations failing to express what difference actually *is*. This challenging dimension is inherent in Barnett’s work and reflection on critical understanding. His “understanding of understanding” echoes psychoanalytical theory through the necessity of self-critical and self-analytical attitudes to intersubjective relationships and encounters. One has to analyse and take a good look at oneself before claiming to understand others. Reflexivity *depends* on self-analysis and understanding, therefore echoing the dual psychoanalytical process of the talking cure. Understanding requires critical distance and intersubjectivity in order to heighten cultural tolerance and appreciation. In capitalistic societies driven by profit,



targets and fetishised pragmatism, the role of the University -and its graduates- as critical and cultural voices is important.

Barnett addresses the challenges faced by the University and how it can reinvent itself in times of economic, social and cultural changes. His work defends an idea of Higher Education as critical business<sup>5</sup> where the financial, managerial and governmental pressures imposed onto the University must not work at the expense of its central aims of self-development, critical knowledge and respectful understanding.

Barnett depicts a realistic, but also inspiring, portrayal of the function of Higher Education within late capitalism and how it can find a relevance to contemporary society. Other practitioners within the field such Freire (1972), Byram (1994; 1997; 2001; 2003) and Guilherme (2002) also address the role of the University within contemporary capitalism. What these writers and academics have in common is a rethinking of the institution as potential resistance to the social, cultural and economic demands of the global paradigm. Their vision of understanding and knowledge is inseparable from critical awareness and the need for pedagogies of change.

Critique is defined as a process raising one's awareness of the self as well as the context one evolves in. Graduates working and living abroad for the first time experience critique on several levels. Firstly, they become aware of their own sense of difference abroad within working contexts that are often standardised and homogenous. This may trigger a search for difference situated outside the workplace. Or it may generate strategies of mimemism and cultural conformity. Secondly, they



realise what the *value* of the difference is and what *problems* cultural commodification raise in critical terms. The graduates' sense of discomfort and duplicity can be related to the critical dilemma they experience in unknown cultural surroundings. One may wonder if they should serve the global discourse or pursue cultural discovery at the expense of their careers. If pursuing non-profitable cultural activities is not always encouraged, one has to ask oneself if the graduates encounter difference abroad outside the valued, commodified and fetishised context of Western capitalism.

Such questions generate a state of cultural confusion amongst the graduates who in turn generate multiple -and often paradoxical- readings of difference in their narratives. In the second part of this chapter, the data analysis reflects upon difference as a form that is as much *felt* as it is *performed*, *analysed* as well as *commodified*. It nevertheless reaches a key critical level by forcing the graduates to reflect upon its relevance and meaning within residency and working life abroad. The ambivalence and ambiguity generated by critical thought are echoed within language and its fundamental -but also problematic- role for the graduates.

### **5.2.1. Language and cultural exchange as ambivalent forms**

This part introduces a detailed analysis of the complexities inherent in the linguistic process while examining its central relationship to the graduates and their valued experiences of working life abroad. Language is an ambiguous process for the graduates as it stands for cultural difference *as well as* commodification. If languages

are essential within the graduates' lives abroad, they are also used as fetishised markers of global value which are key within their professional contexts.

The graduates I encounter are privileged and multilingual Western individuals who, while enjoying the benefits of the global, nevertheless show an awareness of its detrimental effects, as in Laura and Lara's narratives of cultural discovery within and outside working contexts. In Lara's interview, fluency in English is analysed as cultural and economic advantage *as well as* a more problematic expression of cultural and economic dominance:

I remember one episode when I went out clubbing with my flatmate and talked to her in English as we got in. She was really annoyed and asked me to switch to German straight away.

*That is quite strong!*

Yes, it is. I guess they [the East Germans] also have a sense of their own identity and values that they want to preserve and perpetuate. This stems, again, from a clear dislike of any imperialistic tendencies America may have, which is another contradiction I suppose.<sup>6</sup>

I propose to examine the ambivalence and paradox inherent in language(s) affecting the lives and experiences of graduates working abroad for the first time by analysing the linguistic sphere in psychoanalytical and educational terms. The graduates' linguistic abilities are used with specific goals in mind, whether these be career or culture driven. But language is also an ambivalent process when analysed within psychoanalytical and educational theories.

On the one hand, Barnett’s focus on a reflexive understanding of others cannot be separated from the relevance of language as a key communicative and analytical process. On the other, language is the “Great Other” for Lacan. It is *both* internal and external. One *performs* it but does not *own* it. Language is a key instrument within intersubjective exchange and relationships. It acts as *value* as well as *meaning*. There is no communication or exchange without some kind of language involved and this affects the graduates’ sense of cultural difference in significant ways.

The following table examines how language and exchange are intertwined notions for the graduates working and living abroad for the first time.

**Table 5.1 Language and exchange**

Language	Exchange
Enables human exchange and intersubjective relationships	Shapes intersubjective encounters within professional contexts
Subject to limitations and performed as cultural capital	Subject to commodification and fetishised valuing

Language is an integral part of human exchange and communication. It is loaded with social, economic and cultural value as well as relevance within the graduates’ lives. There can be no successful exchanges without mastery of language(s) directing them. But language has limitations as well as conceptual limits. One finds -as Derrida argues<sup>7</sup>- that language always belongs and goes back to the other, a problem I analyse in this section.



The other can be understood as the undefinable ingredient and condition to intersubjective relationships and encounters. Others can never be defined or fully understood and have to be embraced and accepted as such. One *needs* others to establish a sense of self. Relationships to others are compulsory relationships of interdependency. One does not *exist* without others<sup>8</sup>. When the graduates embark on foreign journeys abroad, their sense of self and existence as others are heightened through cultural displacement and change. They start to exist outside their own cultural backgrounds and use their linguistic skills in order to gain a unique perspective on themselves. Exchange shapes intersubjective encounters in a variety of social, cultural and economic contexts. Communication and language operate as forms of exchange that characterise and define relationships to others. But any form of exchange within capitalism is problematic since it is subject to commodification and reification. Exchange is measured in material and valuable terms, too. The graduates' narratives demonstrate, in fact, a keen awareness of exchange as a central value process within the economics of intersubjectivity. Cultural difference has a price

-often a price tag- and can therefore be performed, reified, consumed and exchanged in a variety of ways and contexts. Languages are central currencies within capitalism since they embody cultural difference and have professional kudos within global working environments such as business and education.

### **5.2.2. Language as problematic and compulsory form within psychoanalysis**

The field of Psychoanalysis relates to intercultural exchange through its analysis of language as a problematic -but compulsory- intersubjective form. On the one hand, it has a clear focus on the formation of the Subject and his/her interaction(s) with



others. These interactions are embedded within language and the image forming two key processes within intersubjective encounters.

On the other, psychoanalysis perceives such interactions in paradoxical and ambivalent terms. Difference is problematic for the psychoanalyst since he/she has to accept it will never be fully reached nor defined. Difference is -to paraphrase Freud- an *uncanny* feeling the self has to deal with. Confronting difference is necessary and unbearable at the same time. Psychoanalysis argues that the heart of difference is *precisely* what cannot be grasped, defined or possessed: difference -but also language- always *escape* logical and rational thought.

This failure of rationality when faced with others is a leitmotiv in psychoanalytical thought. Since one of Lacan's main goals is a reinterpretation of Freudian thought, this section explores the notion of the uncanny opening up intersubjective fields.

### **5.2.3. Difference, reflection and intersubjectivity within Lacanian thought**

One of the recurrent themes within Lacanian psychoanalysis is a vast and open exploration of the space and frontiers of subjectivity. Lacan's thought is embedded within maps of the subjective which offer contradictory but also combinatory territories of identification. The formation of the subject -who can be understood as the conscious mind, especially when opposed to anything external to it- is a central theme within his re-interpretation of Freud psychoanalysis. One may relate Lacanian thought to the graduates' involvement with cultural exchange when analysing the mirror image and the relationship between reflection, reflexivity and self.

When the graduates enter unknown surroundings, they are confronted with new cultural images and representations as well as embodied manifestations of difference. In Section One, I showed how the graduates involved within international global businesses are subject to an interesting process of cultural reflection and identification leading to a sense of “blandification” and homogeneity experienced within their working contexts. A key mirror effect operates within their working lives and has a significant impact on their appreciation and understanding of cultural difference, whether it be internal or external. Being exposed to mirrored others within professional lives can also lead to a sense of cultural alienation affecting the graduates’ sense of identity and cultural uniqueness. The mirror stage and acquisition of language are both processes allowing the child’s entry into the three Lacanian fields of subjectivisation: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The Imaginary is a space of identifications in which the ego -the part of the mind that reacts to reality and gains a sense of individuality- comes to embody a site the analyst needs to approach critically. The Symbolic is a linguistic space that allows the construction of the Subject -human language and its system. The field of the Real -one of Lacan’s most ambiguous and problematic concepts- acts as a necessary but disturbing friction between the two. However complex it may be, the Real can be envisaged as one of the main manifestations of otherness examined in this section.

Lacan defines the mirror stage as the moment when the child starts to recognise its own reflection in the mirror and therefore engages in identification with an *external* object. He defines the process in the following terms:

Il y suffit de comprendre le stade du miroir *comme une identification* au sens plein que

l'analyse donne à ce terme: à savoir la transformation produite chez le sujet, quand il assume une image<sup>9</sup>

This identification marks the child's entry into a world of social relationships based on the appropriation and recognition of the image: it is through the mirror stage -a process that occurs before the assimilation of language- that the child becomes aware of its individuality. The contours, shapes and characteristics of its reflection offer a primordial -albeit fictional- representation of the self, since the child only has a very partial mastery of its motor functions. The child is able to enter the realm of the Imaginary throughout the mirror stage as it begins to fantasise upon its own reflection. It is with the image that it begins to build up a sense of self, making the mirror stage problematic as a process of identification. One should therefore to examine what happens when the graduates are faced with mirror-like projections of themselves within the workplace and whether it reinforces their sense of individuality or alienates them further. One has to consider if they are allowed to grow as cultural actors or remain confronted with narcissistic projections of themselves.

The specular *jouissance* comes at a price, and the child's entry into the symbolic world of the *imago* stands for the beginning of the subject's alienation. The reflection is only partial, as the mirror stage defines a first step towards what Freud refers to as the triangular "Ich-Verdopplung, Ich-Teilung, Ich-Vertauschung"<sup>10</sup> which splits the Subject into a parallel framework of binaries. The graduates' narratives *speak of* a sense of cultural duplicity and confusion dividing their identities into contradictory voices they have to negotiate. Not only does the child construct an *inner* self through an *external* object, it also reaches the *materiality* of Being through the *fiction* of



perception. The graduates' narratives posit the *I* from a central discordance or *méconnaissance* as Lacan puts it. If the mirror stage allows the child to position itself within its environment, it nevertheless breaks the unity of its body. Residency and work abroad may affect the graduates' sense of cultural stability. The fragmented image therefore reflects the necessary approximation and chaos inherent in subjective discovery. Steve Pile envisages the mirror stage in the following way:

The mirror stage establishes a relationship between the child and its reality, between its inner world and its external world. There is, in this relation, a primary Discord which is marked by the child's sense of its 'anatomical incompleteness' - because the child can only see from one perspective, it never has a complete sight of its body: the image simultaneously assembles and disassembles the body. (...) The child is already doomed to alienation before the social stamps its mark (...) It establishes bodily 'armour' and 'rigid' ego boundaries, marking the profound schism between 'me' and 'not-me', between interior and exterior - and this provides the child with a sense of its own autonomy, but this is a profound misrecognition which is nevertheless constitutive of the child's ego.<sup>11</sup>

Primary discords -as evoked by Pile- often symbolise the complexities of cultural communication and residency abroad. In Chiara's interview, discord sometimes reaches an unbearable stage of non resolution making her experience of working life abroad rather challenging and painful:

With my French boss, for instance, I do actually spend quite a bit of time not understanding where he comes from. He just confuses me half of the time! He *escapes my understanding*<sup>12</sup> I guess. I do not understand what his motives are or what exactly he wants from me. I mean I tried to tell him about it and I think he realises I do not understand his ways, but I am finding hard to communicate since I never really know what



goes on in his head. There is, in fact, a communication problem between us, although I speak his language. It is terrible!<sup>13</sup>

Chiara's realisation that difference cannot be fully come to terms with and that her boss ultimately escapes her understanding echoes the psychoanalytical stance establishing that the formation of the subject is fundamentally alienating since depends on external forms that cannot be controlled. One of the prerequisites of enabling and fostering intercultural communication is a willingness to accept that others cannot be disciplined nor categorised within simplistic boundaries or binary frameworks.

It is in the mirror image context of intercultural residency and working life abroad that reflexivity as increased cultural awareness has chances to grow and act as a key process developing and cementing relationships to others. This implies that the cultural boundaries set by the graduates have to lose their rigidity in order to let others permeate them. Flexible boundaries and heightened awareness turn residency and working life abroad into reflexive experiences.

Lacan's analysis of the mirror stage demonstrates that one's vision of oneself and further construction as subject both depend on external projections. Self-knowledge therefore entirely depends on others since identification can only be achieved through the use of external forms. The graduates's realisation of difference and what it *means* in critical terms is, in fact, created by their exposure to new professional and cultural surroundings increasing their awareness of their own cultural makeup.

#### 5.2.4. Mirror reflection and critical thought

In the field of Higher Education, the notion of reflexivity develops along the Lacanian reflection when underlining the central mechanisms of interdependency and reciprocity conditioning critical understanding. In his critique of contemporary educational systems, Barnett examines the ambiguous relationship uniting critical projection, understanding and intersubjectivity:

There is a dialectic at work. One's understanding is an understanding of others' understandings; and one's understanding counts as an understanding in virtue of its finding a resonance in other's understandings. However, there is a potential for *slippage*.<sup>14</sup> One can gain an understanding by listening to and participating in the conversations of others. But one's understanding can be granted the status of understanding by yet another set of others. The first lot of others may dismiss what one has got to say while the second lot of others may feel that it is casting an entirely new light on things; *their* things that is. To express the dialectic another way, one's intellectual freedom is won on the back of others and one cannot never entirely be free from others; *some* others at least.<sup>15</sup>

I would like to relate Barnett's critical resonance to the mirror reflection and its narcissistic projection of self onto external forms. His analysis of understanding depending on the understanding of others shapes reflexivity as a mirror-like critical projection of the self that enables intersubjective relationships. There is room for slippage since others fundamentally escape through difference and have to be acknowledged as such. There is *something about difference* that challenges and puzzles the graduates, too. They have to come to terms with a sense of difference that

cannot be pinned down *and yet* is also used as valued and commodified form within their working contexts. This ongoing ambivalence makes the graduates' experiences of work and residency abroad paradoxical and ambiguous.

In his exposure of the processes inherent in the mirror stage, Lacan stresses that the child's appropriation of the image paradoxically generates the lack and division conditioning the birth of subjectivity. The reflection is tempting and deceiving *as well as* necessary and compulsory: it denotes the child's entry into the illusory world of social representation and exchange, while simultaneously emphasising the very impossibility of the image as a whole. Subjectivity occurs through loss and erasure, a process Dolar underlines in his analysis of the reflection:

When I recognise myself in the mirror, it is already too late. There is a split: I cannot recognise myself and at the same time be one with myself. With the recognition, I have already lost what one could call the "self-being," the immediate coincidence with myself in my being and *jouissance*. The rejoicing in the mirror image, the pleasure and the self-indulgence, had already to be paid for. (...) This is what Lacan will later add to his early theory of the mirror phase: the "object *a*" is precisely that part of the loss that one cannot see in the mirror, the part of the subject that has no mirror reflection, the nonspecular.<sup>16</sup>

The graduates' ownership of new linguistic bodies as well as their pragmatic and critical awareness of difference implies a loss of stability leading to a sense of cultural confusion. Knowledge of oneself and of others -as well as the appreciation of one's image- can only *materialise* if a primary loss occurs, referred to as the *objet a* in Lacanian psychoanalysis.



I would argue that the graduates' exposure to cultural difference operates along the same lines as the mirror stage. The reflection is relevant to the reflexive building up of critically aware relationships. In Barnett's thought, understanding cannot be attained outside self-examination and its challenging implications:

We can understand theories, ideas, actions, events, other human beings and our own bodies. But we can also take a view of our own understanding: we can evaluate it, criticise it, value it, and want to go on improving it. We can understand our own understanding. This is not a nice philosophical point. It is central to higher education.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding one's understanding implies a courageous act of self-analysis. Assessing one's understanding first is therefore key and demands a necessary reevaluation of the self before engaging in critically aware relationships with others. It is the acceptance of the other's *escape* that helps attain a reflexive and complex understanding of cultural difference. The mirror stage underlines that the knowledge of the self is an external projection implying a loss of one's own boundaries and a resulting sense of alienation.

It is, in fact, neither clear nor taken for granted *how far* one actually manages to understand others in the context of intercultural communication. The following table introduces key theoretical contrasts between psychoanalytical and educational theories when approaching the formation of the self through the mirror stage and reflexive thought.



**Table 5.2. The formation of the self within psychoanalytical and educational theories**

<b>FORMING THE SELF</b>	<b>Psychoanalysis and the Mirror Stage</b>	<b>Education and Reflexive Thought</b>
<b>Issue</b>	LACK	BIAS
<b>Resolve</b>	IDENTIFICATION	DECONSTRUCTION
<b>Process</b>	EXTERNAL	CRITICAL

Being confronted with difference leads oneself to a realisation of one’s fundamental lack of unity as a subject. This lack is a central issue which is nevertheless inseparable from the formation of the self. In education, one’s own bias is problematic when aiming at a critical, fairer and more self-aware understanding of others. Awareness of one’s own bias is therefore central to understanding and becomes a problem if not acknowledged and dealt with from the start. The mirror stage is mainly resolved through identification with the reflection which can be seen as an external form. The critical process of deconstruction can therefore be likened to the external process of identification and distancing triggered by the image. It is by stepping outside oneself than one may gain clearer understanding and perception. As far as the graduates are concerned, the mirror image process of life and work abroad generates internal struggles helping them reconsider their own sense of difference through an exposure to and projection onto unknown cultural surroundings. In educational terms, one has to analyse one’s critical bias first before engaging in cultural and reflexive relationships with others. Reflexivity therefore demands a critical and self-aware approach to understanding at all levels.

### 5.3. Difference, Language, *Jouissance* and *Objet a*

The *jouissance* and *objet a* are two of Lacan's most important and problematic concepts as he often revised them throughout his life. I explore these concepts in relation to difference and intercultural being with an emphasis on Lipiansky (1993) and his notion of the intercultural. I examine Lacan's perception of intersubjectivity and relate it to some of the intercultural debates evoked by Lipiansky. If the previous part establishes a link between the mirror stage and reflexive understanding, the following analysis focuses on the frictions and tensions shaping one's relationships to others while returning to the problematic issue of language.

The *jouissance* and *objet a* both operate *inside* and *outside* the self. The *jouissance*, for instance, can be envisaged in a variety of ways and contexts as it does not really stand for one single concept but expresses some of Lacan's concerns regarding difference and the formation of the subject. Slavoj Žižek perceives the *jouissance* as both condition and experience of the Real which is mostly made of our interactions with others:

Someone can be happily married, with a good job and many friends, fully satisfied with his life, and yet absolutely hooked on some specific formation ('sinthom') of *jouissance*, ready to put everything at risk rather than renounce *that* (drugs, tobacco, drink, a particular sexual perversion...). (...) At a less extreme level, the same holds for every authentic intersubjective encounter: when do I actually encounter the Other 'beyond the wall of

language', in the real of his or her being? Not when I am able to describe her, not even when I learn her values, dreams, and so on, but only when I encounter the Other in her moment of *jouissance*: when I discern in her a tiny detail (a compulsive gesture, an expressive facial expression, a tic) which signals the intensity of the real of *jouissance*. This encounter with the real is always traumatic; there is something at least minimally obscene about it; I cannot simply integrate it into my universe, there is always a gulf separating me from it.<sup>18</sup>

Žižek's analysis can be shown to apply to the graduates' experiences of cultural difference in two fundamental ways. On the one hand, he identifies *jouissance* as a potentially dangerous mania or perversion that threatens the balance of the subject. Graduates working and enjoying residency abroad, are in fact, encountering the real of difference within or outside their working contexts which often results in a radical rethinking of their identities. As in Mario's case, they are also confronted with the power of stereotypes and have to decide whether or not they work to their advantage. This is potentially dangerous, since the graduates may embody the stereotypes instead of themselves in order to gain acceptance or specific benefits within their professions. This process of identification raises the delicate issue of cultural authenticity and whether or not the graduates -or anyone- can position themselves as representatives of their own culture. On the other, Žižek also underlines the status of *jouissance* as a key occurrence inseparable from encounters with difference which - however crucial and fascinating- alienates and puzzles us. His reference to the walls of language applies to the limitations encountered by human beings when they try to contain difference -as well as their own sense of it- within words. This escape of difference within reality is relevant to the graduates' experiences and shapes a sense of identity which may be perceived as split or maniacal.



The other's *jouissance* -and ensuing difference- are unbearable *but* compulsory within one's understanding of reality. One's experience of the Real depends on others and therefore subjectifies us to external understandings. The acquisition of intercultural knowledge and understanding can be complex and potentially alienating since it orchestrates a constant *negotiation of intersubjectivities* that are fundamentally different.

The *jouissance* also expresses the unnerving and frustrated fantasy to *be* the other and applies to the intercultural in the following way:

In this perspective, the intercultural is not simply the bringing together of two objects, of two independent and relatively stable entities (the cultures in question). It is a matter of interaction, through which these objects constitute themselves as much as they communicate with each other. Indeed, social groups never exist in total isolation, they always have relations with other groups. This creates an awareness of their own specificity, certainly, but at the same time it involves exchanges, borrowings, and a process of constant transformation.<sup>19</sup>

The *jouissance* and *objet a* deploy a formative lack that not only belongs to the field of the other, but also acts as a primary force for the construction of the subject through compulsory and interdependent intersubjective encounters. The *jouissance* and *objet a* open up a space of *constitutive impossibility* which is relevant to intercultural exchange, since one's acceptance and realisation that the other can never fully be grasped nor understood is precisely what makes knowledge and understanding critical and reflexive. The other always *escapes*, and the acceptance of this escape acts as a key basis towards mutual understanding.



Within the mirror stage, the *objet a* acts as a haunting presence signifying one's inability to be oneself while possessing the image. The image can *never* be possessed since otherness *always* escapes. The reflection is the external double one cannot control -the *objet a* essential to self-understanding. Reflexivity can therefore be defined as a subtle process of understanding implying a critical distance towards oneself and others. The reflection is both uncanny *and* enlightening.

As the disturbing *jouissance* and *objet a* underline one's incapacity to deal with the lack and loss generated by the realisation of subjectivity, giving a name to this absence makes the Real easier to approach. Both these ideas conceptualise *an-other* space of uncertainty and friction embodied by the linguistic sphere.

### **5.3.1. Language as Doppelgänger and field of the other**

If, throughout the mirror stage, the reflection is the Imaginary and the Real one's own gaze that cannot be seen, language offers a possible rescue as it designates the space of the other by giving shape to the void. As far as the graduates are concerned, language offers the ability to understand difference and come to terms with its complexities.

The questions that *resist* answers are not only at the core of one's existence as subject but also inherent in intercultural communication. It is worth thinking about how the graduates come to terms with their ambivalent sense of difference and how far they are affected by it as subjects. The fact that one cannot see oneself when looking at

one's own image also implies that one may not be able to be *one* with one's own *difference*. It also raises the issue that one's *jouissance* and development as an individual may depend on this suffering.

The desires, identity and space of the other -whether social, professional or cultural- are problematic for the subject, since the boundaries separating oneself from him/her are constantly redefined and negotiated. If the otherness of the mirror belongs to a process of lack, one may think that language -and the learning of foreign languages- could make up for that loss while creating and articulating difference. One has, in fact, to wonder if there is any difference outside language and how the graduates deal with these contradictory conflicts.

In *Das Unheimliche*, Freud underlines language's duality and ambivalence as he chooses to focus on the deconstruction of two adjectives, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. As he examines the various meanings these two words have in the German language, his semiotic approach leads him to a first set of conclusions:

Aus diesem langen Zitat ist für uns am interessantesten, daß das Wörtchen *heimlich* unter den mehrfachen Nuancen seiner Bedeutung auch eine zeigt, in der es mit seinem Gegensatz *unheimlich* zusammenfällt. Das *heimliche* wird dann zum *unheimlichen*; vgl. das Beispiel von Gutzkow: "Wir nennen das *unheimlich*, sie nennen's *heimlich*." Wir werden überhaupt daran gemahnt, daß dies Wort heimlich nicht eindeutig ist, sondern zwei Vorstellungskreisen zugehört, die, ohne gegensätzlich zu sein, einander doch recht fremd sind, dem des Vertrauens, Behaglichen und dem des Versteckten, Verborgengehaltenen, *Unheimlich* sei nur als Gegensatz zur ersten Bedeutung, nicht auch zur zweiten gebräuchlich.<sup>20</sup>

One of the key priorities and concerns within the psychoanalytical process is to keep a critical response to language and never take words for granted. Language is a powerful shield the psychoanalyst has to be wary of throughout the therapy, since it acts as a barrier preventing access to the workings of the ego. Language acts as a wall -to paraphrase Žižek- that challenges the psychoanalyst in his/her search for concealed meanings.

The psychoanalytical cure can be envisaged as a constant battle *against* and *through* language for signification to occur, and Freud finds signs of this contradiction within language itself: contradictory meanings within words have to be dealt with in order to negotiate the contradictory nature of subjectivity. Freud's scepticism towards words raises interesting questions around the nature of language and whether or not it can be trusted or taken for granted. I suggest that language may always be approximate and is therefore subject to negotiation. I am interested in the ways it both asserts and threatens one's subjectivity while considering the ambiguous role language plays within the graduates' lives.

If Freud does not answer any of these questions directly, the *Unheimliche* offers a starting point towards an exploration of language:

Also *heimlich* ist ein Wort, das seine Bedeutung nach einer Ambivalenz ihn entwickelt, bis es endlich mit seinem Gegensatz *unheimlich* zusammenfällt. *Unheimlich* ist irgendwie eine Art von *heimlich*.<sup>21</sup>



Not only does Freud highlight the ambiguity of meaning when binaries collapse within language, he also perceives the *Unheimliche* as a key process within human life. The *Unheimliche* is a disturbing presence that stems from familiarity and reiteration, a direct consequence of the repetition inherent in linguistic patterns that Freud identifies in the opening pages of his essay:

Ich will gleich verraten, daß beide Wege zum nämlichen Ergebnis führen, das Unheimliche sei jene Art des Schreckhaften, welche auf das Altbekannte, Längsvertraute zurückgeht.<sup>22</sup>

There is an ambiguous and disturbing dimension within language. If language belongs to the reassuring and predictable "Altbekannte", the *Unheimliche* does, however, manifest itself through the fundamental otherness of words. Words can never really express how one feels. They are always approximate as they fail to come to terms with difference and define it.

Language is ambivalent *and* challenging, because -as Derrida argues- it can be conceived as the *unheimlich* site of the other. Recalling childhood memories when growing up as a Jewish child in a Franco-Arabic context, he likens the *unheimlich* to a peculiar human closeness:

*Unheimlich*. Pour moi, ce fut la langue du voisin. Car j'habitais à la bordure d'un quartier arabe, à l'une de ces frontières de nuit, à la fois invisibles et presque infranchissables: la ségrégation y était aussi efficace que subtile. Je dois renoncer ici aux fines analyses qu'appellerait la géographie sociale de l'habitat, comme la cartographie des salles de



classe de l'école primaire, où il y avait encore, avant de disparaître au seuil du lycée, beaucoup de petits Algériens, Arabes et Kabyles. Tout proches et infiniment lointains, voilà la distance dont on nous inculquait, si je puis dire, l'expérience. Inoubliable et généralisable.<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting to see how Derrida associates *parler* to *habiter*, as if the two were unequivocally bound. One inhabits the foreign space of language(s) through the words that operate *inside* and *outside* subjectivity, in the same way that the mirror image creates a picture of the self through external identification. The graduates inhabit social and cultural spaces through the languages they perform, as they recreate their identities through language, whilst embodying and performing a space of cultural difference. Spaces of difference are both constructed and experienced through language, but language is never enough to come to terms with difference, since difference relates to the real and what escapes linguistic signs.

In this sense, languages generate an *unheimlich* distance which -as in the mirror stage- epitomises human experience, even though the graduate's use of their linguistic skills may, at times, be perceived as fixed, strategic and commodified.

When language acts as an expression of difference, it is already reified and used as a powerful tool or accessory.

### **5.3.2. Language, loss and difference**

One cannot *own* language. It has never been ours and never will be. Language is the Great Other in the Lacanian sense, since it acts as a system located *outside* oneself. Language existed *before* and will remain *after* us. Its reiteration paradoxically

supersedes one, therefore emphasising the incomplete and constantly negotiable nature of subjectivity. In his analysis of encounters with difference, Derrida approaches language as fundamentally other:

Mais pour cette raison même, le monolinguisme de l'autre, cela veut dire encore autre chose, qui se découvrira peu à peu: que de toute façon on ne parle qu'une langue -et on ne l'a pas. On ne parle jamais qu'une langue -et elle est dissymétriquement, lui revenant, toujours, à *l'autre*, de l'autre, gardée par l'autre. Venue de l'autre, restée à l'autre, à l'autre revenue.<sup>24</sup>

If language always goes back to the other, it also stands for his/her incommensurable distance. Words generate a deep loss as soon as the subject's dissemination occurs through language: the reiterative performing of words paradoxically reinforces one's anxieties, as one realises that words do not suffice to describe the difference outside and the difference within. In Lacanian terms, language forms a field of self-awareness and subjectivity through the recurrence of absence and erasure:

Par l'effet de parole, le sujet se réalise toujours plus dans l'Autre, mais il ne poursuit déjà plus là qu'une moitié de lui-même. Il ne trouvera son désir que toujours plus divisé, pulvérisé, dans la cernable métonymie de la parole. L'effet de langage est tout le temps mêlé à ceci, qui est le fond de l'expérience analytique, que le sujet n'est sujet que d'être assujettissement au champ de l'Autre, le sujet provient de son assujettissement synchronique dans ce champ de l'Autre.<sup>25</sup>

Language fills in the gaps that separate us from others, but the gaps always remain. Meanings are therefore never entirely satisfactory and escape them the same way the reflection does. Language designates the other who is often uncanny and threatening

to us. But the naming of others through language does not necessarily result in a guaranteed understanding of difference. Language is only the first step, since Kristeva perceives it as necessary resistance to nothingness:

Le non-sens strie les signes et les sens, et la manipulation des mots qui en résultent est pas un jeu de l'esprit mais, sans aucun rire, une tentative désespérée de s'accrocher à un signifiant pur (...) Il y a là une tentative forcenée d'un sujet menacé de sombrer dans le vide.<sup>26</sup>

I argue that the pure signifier belongs to the field of the other, and that language therefore conditions the discovery, understanding and appreciation of cultural difference. On the one hand, language finds its strength and purpose in an ongoing battle against the void: it is an essential tool that helps one fight hatred, narrow mindedness and ignorance. On the other, it is the complete opposite. Language acts as an ongoing negotiation of ambivalent contradictions. The next part examines the psychoanalytical process of the talking cure in linguistic terms.

### **5.3.3. Language, difference and the talking cure**

Psychoanalytical theory refers to the talking cure as a key process and fundamental basis enabling the patient to come to terms with his or her issues through language. If difference is embodied through language -although never fully understood by it- language also has the potential to cure and help individual in their daily lives. The paradoxical and contradictory relationship uniting language to difference is summed up in the following table.



**Table 5.3 Language and Difference**

LANGUAGE	DIFFERENCE
Performed by ourselves but owned by others	Located outside and starting Within
Cannot come to terms with Difference	Manifests itself outside the walls of language
Fundamental but untrustworthy	Compulsory but challenging

Difference lies at the centre of the talking cure for several reasons. Firstly, the psychoanalytical process implies regular subjective encounters between two individuals who are different. Secondly, these encounters are negotiated and addressed through language turning into compulsory and fruitful mediation between subjectivities. Thirdly, it is by expressing symptoms through language that the patient finally comes to terms with initial traumas or difficulties. If language belongs to the Great Other, the other is also great because he/she has the potential to help me. Language is therefore key within the psychoanalytical process, precisely because it attempts to grasp the otherness of the unconscious. Within a psychoanalytical cure, speech is not only the manifestation of a symptom, but a way to solve it, too. In her analysis of the talking cure, Kristeva explores the ways in which the analyst encounters the density of the subject through the use of discourse:

Si le psychiatre cherche une lésion physique pour en faire la raison d'un trouble, le psychanalyste, lui, ne se réfère qu'au dire du sujet, mais ce n'est pas pour y déceler une "vérité" objective qui serait la "cause" des troubles. Il écoute avec autant d'intérêt, dans



ce que le sujet lui dit, le réel que le fictif car l'un et l'autre ont une égale *réalité* *discursive*.<sup>27</sup>

I apply the idea of the talking cure to a wider context of intercultural encounters and communication as experienced by graduates working and living abroad for the first time whereby difference operates as a *vital* process conditioning understanding. If difference is threatened by the cultural commodification and fetishism inherent in the Western world, reflecting upon the potential role of graduates working and living abroad for the first time as ambassadors of difference and cultural voices is important. By projecting cultural difference abroad and performing a variety of foreign languages, the graduates keep difference and its elusiveness alive while raising the problematic issue of cultural authenticity.

De Saussure's perception of language as "un système dont toutes les parties peuvent et doivent être considérées dans leur solidarité synchronique"<sup>28</sup> is an interesting metaphor for the experiences of graduates living and working abroad. The notions of solidarity and interdependency are key when examining the difference embodied through language as powerful resistance to the dominance of the global and its cultural "blandification".

## 5.4. Conclusion

The notion of reflexivity is illustrated by Barnett's work and his concept of "understanding one's understanding" constituting a key basis towards intersubjective encounters and intercultural communication. Reflexivity has to be understood as the ability to analyse one's point of view and cultural make up first before expressing opinions about and judgments of others. It implies a self-aware approach that is challenging and often quite uncomfortable since it implies self-analysis. Reflexivity requires "walking in someone else's shoes" and seeing how one thinks -and feels- when put in that context.

Within the field of Higher Education, reflexivity also operates as a form of resistance to the reification of knowledge and ongoing influence of a managerial discourse affecting the University. Employability marks a current shift encouraging universities to perform like businesses through the use of management strategies and emphasis on measurable outcomes. Reflexivity involves a rethinking of the University while, nevertheless, bearing in mind its central aims of awareness, respect and mutual understanding that are served by critical thought. The idea that self-awareness is essential, whenever fostering and developing relationships with others, lies at heart of reflexive thought and its ability to deconstruct itself.

This idea of the reflection is central within psychoanalytical thought and its exploration of the mirror stage as a formative step within the formation of the

Subject. The reflection is *other* and *compulsory* when building up a sense of self. Throughout the mirror stage, the child becomes aware that self-understanding depends on an external projection being the image. This rejoicing in the image also gives way to a relative feeling of alienation triggered by the external nature of the reflection. In intercultural terms, the mirror image is the realisation that one cannot gain a sense of self without the other's difference. There is a relationship of interdependency and reciprocity between cultures since one's cultural difference can only be established when projected onto others. Difference can therefore be envisaged as a contradictory and ambiguous process since it is *other but also* one's own.

One may see oneself in the mirror, the reflection nevertheless remains an external object. When faced with others, one gains a sense of self that is challenged -but also conditioned- by the impact of difference. The paradox of the mirror stage lies in one's necessary dependence on others in order to know oneself. Reflexivity and self-awareness are therefore possible because one is faced with others and has to consider their point of view. By taking the other's views into account, one reaches a heightened level of self-awareness and understanding. The relationship triggered by the reflection is one of *reciprocity* and *necessity*.

The ambiguities inherent in difference and its paradoxical nature are echoed by language and its ambivalence. The difference performed and displayed by the graduates is visible through their linguistic skills and proficiency. Language nevertheless acts as a double-edged sword within the graduates' lives. On the one hand, the very fact that they speak foreign languages is a tangible proof of difference

and its existence. On the other, the fact that their languages are valued and exchanged within their professional contexts while contributing to enhanced career profiles demonstrates the impact of fetishised commodification on their experiences.

Difference is embodied through language but language never fully comes to terms with it. Lacan describes language as the Great Other since language is an external system that is not ours. The notion of escape also applies to difference and its indefinable core. Language and difference are therefore parallel and intertwined processes essential within intersubjective encounters and intercultural communication. Languages are essential to *communicate* difference but difference itself cannot simply be *embodied* through words. The *jouissance* and *objet a* are, in fact, instances of difference manifesting itself outside language. One cannot define difference because one cannot define the other. However efficient, marketised and dissected, profitable and measurable strategies do not always succeed when faced with difference. Psychoanalytical thought maintains the argument that language and difference are both challenging processes that are compulsory -and yet problematic- within the formation of the self.



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<sup>1</sup> See Harvey and Knight (2003), Lees (2002), Little (2003) and Yorke (2003).

<sup>2</sup> See Byram (1997).

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Wright, *Lacan and Postfeminism*, p.74, 2000, Icon Books, Cambridge.

<sup>4</sup> See Saussure (1916).

<sup>5</sup> See Barnett (1997).

<sup>6</sup> *Appendix E Lara's Interview*, p.12, 2002, Glasgow.

<sup>7</sup> See Derrida (1996).

<sup>8</sup> See Lévinas (1985; 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, p.94, 1966, Seuil, Paris.

"We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image"

Translated by Alan Sheridan, 1997, Tavistock Publications Limited, London.

<sup>10</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Das Unheimliche und andere Texte*, p.76, 2001, Gallimard, Paris.

"I-duplication, I-division, I-permutation".

My translation.

<sup>11</sup> Steve Pile, *The Body and the City, Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity*, p.125, 1996, Routledge, London and New York.

<sup>12</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> *Appendix C Chiara's Interview*, p.9, 2001, Paris.

<sup>14</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Ronald Barnett, *The Limits of Competence*, p.104, 1994, Open University Press, Bristol.

<sup>16</sup> Mladen Dolar, "At First Sight", in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, edited by Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek, p.138, 1996, Duke University Press, Durham and London.

<sup>17</sup> Ronald Barnett, *The Limits of Competence*, p.101, 1994, Open University Press, Bristol.

<sup>18</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, p.49, Verso, 1997, London and New York.

<sup>19</sup> Edmond Marc Lipiansky, *Reflections on the Notion of the Intercultural*, in *Journal of Area Studies*, p.7, edited by Ian Kemble, 1993, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth.

<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Das Unheimliche und andere Texte*, p.46, 2001, Gallimard, Paris.

"The most important part from this long essay is for us that the word *uncanny*, which has many meanings, can be paired with its opposite meaning of *sinister*. The *uncanny* then turns into the *sinister*: when compared to the example of Gutzkow: "We call it sinister, they call it *uncanny*."

We are being reminded that the word *uncanny* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two circles of meanings, which, without being opposed, are still very alien to each other and the well known, comfortable and concealed. *Uncanny* is only opposed to the first meaning, not the second."

My translation.

<sup>21</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Das Unheimliche und andere Texte*, p.50, 2001, Gallimard, Paris.

"So *uncanny* is a word which develops its ambivalence until it comes together with its opposite, the word *sinister*. The *uncanny* is somehow a kind of *sinister*."

My translation.

<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Das Unheimliche und andere Texte*, p.30, 2001, Gallimard, Paris.

"I want to put an end to a secret now, namely that both approaches have the same results, the *sinister* being part of the fear that leads back to the familiar and trusted."

My translation.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'Autre*, p.66, 1996, Galilée, Paris.

"*Unheimlich*. For me, it was the neighbour's language. For I lived on the edge of an Arab neighbourhood, at one of those hidden frontiers, at once visible and almost impassable: the segregation there was as efficacious as it was subtle. I have to forgo here the delicate analyses that the social geography of the habitat would call for, as well as the cartography of the primary school classrooms where there were still little Algerians, Arabs, and Kabyles, who were about to vanish at the door of the lycée. Very near and infinitely far away, such was the distance that experience instilled in us, so to speak. Unforgettable and generalisable."

Translated by Patrick Mensah, 1998, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'Autre*, p.70, 1996, Galilée, Paris.

"But for this very reason, the monolingualism of the other means another thing, which will be revealed little by little: that in any case we speak only one language -and that we do not *own* it. We only ever speak one language -and, since it returns to the other, it exists asymmetrically, always for *the other*, from the other, kept by the other. Coming from the other, remaining with the other and returning to the other."

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Translated by Patrick Mensah, 1998, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse*, p.211.212, 1973, Seuil, Paris.

“Through the act of speech, the subject always realises himself more through the Other, but he is only pursuing there half of himself. He will only find his desire more divided and shattered within the tangible metonymy of speech. The process of language is always connected to this, which forms the core of the analytical experience, that the subject is only subject through his subjectification to the field of the Other, the subject stems from his synchronic subjectification to this field of the Other.”

My translation.

<sup>26</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur, Essai sur l'Abjection*, p.62, 1980, Seuil, Paris.

“non-sense runs through signs and sense, and the resulting manipulation of words is not an intellectual play but, without any laughter, a desperate attempt to hold on to the ultimate obstacles of a pure signifier (...) It is a frantic attempt made by a subject threatened with sinking into the void.”

Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, 1982, Columbia University Press, New York.

<sup>27</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Le Langage, cet Inconnu*, p.264, 1981, Seuil, Paris.

“While the psychiatrist may look for a physical lesion as the cause of a disturbance, the psychoanalyst refers only to what the subject says, but not in order to find there an objective ‘truth’ that would be the ‘cause’ of the problems. He listens with as much interest to the real as to the fictitious part of what the subject tells him, for both have an equal *discursive reality*.”

Translated by Anne M. Menke, 1989, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, Sydney and Tokyo.

<sup>28</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, p.124, 1916, Payot, Paris.

“a system whose all parts can and have to be considered in their synchronic solidarity”

My translation.



## 5.5. Introduction

This part offers an analysis of graduates working and living abroad for the first time through the lens of psychoanalytical discourse and Lacanian theory. It primarily offers a theoretical focus on the notions of difference and *jouissance* before moving on to analyses of narratives in the final section. I examine the experiences of graduates working within the contexts of administration, tourism and banking. The data analysis focuses here on the paradoxical state of cultural difference through a psychoanalytical framework of interpretation using Lacanian *jouissance* and returning to the central notion of cultural reflexivity. I apply these concepts to selected samples of interview data targeting bilingual and multilingual graduates.

Working around the complex relationship linking language and otherness to the concept of *jouissance*, this part attempts to analyse the graduates' narratives in psychoanalytical terms. I choose Lacanian theory for two key reasons. On the one hand, Lacanian thought is not normally used for the analysis of linguistic and intercultural experiences.<sup>1</sup> Psychoanalysis is, in fact, not a favoured interpretative field within the context of language and intercultural learning. On the other, it defines difference as a compulsory and indefinable form, even though it locates it in language and the mirror reflection. Psychoanalytical theory reflects upon difference while

coming to the conclusion that it is impossible to categorise or pin down. The graduates' narratives introduced and analysed in this part all have a common thread of refusal and/or impossibility when it comes to defining one's sense of cultural difference.

I worked with graduates whose own personal narratives and intercultural experiences operate at the crossroads of several cultures and languages. These transcripts can be perceived as an exploration of the contradictory and complex nature of difference uniting their portrayal of residency and work abroad for the first time. I use the Lacanian approach in order to emphasise what can be defined as the foreigner's sense of cultural confusion and "schizophrenia". I do not refer to this term literally but as an expression of the dividing and problematic contradictions affecting the graduates. The confusion and "schizophrenia" shed a new light on the notion of reflexivity when examining individuals whose career choices and professional environments tend to either confuse or complicate their sense of identity. This process affects them in internal *and* external ways, echoing Kristeva's argument that cultural difference acts on the outside but also starts from within.<sup>2</sup> The three following sections introduce spaces of cultural *jouissance* and confused difference as experienced and depicted by three female university graduates starting their careers abroad.



## 5.6. “Schizophrenia” and Cultural *Jouissance* within Marie’s Narrative

Marie was born in England, but studied Foreign Languages at a British university. Her mother is French and her father is English. She was in her mid-twenties when she graduated in 1999 and moved to France to start her working career. She spent most of her childhood in America and moved to Oxford with her family in her early teens, where she stayed until her university years. She was living in Paris and working as a personal assistant for a recruitment agency at the time of the interview.

Marie’s performance of her bilingual identity emphasises certain assumptions regarding the graduates’ sense of cultural confusion and what can be named their ensuing “schizophrenia”. Kristeva’s post-Lacanian analysis of the foreigner’s psyche provides a theoretical starting point towards an exploration of the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in cultural difference. At the beginning of her interview, Marie evokes the problematic split defining her upbringing. She sees herself as: “bicultural actually”<sup>3</sup> while nevertheless showing a fragmented sense of her own identity. When discussing the importance of the diverse cultural contexts she lived in, she gives a compartmentalised and separated approach to her sense of cultural belonging:

*How did coming here affect your vision of Oxford? Are these two cities clearly separated for you?*

I spent five years of my life in Oxford, and apart from the fact that my parents live there I do not have any strong emotional ties to the place. I have as many ties to Scotland where

I spent five years, too. I kind of see Oxford the same way, I like going there without having any strong emotional ties to it.

*Does each place correspond to separate things then?*

Yes, that is right.

*Are there any conflicts between these places?*

No, but at the same time it can create some, you still have two identities, and it annoys me when people call me English, because I feel this is not completely true, and it is the same when they call me French.

*And does that bother you when people criticise English things here?*

Yes, it does. I work with this English girl for instance who is a lot more defensive about it than me. Maybe I am different from her, but it true that certain things annoy me because they are ridiculous. I grew up in an environment where I saw things from a British angle. I have British reflexes, so I defend a lot of things as a result.

*And it will be the same on the other side.*

Yes, that is true.<sup>4</sup>

On the one hand, Marie shows a critical approach to her own identity as one notices her emphasis on distinct cultural reference points throughout her narrative. This reverse awareness of diverse cultural backgrounds often develops along an improved knowledge of work and residency abroad. On the other, she has an awareness of her identity as constant negotiation and cultural flux between the spaces she inhabits through language and life experiences.

What is interesting about Marie's position is that she perceives herself as French *and* English. Her belonging cannot be essentialised nor summarised to one single strand as it stands for a constant struggle and acceptance *in between* cultures. Marie's sense of cultural conflict can be related to the graduates' experiences of tensions and paradox as introduced and analysed within previous sections. They are foreign individuals often faced with difficult situations challenging their sense of cultural belonging and stability. The pressures inherent in their working lives as well as their gradual discovery of unknown surroundings both contribute to a sense of cultural stress and potential alienation. I see these problems as key steps towards a reflexive and more critically aware understanding and appreciation of cultural difference. Cultural confusion, conflict and *jouissance* have therefore to be understood in critical terms as a series of challenging -but constructive- processes going against the smooth, manageable and homogenous standardisation of "global culture" and all-equivalence within the Western world. The discursive and experiential struggles I examine here all partake of the same *desire* to resist the categorisation and marketisation of cultural difference as orchestrated by capitalism. The graduates' inner struggles and indecisions are a resisting voice to the commodified and efficient framework of manageable cultural difference.

Marie's narrative displays a form of *jouissance* that is emblematic of the foreigner's cultural "schizophrenia" or *bonheur*<sup>5</sup>, as Kristeva puts it. Her identity occupies a diversity of influences generating a compulsory -and complex- process of negotiation mediated through language. Her identity is under threat, as her narrative highlights defence mechanisms visible on two levels. Firstly, she denies any affective ties to either Oxford or Glasgow: "I spent five years of my life in Oxford, and apart from the



fact that my parents live there I do not have any strong emotional ties to the place. I have as many ties to Scotland where I spent five years, too.” -two cities in which she, nevertheless, spent ten years of her life. Secondly, she is keen to reject the idea of a presupposed predominance of one context over another in cultural terms: “you still have two identities, and it annoys me when people call me English, because I feel this is not completely true, and it is the same when they call me French.” Her contradictory answer to my assumption of a cultural clash between these influences is revealing: she answers negatively to then state the opposite: “No, but at the same time it can create some [conflicts]”. This is an important moment in the interview, as it emphasises the core of Marie’s *jouissance* as an intercultural being and bilingual graduate. The hesitation and contradiction in her answers convey both an *impossibility* and *refusal* of a categorised and simplified sense of cultural belonging.

This constant negotiation of clashing identities and influences defines the space of the graduates working and living abroad. Their narratives operate at the crossroads of central contradictions such as private being and professional persona, sense of uniqueness and global conformity. Marie’s insistence on how she has to defend her own sense of identity in all contexts opens up a dimension of threat and anxiety that is key to an understanding of the foreigner’s *bonheur*. Working life and residency abroad can, in fact, be understood as experiences of cultural *jouissance* in the sense that the graduates’ identities constantly hover *on the edge, in between, borderline*, resisting the stagnation of the global while challenging fixed readings of cultural belonging. Marie’s identity appears to be *on the verge* of collapse or realisation, without her ever realising any of these two possibilities.



The space of the foreign graduate shatters any sense of essentialised identity. His or her space itself is, in fact, split, dislocated and decontextualised. Being foreign implies an estrangement from oneself that is emblematic of Marie's experience of difference. What makes her identity culturally reflexive is the critical and ambivalent approach she has towards her own being. She performs an identity that is simultaneously defended and undermined at the same time: reflexive behaviour demands that she defend France in a British context and Britain in a French context. This divided state of being gains further clarity through a Lacanian reading of difference as Marie's rejoicing in her singularity is also what she has to negotiate and problematise.

If her sense of belonging follows the logics of an ongoing personal and external struggle, Marie nevertheless shows reflexive signs of a critical and distanced approach towards her own sense of difference. She states, for instance, that: "When I return to England, I appreciate a lot of things I had not noticed before."<sup>6</sup> This reverse form of culture shock can be related to the new body evoked by Kristeva and a sense of rediscovery within one's original surroundings. Marie may have lost some of the strength of the attachment she feels for England, she nevertheless gains a critical and reflexive attitude towards British culture which is refreshing and constructive: she rediscovers parts of her identity that had either been forgotten or taken for granted. This temporary distancing from her British roots leads to a cultural revaluation that - however difficult and confusing- paradoxically turns her into an embodied protagonist of intercultural difference.

The *jouissance* is, in fact, a key process when aiming at a reciprocal and critically aware understanding of cultural difference. An *unheimlich* and disturbing sense of confusion can lead to a fuller sense of cultural belonging and depth. As Marie puts it:

At the same time, it happens to me to feel foreign in Britain. I was in the London underground once and had not paid the full fare for the journey. The man thought I was French and told me with a very strong English accent: "Deux francs!"... Well the amount I had to pay anyway, but he told me that in French.<sup>7</sup>

Having gained the status of a foreigner in Paris, Marie is more likely to have an uncanny relationship with her own cultural identity whenever she returns to England. This added cultural uncertainty can be understood as Marie's *objet a*, shaping a reflexive cultural process raising more potential questions about her sense of belonging than answers.

Marie's London episode emphasises how she has become a foreigner to *herself*, misread, misunderstood and mistaken by an English man, in the very country in which she grew up. The humour in her anecdote is a defence in itself, as it prevents her from *really* wondering how foreign she actually is and why the man identified her as different from him. The uncanny occurs in such mundane daily situations that are ruled by convention and reiteration: what could be more banal and repetitive than buying an underground ticket? She experiences the conflict of her difference in what can be perceived as an inappropriate and unexpected context, however emphasising how the *jouissance* of her cultural being can only be attained in a situation where she has no control.

The foreigner's space opens up a schizophrenic dimension experienced by the graduates in cultural terms. They are not only divided through their own words and split between the diversity of their belonging, but also through the mirror image context of their professional lives and their experience of language as field of the other. The situation of graduates working and living abroad for the first time offers a unique opportunity to experience *jouissance* and the density of being through an exposure to and understanding of cultural difference. Difference is only attainable when one realises that it is out of reach:

Ne pas chercher à fixer, à chosifier l'étrangeté de l'étranger. Juste la toucher, l'effleurer, sans lui donner de structure définitive. Simplement en esquisser le mouvement perpétuel à travers quelques-uns des visages disparates déployés sous nos yeux aujourd'hui, à travers quelques-unes de ses figures anciennes changeantes dispersées dans l'histoire. L'alléger aussi, cette étrangeté, en y revenant sans cesse -mais de plus en plus rapidement. S'évader de sa haine et de son fardeau, les fuir non par le nivellement et l'oubli, mais par la reprise *harmonieuse* des différences qu'elle suppose et propage.<sup>8</sup>

Kristeva's depiction of the foreigner's difference as untouchable and indefinable force also underlines the fragility inherent in the graduates' narratives and how they can be reminded that they *do not* belong within their new surroundings. Marie recalls her first encounter with French administration in the following way:

There is so much red tape nonsense in France, and I find that extremely annoying. I do not have a national insurance number at the moment, and although I applied for one more than a year ago, every time I call I am told I am English, even though I have the French nationality. And then they answer: "Yes, but you were born in London, so I will need such document." And I say: "But I have provided you with that one already." And their



reply is: "Yes, but you gave it to another office." And I say: "Did they not send it to you?" and so on...<sup>9</sup>

The fear, anxieties -and potential hatred- directed towards the graduates' difference only make them more powerful in cultural terms, as the rejection and fallible managing of difference paradoxically emphasise its subversive strength and radical impact. Within a context of cultural marketisation and commodification, the graduates' difference *and* desire for difference operate as challenging voices within the global.

In her analysis of the foreigner's impact on communities, Kristeva argues that hatred is a desire for the other that has become too intense to be contained by subjectivity:

Vivre la haine: l'étranger se formule souvent ainsi son existence, mais le double sens de l'expression lui échappe. Sentir constamment la haine des autres, n'avoir d'autre milieu que cette haine-là. Comme une femme qui se plie, complaisante et complice, au rejet que son mari lui signifie dès qu'elle esquisse le moindre mot, geste, propos. Comme un enfant qui se cache, peureux et coupable, convaincu d'avance de mériter la colère de ses parents. Dans l'univers d'esquives et de faux-semblants qui constituent ses pseudo-rapports aux pseudo-autres, la haine procure à l'étranger une consistance. C'est à cette paroi douloureuse mais sûre, et en ce sens, familière, qu'il se heurte pour s'affirmer présent aux autres et à lui-même. La haine le rend réel, authentique en quelque sorte, solide, ou simplement existant.<sup>10</sup>

Foreigners are figures of difference because they always *escape*.

The multiplicity of the graduates' sense of cultural belonging is -unsuccessfully- dealt with within binary frameworks and fetishised approaches. Difference is a dynamic site of cultural flux and resistance to leading discourses, whereby conflict and contradiction condition reflexive being. One has to wonder here what is so unnerving and disturbing about difference and why does it generate extreme reactions and behaviours. I suggest that difference keeps on resisting definitions and categories. In his analysis of what makes foreigners different from us, Žižek implies that the drive for categorisation and control emphasises the threat difference poses to subjectivity:

What does our intolerance towards foreigners feed on? What is it that irritates us in them and disturbs our psychic balance? Even at the level of a simple phenomenological description, the crucial characteristic of this cause is that it cannot be pinpointed to some clearly defined observable property: although we can usually enumerate a series of features that annoy us with "them" (the way they laugh too loudly, the bad smell of their food, etc.), these features function as indicators of a more radical strangeness. Foreigners may look and act like us, but there is some unfathomable *je ne sais quoi*, something "in them more than me" that makes them "not quite human"<sup>11</sup>

The *je ne sais quoi* evoked by Žižek here forms a point of escape and impossibility characterising one's experience of difference as unbearable *jouissance*. Since difference can never be controlled, it represents a threat to the (relative) stability of communities.

## 5.7. Reflexivity and Reification within Carla's Narrative

After graduating with a language degree, Carla found her first job abroad as a guide, dealing with British tourists in Italy. She was born in Britain, but grew up in an Italian family with strong, traditional values. She was in her late twenties at the time of the interview and spoke Italian fluently. She had just graduated and previously spent a year abroad in Turin as a student. As a teenager, she worked in the fish and chips restaurant her father owned before being able to afford to go to university in her mid-twenties and study. Her Year Abroad was an experience she had mixed feelings about, even though it helped her improve her spoken level of Italian. Carla shows an awareness of distinction, consumption and commodification that distinguishes her interview from Marie's. This part analyses her sense of cultural *jouissance* while bearing in mind the reified status of cultural difference within Western capitalism.

At the beginning of our discussion, she stresses the importance of status when working in Italy:

You feel more important, because, whatever job you do, you have a certain amount of status and status in Italy is very important, and when you are a student -it depends on the job and the profession obviously- but having work, simply being able to earn money and live independently gives you a certain amount of status. I also felt I was more productive. When I lived in Italy as a student, I did not feel I was able to fill my time. I felt I did not have enough to do and with a job I have things to do. Studying in Italy is something that is quite a lonely activity, if you want to call it like that, because on the whole few people go to lectures in Italy and study is very much an individual thing. What you are studying and how you do at your exams... That is not a collective thing like studying in Britain,



because it was more of a class situation, and I was happy with that type of learning. In Italy, it is very much you and the books. I found that quite difficult and lonely. With the job, it brought me more into contact with people.<sup>12</sup>

Carla's interest in status proves her awareness of the economics of intersubjectivity at work throughout residency abroad and the ensuing valuing of cultural experiences inherent in contemporary capitalism. She is -like other graduates introduced in previous sections- very aware of the price of difference and how experiencing working life abroad has social, economical and professional weight.

Work gives Carla a sense of place and confidence she did not experience as a student. It is an empowering process whereby production and status are predominant. The graduates often deal with difference in pragmatic, proactive and efficient ways. It is therefore no wonder that Carla gives production positive connotations as opposed to an analysis of universities as places removed from the reality of work.

Work also grants her a stamp of social approval and integration forming a key process within the graduates' gradual assimilation to their new environments. Having certain responsibilities, a sufficient salary and a team of colleagues makes up for the uncertainties of cultural transition and professional change. Graduates earn respect from others through their achievements at work. They prioritise their careers because they want to be acknowledged as successful foreigners and fully functioning members of society. Work therefore plays a central role within their lives by guaranteeing them with a recognised status and facilitated integration. As Kristeva puts it:

L'étranger est celui qui travaille. Alors que les indigènes du monde civilisé, des pays avancés, trouvent le labeur vulgaire et arborent les airs aristocratiques de la désinvolture et du caprice (quand ils le peuvent...), vous reconnaîtrez l'étranger à ceci qu'il considère *encore* le travail comme une valeur. Une nécessité vitale certes, l'unique moyen de sa survie, qu'il n'auréole pas nécessairement de gloire mais revendique simplement comme un droit primaire, degré zéro de la dignité. Encore que certains, une fois le minimum satisfait, éprouvent aussi un bonheur aigu à s'affirmer dans et par le travail: comme si c'était *lui* la terre d'élection, l'unique source de réussite possible, et surtout la qualité personnelle inaltérable, intransmissible, mais transportable par-delà les frontières et les propriétés.<sup>13</sup>

But the foreigner's entry into the world of work also implies the discovery of cultural commodification and reification within Western capitalism. Cultural discovery itself becomes a form of work which has to be tackled by the graduates. I show in Section One how professional schedules and priorities also limit the graduates in cultural terms by preventing them from engaging with others. Work *does not stop* once work is over. As Carla suggests, difference has to be worked on throughout residency and professional life abroad:

You are not immediately welcomed. When you know someone -or you are introduced by someone that they know- then you are welcomed much more easily. You have to work very hard at getting to know people first in Italy before you will be accepted, so there is an investment of time to be made there with people and say hi, introduce yourself, you said what you wanted, talk to them, and then you go back, again and again and again... And only when you go back again and again and when you give them time, give them your time, then they begin to sort of want you. But you cannot expect much from them at the first meeting, whereas in England, in Britain, I think it is much colder, you simply

state what you want, and they can either offer you that service or not. In Italy, it is different, you have to give them time to get to know you.<sup>14</sup>

The economics of intersubjectivity shape Carla's understanding of cultural difference here. Her narrative echoes the logics of managerial investment and search for quick results. Problems occur, however, when she realises that mutual relationships and cultural trust take time to build up and develop.

There is an economic flavour to her words placing intersubjective encounters abroad within the reified context of cultural exchange and marketisation. She tries to make sure her investment is worthwhile and hope that something will be gained in return, as she mentions expectations and intersubjective strategies. It is not certain, however, how "fruitful" the investment will be. Carla's ongoing frustration proves that there are no guarantees of success when engaging with cultural difference on a reified level. Her repetitive use of "giving time" and "again" show how tiring and emotionally draining investments can be. She ends up defining her interactions with others as "hard work", which speaks of a sense of annoyance not dissimilar to Chiara's in Section One.

On the one hand, Carla's ongoing efforts and subsequent frustration demonstrate that investments may not be a payable approach towards the building up of critically aware intercultural links. On the other, her struggle with difference and gradual realisation that expected results are not always met can be perceived as a positive - and eminently reflexive- appreciation of difference as a unmanageable and uncommodified force.



Beyond the mercantile and status-driven considerations affecting Carla's experience of difference, one also comes across a reflexive dimension of cultural doubt and questioning affecting her own sense of belonging:

*Did going abroad make things clearer or more confusing for you?*

Probably more confusing because I have made my link with Italy much stronger.

*Do you feel that you have lost something going abroad?*

Yes.

*What would you say you had lost?*

I have lost this strength of contact or the strength of belonging. Since I was born in Scotland from Italian parents, I have lost some of the strength of feeling, of the closeness I had for Scotland. I do not feel quite that I belong so much there now as I did before, and maybe it is why I am going back.<sup>15</sup>

I argue that Carla's loss is necessary and important in cultural terms towards the opening up of a reflexive dimension placing her own sense of identity outside simplified boundaries. Carla's experience of cultural loss can, in fact, be likened to the mirror stage where the child gazes at its external reflection. Her *jouissance* as intercultural being precisely starts when she becomes aware of the absence of a safe, essentialised and stagnant sense of cultural identity. The *jouissance* creates a space of cultural contradiction and conflict shaping the core of her identity.

This ambivalent space of identification is illustrated by her reflexive analysis of cultural belonging:

I think it is idealistic to think you can belong to one group. In reality, the number of people who can actually belong to one single nationality is very few, because in any country there are divisions, there are borders and people who do not feel fully... For example, in Italy, there are many people who do not feel fully Italian. In Britain many people do not feel fully English, or fully Scottish or fully anything. So it is idealistic to think that you can, but it is very difficult also not to be able to identify with something very, very strongly, with one particular nationality.<sup>16</sup>

Carla's impossibility -but also refusal- to "feel fully anything" echoes Marie's defensive attitude towards essentialism as well as a sense of resistance to the cultural simplification implied by the global and fragmented identities of Western post-modern lives. Carla and Marie's realisation of their cultural complexity is a painful -but reflexively powerful- process heightening awareness:

I get very defensive about Italian culture, but I also get defensive of British culture when I am home in Britain. When Italians talk about things in Britain, I get very defensive of it. What I am defensive of I think is difference. I defend different cultures right to be different.<sup>17</sup>

Carla's defence of difference is ambivalent given her professional role as a tourist guide working abroad for British tourists. She has to come to terms with the cultural implications of her work as a Scottish-Italian woman looking after tourists. In this sense, Carla's working context favours reflexivity by offering mirror images of both cultures. The fact that she is in daily contact with the two major influences shaping her identity generates key conflicts encouraging critical thought. Her narrative underlines the taking place and attempted resolve of internal and external struggles between British and Italian cultures.

She is in fact keen to emphasise the narrow-mindedness of her compatriots when giving me narrative snapshots of working life abroad:

*Did you feel when you worked in Italy that you wanted to spend more time with the Italians or the foreigners?*

The Italians definitely, in fact I was beginning to get very anti-British.

*Why? Was it because you felt you could judge their lack of understanding for Italian culture? Did you actually feel superior to them in a way? Did you feel that you knew more than they did?*

I was not always more knowledgeable than they were, sometimes people came in and they had quite a lot of knowledge, but it was very occasionally. But I think maybe that this is very relative to the fact that the kind of people who came on the type of holiday that were offered where I was working were not very independent and were not the kind of people who made a real effort to know other cultures.

*Is that something you expected from them?*

Well, I expected them... In fact I wanted them to have more knowledge. In the end I realised that it is something they would never have and that the majority of people I dealt with would be at that level.

*Did you try to challenge this?*

Occasionally, but it was not a good idea really.

*Were you thinking at the beginning that you could expand their knowledge and perceptions? Or did you quickly realise there was no use in doing that?*

No, I had this enthusiasm for anything Italian until the end and I tried to encourage their interest in all things Italian. But unfortunately it went down better with the British clients that I had -or most of them- when you criticised the way of life. I felt very much that they came in and wanted to be openly critical towards Italy.



*Why do you think they acted like this? It does not really make sense to go to Italy just to criticise it, does it?*

I do not know but they were very often critical. For example, when I tried to explain to them money and the different types of notes and coins, then there would often be someone who would say: “Why don’t they change the money? Why don’t they do this?” or “Why are the shops not open longer during the day?” “Why can’t I have cold milk in my coffee?” “Why can’t I have warm tea?” “Why can’t they make a cup of tea?” “Why is there no kettle in my room?” They seemed to want the things they were used to at home and did not seem to appreciate the fact that they were in a different culture.

*Was that hurtful when someone criticised something?*

It was not hurtful, it was very annoying to the point where I did not care in the end really whether they liked it or not and became quite indifferent to their criticism.

*Do you actually have an experience of Italians spending some time in Britain? Does the same sort of criticism come up or do they behave in a different way? I am trying to see whether or not Italians would behave the same way if they were in England.*

Well, I think it is specifically British. When the Italians go abroad they try to speak English for example. Many of them make an effort to speak English, I suppose that one thing that you find with Italians is that they tend to look for Italian food and the British as well, they want their eggs and chips all the time.<sup>18</sup>

There are several key points developed by Carla in the previous -and rather long- quote. The first thing is how she -perhaps involuntarily- stresses the fundamental role of language within intercultural encounters, as she blames the British tourists for not making an effort to learn Italian. Her understanding of successful cultural interactions therefore depends on having access to the other's language. This is a crucial point of

view which -as shown in the previous section- is echoed by practitioners and teachers within the field of Education.

Carla's anger in this context is, however, not purely linguistic as she has to come to terms with cultural intolerance and ignorance, too. Her reference to the tourists' eating habits highlights a clear refusal on their part to change their behaviour over the length of their stay. This lack of openness is something she struggles with and finds difficult to accept, as the complaints addressed by the British towards Italian culture are critical *but not* reflexive. There is little trace of the tourists questioning their own cultural patterns and reflecting upon themselves critically. Carla is annoyed by their inability to engage in a reflexive -and self-critical- understanding of their own background bearing the potential to completely transform their vision of Italian life. Their insistence on exporting British habits to foreign shores underlines their commodified consumer approach as well as the impossibility to incorporate difference within.

It is interesting to note how Carla senses her own potential in challenging -and educating- the British tourists, while paradoxically giving up on it. There may be a realisation on her part that the commodified context of global tourism might not provide the best forum for the challenging and questioning of cultural preconceptions and stereotypes. She may worry about keeping her job and decides to make them happy by not confronting them. There is, nevertheless, a bitter tone in her overall analysis of the tourism industry:

But unfortunately it went down better with the British clients that I had -or most of them- when you criticised the way of life. I felt very much that they came in and wanted to be openly critical towards Italy.<sup>19</sup>

Carla's position as an intercultural speaker echoes Byram's denunciation of the commercial<sup>20</sup> while emphasising her awareness of marketisation and the cultural isolation it puts the tourists in. They are in *contact* with difference but clearly *removed* from it as they display an overtly critical and biased attitude towards the Italian life.

In the analysis of her professional context, Clara sees tourism as a "dream", a "fantasy" and an "ideal of a place" she all describes as "superficial"<sup>21</sup>. Her criticism echoes the sheen of the global and its emphasis on cultural promiscuity and immediacy lacking reflexive depth. This selling of a place ultimately stands for a fetishised and accessorised consumption of difference she finds rather difficult to come to terms with.

Her position can, nevertheless, be perceived as a privileged one in intercultural terms. The demands of her working life do not prevent her from addressing the Italians in critical ways, too:

When they [Italians] go abroad, they are also critical of what they find, and they are also making a statement when they go abroad, they are very well dressed. they like to make a fashion statement wherever they go. There is something specific to them, there is a thing like "bella figura"<sup>22</sup> that they have wherever they go and travel abroad. Travelling abroad is a status thing for the Italians because many of them often do not.<sup>23</sup>



It is interesting to note how she underlines fashion statements as powerful economic, social and cultural messages when describing the Italians' dress sense. Carla shows an awareness of holidays abroad as accessories of distinction with powerful connotations inherent in financial and cultural capital. The field of the accessory developed in Section One is to be encountered once more through her evocation of fashion as a key signifier within the economics of intersubjectivity. Fashion and facilitated travel deploy a sense of cultural and social affluence that echoes Mario's cosmopolitan and international lifestyle. Carla's awareness of the importance of status approaches travelling itself as a form of conspicuous display embodying a key relationship between consumption, distinction and commodification within the globalised experience of cultural difference.

Her realisation of difference as commodified accessory operates on two contradictory levels. On the one hand, her working role as a tourist guide creates personal and cultural dilemmas that are problematic and difficult to solve. On the other, this conflicting dimension allows Carla to reflect upon the cultural accessory and difference in critical ways. The next part examines the seemingly seamless negotiation of cultural influences described by Claire, a multilingual Norwegian graduate working in London.

## 5.8. Intercultural Being as Socioeconomic and Cultural Privilege: an Analysis of Claire's Narrative

Claire is a Norwegian woman in her mid-twenties who has an Italian father and moved to the UK at the age of 18 in order to enrol at a Scottish university. She speaks Norwegian, Italian, French and English fluently. She grew up in an affluent city in Norway and was sent to the French *Lycée* and International School as a child and teenager. After getting an honours degree in Italian, she moved to London straight after graduation to work for an Italian bank based in the City. In the previous section, I have reflected upon the notion of privilege as expressed within the field of Education and the reflexive position of native speakers working and living abroad for the first time. The experiences of Claire offer here a contrasting vision of intercultural being and reflexivity as the result of a privileged, affluent and international upbringing. I examine being intercultural as a distinctive privilege within her narrative of working life abroad and personal background. Claire's words can, in many ways, be contrasted to Carla and Marie's somewhat problematic and difficult negotiation of the multiple cultural influences shaping their sense of identity.

Claire's narrative has to be reframed within a context of cultural, social and economic privilege where distinction -in Bourdieu's sense- plays an essential role. One of the most striking features of the interview is that she does not display the usual "symptoms" of intercultural *jouissance* and rarely evokes strong conflicts or disadvantages when narrating her experiences. In fact, it is perhaps what *is not there* within her narrative that hints at potential problems raised by her upbringing.

Her narration of working life abroad *speaks of* the kind of privileged life and milieu depicted by Mario in Section One. Claire's negotiation of diverse cultural influences is rather seamless and uncomplicated. She grew up within a comfortable and international environment. Talking about her nannies as a child, she stresses the cosmopolitan nature of her upbringing:

My parents also had to travel so much for their job that I grew up with au pairs. I think we had, like, nineteen different people, so I have always lived with either French or Swiss people.<sup>24</sup>

Claire's childhood *speaks of* comfort, privilege and differentiation. Evoking her current working life, she is keen to emphasise internationalism and the kind of cultural adaptability that comes with socioeconomic privilege:

*At the end of the day, you do not really feel like a foreigner in London since you are surrounded with other foreigners. It is also quite a cosmopolitan place and this is probably why you feel comfortable here.*

I think so, too. You will end up having so many friends from different countries here, so many international as well as British people, which is very important to me because I would feel very sad living in a country and not have friends from the place. Anyone could feel at home in London.<sup>25</sup>

Her emphasis on international friendships and assumption that "anyone could feel at home in London" relates to Mario's evocation of global lifestyles and cultural capital in interesting and parallel ways. Claire's evocation of an all-embracing cultural exchange taking place in London also hints at the strength of global economics and insistence on cultural promiscuity and constant exchange. Her story of cultural



privilege and global capital is also inherent in her evocation of French school. When Claire was separated from her older sister who was sent to boarding school in Switzerland, she pursued her school studies at the international school in Oslo and remembers these years in the following way:

*So you went to French school.*

Exactly, in Norway. And that was until the end of la seconde [Secondary], then I went to the international school for the last two years, because the people you got to know in French school in a small country like Norway, they are mostly diplomats' sons or daughters, so you never really got to know anyone.

*What was the difference between the French and international schools in terms of teaching?*

Amazing. Huge. The French school was extremely disciplined and mine was probably more so than you would find in a normal common school in France, because the teachers demanded such a huge amount of respect basically, and they were very strict. We also had so much homework to do, so it was really quite a tough school. When I started going to the international school, I was obviously a lot older, but it was influenced by the Norwegian classic system, and this system is extremely relaxed. It is very good in many ways, because it focuses more on children's artistic sides rather than the scholastic ones. It is a lot more creative. They leave much more room for the children to use their own imagination and creativity.<sup>26</sup>

If Claire does not seem so keen on describing her current working context, she nevertheless emphasises the context of her upbringing. I feel that this is significant in several ways, since it places her within a distinctive social group, therefore giving her cosmopolitan cultural capital even before entering the world of work. Her travel experiences also imply that Claire is comfortable with foreign cultures and should

therefore have no major problem working for an Italian bank. She speaks fondly of Italy and her first encounter with Florentine life is depicted in the following way:

And then I decided to go to Italy because I am very interested in art and drawing and painting, so I thought I was going to go and learn to draw and paint, you know. So I had a look and discovered that in order to do that, you had to speak Italian and then you could take some courses. I went to a language school in Florence, and I took a drawing course where I was the only pupil who was actually interested, and I took a cooking course as well. It was so much fun because I met people, we went out a lot.<sup>27</sup>

Claire's first experience of staying in a foreign country is embedded within a socially charged and rather gendered cultural context. Her Florence experience is the ultimate fantasy for any *jeune fille de bonne famille* willing to develop her artistic and creative skills. If the cooking course is heavily gendered, the art and drawing courses are framed within an imitation of aristocratic lifestyles by the upper-middle classes, an imitation process identified by Bourdieu in *Distinction*<sup>28</sup>. Claire also stresses the "fun" and playful aspects of intercultural encounters as opposed to potentially conflicting and problematic ones. Such a stance echoes Mario's "work hard, play hard" approach and his emphasis on distraction and *divertissement* within the workplace. These graduates' lack of social and economic anxieties leads to an entertaining vision of cultural difference emphasising privileged backgrounds. The playful, pleasurable and rewarding elements inherent in their narratives all denote facilitated interactions with other within the global sphere whereby difference is rarely experienced as radical conflict or challenging force. Difference seems much more approachable and enjoyable when dealing with individuals coming from rather comfortable socioeconomic backgrounds.

Claire's experience is, in fact, quite *different* from Carla's who had to work in her father's fish and chips restaurant before enrolling at university. Carla's frustrating experience of Italy as a working woman differs significantly from Claire's idyllic fantasy of Tuscan school trips. Although she happily starts to learn Italian during her stay abroad, not everyone seems to share Claire's enthusiasm for the Italian immersion: "I went to a language school in Florence, and I took a drawing course where I was the only pupil who was actually interested"<sup>29</sup> Such episodes indicate that socioeconomic privileges do not necessarily translate into cultural curiosity and openness. Being privileged also breeds cultural contempt and disrespect towards others. Taking cultural difference for granted is, in fact, the privilege of those who can afford to ignore it.

Claire's interest in Italian culture -she graduates with a degree in Italian and is working for an Italian bank- can nevertheless be perceived in reflexive terms. Travelling and coming in contact with cultural difference gives her a level of freedom, independence and confidence she has perhaps not experienced before. Her Italian stay can, in fact, be perceived as a paradoxical form of liberation from a strict and restrictive schooling system, even though it reproduces social privileges in cultural terms.

Claire is, however, aware of her own privileged situation and experiences. She often uses the words "gift", "lucky", "privilege" and "thankful" at key moments within the interview. She shows an appreciation for difference and interest in others which is clearly removed from the narrow mindedness of other pupils. She acknowledges her



studies abroad as a “gift from my parents”<sup>30</sup> while showing awareness of “the privilege that I have had growing up in this sort of environment.”<sup>31</sup> Claire displays a critical -and reflexive- analysis of her own background making her a grateful and aware woman in cultural terms. She expresses, like other graduates, a clear refusal of cultural essentialism and simplification:

It probably is [easier], as long as you stay in your own culture, but then I think as soon as you leave it, then you start to encounter problems. It is probably easier, but then it is not as interesting. It is very good as well, because it keeps the cultures together in a way. I mean you can tell for example the girl that I work with in my team, she is so Italian in every single way.

*So you feel positive about it.*

Yes. I feel very lucky and I am very thankful.<sup>32</sup>

Claire displays reflexive *jouissance* without the cultural pain and confusion it often involves. If she rejoices in what she acknowledges as a unique and privileged situation, Claire nevertheless *escapes* Kristeva’s tragic portrayal of the foreigner’s psyche and ongoing conflicts. This is, perhaps, hardly surprising given the privileged nature of her upbringing. Her approach to the multiplicity forming her cultural core stresses the positive while showing an awareness of social and cultural contrasts. She also displays reflexive resistance when asked about the possibility of cultural identification:

*How do you feel yourself? Norwegian, Swiss, French, British? If I asked you just like that, what is the culture you could relate to the most?*

That is a question I have never been able to answer, and I do not think maybe that I ever will be.<sup>33</sup>

Claire's statement shuns categorised and measurable visions of identity while opening up a space of indefinable difference standing for the contradictory and ambivalent process of cultural *jouissance*. Her notion of intercultural being is, in fact, echoed within Maalouf's autobiography:

Moitié français, donc, et moitié libanais? Pas du tout! L'identité ne se compartimente pas, elle ne se répartit ni par moitiés, ni par tiers, ni par plages cloisonnées. Je n'ai pas plusieurs identités, j'en ai une seule, faite de tous les éléments qui l'ont façonnée, selon un "dosage" particulier qui n'est jamais le même d'une personne à l'autre.<sup>34</sup>

The psychoanalytical concept of cultural *jouissance* has, in fact, several limitations when confronted with Claire's case, her own *dosage* being far more liberated from than subjected to the field of the other. The way she refers to a colleague at the bank as "so Italian in every single way" is a proof of a pronounced awareness and distanciation in cultural terms. Her rejoicing in uniqueness and individual difference echoes Serge's sense of pride previously analysed within the last section. The confidence she has in her own identity as an educated foreign graduate appears at several times within the interview. When discussing how she may -or may not- feel unique at work, her sense of self does come across:

Italians can look at Norwegians and think that they are cheap. Fair enough, but do not include me in that stereotypical view, because I am not part of it you know, it is strange to explain in a way.

*Yes, but you have been brought up with different values and have had this distance from the very beginning.*

Exactly.

*I mean it is not bad. What is interesting is how you deal with it, use it and live with it on a daily basis. Some people find it difficult, and some rather easy.*

But my parents also had to travel so much for their job that I grew up with au pairs. I think we had, like, nineteen different people, so I have always lived with either French or Swiss people.

*So I guess you do not feel very different at work.*

Well, I guess I do feel different in a way, because there is no one at the bank with the sort of background that I have. They are either all Italians or completely English, or they might be Italians who grew up in Britain, but I have not met anyone with the same sort of background so far, and I guess that makes me different.

*Do you feel superior?*

It would sound bad if I said yes, would it not?

*No, not at all. You can say yes. Do you think it has made you a better person?*

I think it is something that is better because it broadens your mind, it made me open to different sorts of people. It is the way I grew up and it is easier for me to get on with people.<sup>35</sup>

Her underlining of the singularity and uniqueness of her situation can be understood in both social and psychoanalytical terms. Her firm belief that no one at the bank will ever be like her denotes a strong awareness of her social status as well as cultural capital. Even though she does not refer to it in terms of social and distinctive competition, Claire's tentative identification with cultural superiority relates to a



pronounced sense of distinction and privilege that is, in fact, emphasised by the “Italianicity” of the bank. Her refusal to be pigeon holed or mimetically adopt her surroundings recalls Kristeva’s portrayal of the foreigner and his/her proud refusal of easy definitions.

Claire is not -unlike Mario and other graduates I encountered- very career-oriented and willing to efficiently translate her own sense of difference into the professional sphere. She clearly refuses to be assimilated to one culture in particular, whether it be a working or national one. When asked if she would ever consider going back to Norway, her answer is as follows:

*Could you live and work in Norway now?*

Yes, I think I could. It would not be right for me now at this stage of my life, but...

*Do you think you will go back at some point?*

I probably will, but I am not sure. What I say is that it all depends on circumstances.

*On your work?*

No, not work, because I am not very career-oriented, more the sort of people I meet.<sup>36</sup>

Claire’s emphasis of her lack of interest for her career has again aristocratic undertones underplaying strands of social and cultural competition within her workplace. Claire resists competition on several levels by refusing to fully engage with colleagues in the workplace since she perceives herself as above the rest and somewhat removed from her surrounding. This critical sense of her own difference leads to an appreciation of difference as cultural gain rather than commodified tool exchanged and performed within the workplace. Her narrative does, in fact, illustrate

Byram's notion of intercultural speaker in interesting ways. By approaching cultural difference as personal -rather than valuable- wealth, Claire inscribes herself within an uncommodified framework of difference appreciation distancing itself from the all-commercial and reified discourse of the global. Her refusal of cultural definitions and fetishised categorisation illustrates the central point I made in this section: difference always *escapes* and cannot be managed. The experiences and place of the foreigner - as understood by Kristeva in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*- are characterised by cultural flux, internal conflicts and reflexive negotiation. Pride and desire, singularity and acceptance, acknowledgement and refusal all stand for an ambivalent sense of *jouissance* shaping the working graduate's space and his/her cultural interactions with others.

Kristeva argues that difference starts from within and that what one perceives as radically different can also be one's reflection. The specular contexts of intercultural encounters bear narcissistic -and yet external- dynamics of cultural change shaping one's necessary relations to others. The visceral and compulsory nature of intercultural experiences as expressed by the graduates living and working abroad for the first time emphasises how difference can trigger *anything but* indifference.



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<sup>1</sup> Cormeraie (1995) uses a Freudian approach to language and intercultural issues echoing some of the key introduced by Kristeva (1988).

<sup>2</sup> See Kristeva (1998).

<sup>3</sup> *Appendix G Marie's Interview*, p.2, 2000, Paris.

<sup>4</sup> *Appendix G Marie's Interview*, p.9, 2000, Paris.

<sup>5</sup> The foreigner's *bonheur* stems from the shock of his or her difference when challenging the social and cultural cohesion formed by communities. As Kristeva puts it "The foreigner's face burns with happiness. At first, one is struck by his peculiarity – those eyes, those lips, those cheek bones, that skin unlike others, all that distinguishes him and reminds one that there is *someone* there. The difference in that face reveals in paroxystic fashion what any face should reveal to a careful glance: the non-existence of banality in human beings."

Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to ourselves*, p.3, 1991, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo and Singapore.

<sup>6</sup> *Appendix G Marie's Interview*, p.10, 2000, Paris.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p.11, 1988, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris.

"Let us not seek to solidify, to turn the otherness of the foreigner into a thing. Let us merely touch it, brush by it, without giving it a permanent structure. Simply sketching out its perpetual motion through some of its variegated aspects spread out before our eyes today, through some of its former, changing representations scattered throughout history. Let us also lighten that otherness by constantly going back to it – but more and more swiftly. Let us escape its hatred, its burden, fleeing them not through levelling and forgetting, but through the *harmonious* repetition of the differences it implies and spreads."

Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, 1991, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo and Singapore.

<sup>9</sup> *Appendix G Marie's Interview*, p.11, 2000, Paris.

<sup>10</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p.24, 1988, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris.

"Experiencing hatred: that is the way the foreigner often expresses his life, but the double meaning of the phrase escapes him. Constantly feeling the hatred of others, knowing no other environment than that hatred. Like a woman who, accommodating and conniving, abides by her husband's rebuff as soon as she makes the merest suggestion of a word, gesture or intention. Like a child that hides, fearful and guilty, convinced beforehand that it deserves its parents' anger. In the world of dodges and shams that make up his pseudo-relationships with pseudo-others, hatred provides the foreigner with consistency. Against that wall, painful but certain, and in that sense familiar, he knocks himself in order to assert, to others and to himself, that he is here. Hatred makes him real, authentic so to speak, solid, or simply existing."

Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, 1991, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo and Singapore.

<sup>11</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "I Hear You with My Eyes", in *At First Sight*, edited by Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek, p.105, 1996, Duke University Press, Durham and London.

<sup>12</sup> *Appendix B Carla's Interview*, p.2, 2000, Paris.

<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, p.30.31, 1988, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris.

"The foreigner is the one who works. While natives of the civilised world, of developed countries, think that work is vulgar and display the aristocratic manners of offhandedness and whim (when they can...), you will recognise the foreigner in that he *still* considers work as a value. A vital necessity, to be sure, his sole means of survival, on which he does not necessarily place a halo of glory but simply claims as a primary right, the zero degree of dignity. Even though some, once their minimal needs are satisfied, also experience an acute pleasure in asserting themselves in and through work: as if *it* were the chosen soil, the only source of possible success, and above all the personal, steadfast, non-transferable quality, but fit to be moved beyond borders and properties."

Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, 1991, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo and Singapore.

<sup>14</sup> *Appendix B Carla's Interview*, p.4, 2000, Paris.

<sup>15</sup> *Appendix B Carla's Interview*, p.9.10, 2000, Paris.

<sup>16</sup> *Appendix B Carla's Interview*, p.5, 2000, Paris.

<sup>17</sup> *Appendix B Carla's Interview*, p.9, 2000, Paris.

<sup>18</sup> *Appendix B Carla's Interview*, p.6.7.8, 2000, Paris.

<sup>19</sup> *Appendix B Carla's Interview*, p.7, 2000, Paris.

<sup>20</sup> See Byram (1997).



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<sup>21</sup> See *Appendix B Carla's Interview*, p.11.12, 2000, Paris.

<sup>22</sup> The "bella figura" refers to the successful performance of an individual in a specific social context. "Fare bella figura" is to cut a fine figure, but the figura can also be "brutta" -poor- depending on its reception and how the individual's performance is assessed.

<sup>23</sup> *Appendix B Carla's Interview*, p.8, 2000, Paris.

<sup>24</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.9, 2000, London.

<sup>25</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.8, 2000, London.

<sup>26</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.2, 2000, London.

<sup>27</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.3, 2000, London.

<sup>28</sup> See Bourdieu (1979).

<sup>29</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.3, 2000, London.

<sup>30</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.2, 2000, London.

<sup>31</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.7, 2000, London.

<sup>32</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.10, 2000, London.

<sup>33</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.5, 2000, London.

<sup>34</sup> Amin Maalouf, *Les Identités Meurtrières*, p.10, 1998, Grasset, Paris.

"Half French and half Lebanese then? Not at all! Identity cannot be compartmentalised or split into halves, thirds or closed entities. I do not have several identities, I have one only, made up of all the elements shaping it, according to a special "dosage" changing from one person to another."

My translation.

<sup>35</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.9.10, 2000, London.

<sup>36</sup> *Appendix D Claire's Interview*, p.7, 2000, London.

## **Part Six**

### **Conclusions**

## 6. Conclusion

The individuals I interviewed can be perceived as key actors within global economics and the context of intercultural communication and exchange. I examined and analysed their narratives in order to establish how their working environments may - or may not- influence their readings of cultural difference. They are educated, multilingual and socially privileged individuals forming a relatively new breed of cultural élite enjoying the economic benefits of the global and its promotion of residency and working life abroad. They have the opportunity to live in foreign countries and achieve professional aspirations in successful and tangible ways. They are products of (Higher) Education and highly employable individuals who perform accordingly in diverse working contexts. I focused on their experiences of cultural difference within corporate and international business, education, administration, tourism and banking. This selection evidenced that foreign graduates living and working abroad for the first time can be encountered in a variety of professional contexts.

In the Methodology, I reflected upon the difficulties and struggles concerning the finding of informants within the field. If graduates working and living abroad for the first time may be perceived as a logical evolution of the global paradigm, they are,



nevertheless, hard to locate and come across. Acting as an academic researcher does not always grant open-mindedness and free access to professional contexts: one of the findings within the research was, in fact, the experience of diffidence and wariness from business organisations as well as the graduates themselves. As far as empirical research is concerned, access is somewhat facilitated within Language Education.

My critical exploration of the dynamics operating between working environments and the graduates' organisation of their own sense of cultural difference leads to contradictory strands of social analysis highlighting the ambiguous and ambivalent nature of their narratives and experiences of residency and working life abroad.

One of the research outcomes is the realisation that the cultural homogenisation and standardisation inherent in Western societies create new forms of culture shock expressed by the graduates' narratives. In Section One, Mario's portrayal of residency and working life abroad illustrates the seeming smoothness and cultural isolation of the global sphere and its privileged forms of cultural interactions, while Lara's interview situates real difference outside the global workplace and self-enclosed business bubble relying on sameness and identification. If Mario's narrative of facilitated -and perhaps predictable- flexibility entails a global sense of belonging bred by the existence of a cosmopolitan, intercultural -and yet homogenous- élite of graduates acting within capitalism, Lara's portrayal of a less privileged economic environment highlights the limitations -and detrimental effects- of the global paradigm. Her resistance to the family-like ethics of her working organisation and insistence on the necessity of cultural discovery underlines a strong desire amongst the graduates to still encounter difference and its shock outside the "blandification"

and homogeneity provoked by global economics. This desire for difference remains a key feature within their narratives and shows how difference still *matters* for individuals starting their careers abroad.

In her depiction of underprivileged pupils and pedagogical problems encountered within the classroom, Laura partakes of the same desire to experience the *frisson* of difference and tackle it within her working context. I also showed how her status as a native speaker still mattered in the classroom, therefore problematising Kramsch's critique of cultural authenticity within the field of Language Education. Laura's narrative can be contrasted to Anke's pragmatic approach within Higher Education aiming at the satisfaction of students and echoing the marketisation of knowledge within contemporary capitalism. Anke's goal to satisfy the students evidenced the commercialisation of Higher Education and contrasted with Byram's inspirational - but problematic- model of the "intercultural speaker". The graduates' conformity or resistance to cultural commodification and the demands of their working environments therefore place their narratives and experiences within contradictory frameworks highlighting ambivalent reactions to cultural difference.

The concept of the culture accessory is a theoretical contribution to intercultural debates positing difference as a materialistic, fetishised and valued currency within global exchange and contemporary capitalism. The graduates are pragmatic individuals whose narratives establish difference as key added value within their curriculum. The fashion system and its ongoing display of branded accessories underline the logics of social distinction and its emphasis on social differentiation and competition. The graduates use their sense of difference, their linguistic skills and

experiences of working life abroad as key markers of internationalism and added cultural value. Residency and life abroad still have prestigious -and highly valuable- connotations understood by the graduates. This is particularly true of Chiara's interview in Section One and her fetishised descriptions of branded accessories rooted within a materialistic and commodified understanding of difference.

The graduates' awareness of their social, professional and educational capitals is embedded within the economics of intersubjectivity and its ongoing valuing affecting cultural phenomena. Having gained critical and analytical skills does not, in actual fact, prevent them from valuing themselves and their own sense of difference as key tools of exchange within capitalism. This shift also affects graduates involved in Education, who, such as Anke, show a cultural understanding of the global while adapting the marketisation of knowledge to their working environment.

The accessory speaks of the graduates' ability to successfully adapt to unknown surroundings as well as demonstrate social and professional flexibility. There is, however, a key tension between the graduates' -relatively- successful negotiation of their professional environments and the effects of change and transition on their own identities.

I relate the notion of the accessory to the field of Psychoanalysis and its treatment of language and difference. My analysis of the cultural conflicts expressed by the graduates within their narratives echoes Kristeva's portrayal of the foreigner as a complex, contradictory and ineluctable figure of difference. It contributes to a reformulation of difference through the use of Lacanian *jouissance* applied to



depictions of residency and working life abroad. I showed how the graduates come to experience cultural dilemmas not only generated by their working contexts but also by their difficult negotiation of their own cultural selves. The graduates encounter *jouissance* through the density of their being as well as the cultural relevance of their working contexts.

On the one hand, difference resists as an unreachable and indefinable form inseparable from their narratives. Serge's interview in Section Two -as well as the narratives of multilingual graduates introduced within the previous section- explore the graduates' complex negotiation of cultural identity as well as their clear refusal of compartmentalised and essentialised belonging. On the other, Mario's, Anke's, Lara's and Chiara's narratives show an understanding of what difference can *be worth* and how it operates as a major currency within global capitalism. This forms a central paradox shaping and affecting the graduates' narratives and experiences of residency and working life abroad.

Through their exposure to difference on several levels, the graduates reach a critically aware -and reflexive- vision of themselves. They are able to come to terms with what difference *means* to themselves as well as why it *matters* to their own identity.

The graduates encounter the *density* and ambivalence of difference through life and work abroad and are therefore privileged individuals in cultural terms. Their realisation that difference operates on social, economic, cultural and personal scales paradoxically underlines its ineluctable and indefinable nature. My analysis highlights

that their key cultural discovery throughout residency and working life abroad is -  
perhaps- that difference always *escapes*.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Anke's Interview**



*The interview takes place in Anke's office at the University. I turn the tape recorder on and we start chatting about her morning teaching. I try to turn it on before asking questions since I am aware the situation is rather artificial and often makes people uncomfortable. Anke talks to me about her students and how the class went with the First year groups she has within the German department. The "pressure" is on and I decide to start.*

*So why did you decide to come here then? (Stony silence...I say something silly and we laugh. She obviously did not expect "the questions" to come up that early.)*

I was working at the University in Mainz and the professor who employed me is not actually the supervisor of my PhD. The usual thing is that your supervisor is actually the one who employs you. But it was different with me because, at one point, he did not have anyone to fill his position, but I worked for him before and he knew me. He employed me then just to keep this position. He needed someone to teach anyway and asked me to do that. Then later on, as the person who -he thought- would take the position did not want it, I then stayed on for another year, but then it was quite clear that my contract would end by the end of September. Then someone mentioned that they were basically looking for someone to come to Glasgow and it was going to start just when my contract ended, so...

*Was it your first time here in Scotland?*

Well, it is the first time I have lived here. I have been here before, just for tourist holidays, right after my A levels.

*Where did you go?*

I travelled around. I started with Edinburgh and then ended up on the East Coast, came back to the West Coast basically. We did not go to Glasgow though.

*All right, ok. So it was really your first time in Scotland...*

Last August, I came one and a half month before I came here to look for a flat. I stayed for four days, looking for a flat.

*So what were your first impressions when you arrived?*

Positive actually. The weather was lovely during that week. In Germany we had 39 degrees...

*Yes, it was really hot!*

And it was 19 in Glasgow so I thought...(Big laughs.)

It was quite warm, but obviously not quite as bad as Germany, so I felt much more comfortable over here.

*So how did you find getting on with things and finding a flat?*

It has been quite easy because Klaus (a German tutor at University) picked me up at the train station and basically showed me around the University, around town.

*And you felt kind of comfortable.*

Yes, yes. I met Hans (a German lecturer at University) on the first day for dinner. I went to different parts with them together. Yes, he told me how to look for flats, what

to do. I just arrived and he showed me around, I did not have to find my way around on my own, because I was being shown. That was really...that was brilliant!

*So, it was fairly stress-free coming here and finding...*

Yes, yes.

*Not being in a situation where you felt pressured...*

Yes, obviously the flat I found...But it was not that stressful, there was a list and I made several phone calls to look at something right away.

*How long did it take you to find a place?*

I think I arrived on Monday, went back on Friday and I arranged the whole thing on Wednesday, so I was free all of Thursday, which was ok I think. On Tuesday morning there was one thing I looked at, first phone calls I had made and I thought: "Ok, this room is ok, and I can get it, definitely." Because the chap was just on his way out and said: "I won't have anyone else coming to have a look at it, so if you decide within the next couple of days whether you want to have the room, you can have it."

*That was quite quick.*

So after two hours looking, I had somewhere there to stay, so there was no pressure on. So I was very lucky in that respect.

*Have you moved ever since you arrived?*

No. Last week there was a problem there. My landlord said: "Can you move out today?" although I signed a six-month lease. It kept raining through my ceiling ever

since I came back after Christmas and I obviously complained about that everyday to keep them going sort of thing: “Do something! I am not prepared to pay the complete rent if there are problems all the time. Am I allowed to move out if you don’t do anything?” And she passed that on to the landlord and I had him on the phone for the very first time. He just said: “You didn’t pay your rent!” “Yes, I did.” And he said: “Well you can move out tomorrow if you want to!” Fine, I will have to look for something else first, ok...I had friends looking for something at the time but one of them was in a real rush because she had to leave her flat, so we started looking for a flat for three people, but it is quite hard right now with this multiple occupancy thing. Most three-bedroom flats do not have a licence. We could not find anything and then I found out that they actually had the roof repaired on the day that he told me that I could move out. So the roof has been fine now, no problem there anymore. I just stayed there and the other two girls moved in a two-bedroom flat. It was a bit of a hassle and I was quite annoyed, but...

*Did you take a lot of stuff with you from Germany?*

Yes. I came with the car and basically put all the files for my PhD in it and it was fine. I feel quite comfortable if I have several things of my own. Going somewhere and have nothing but your clothes is...I need to have some of my things around me to feel a little bit more comfortable. But usually when I go over and develop a routine, or I know what my routine will look like, I am fine. I came over to Glasgow and after two or three days I knew exactly what it would be like.

*You did that very quickly.*



Yes, very quick. After two weeks time I felt like I had been here for months. Everyone was so friendly. It was not basically just colleagues at University, but everyone.

*And what do you do with your free time here? How many hours do you teach at University?*

The first time my teaching was ten.

*So does that leave you a lot of free time?*

Well, preparation and correction do take quite a lot of time. I sometimes stay in quite late compared to the others in their offices. But still, I am having a really good time. But I am often in on the weekends as well. And basically I am doing teaching here with also my PhD, which can sometimes be a bit of a problem.

*Have you had time to socialise with people and make new friends?*

I spend a lot of time with colleagues really, from the German department. I also know someone from the Celtic department. We have these German Stammtisch you know every other week. Some people I met there from time to time.

*So would you say you are mostly with foreigners or...*

Yes. It is weird though, but...

*Have you made friends with Scottish people, local people?*

Not that much so far. My flatmates are Scottish and I get along great with them. Sometimes we sit in the kitchen together, watch TV, but not as often as I thought in the beginning. They are nice and we get along really well, so...No problem really.

*You have not really clicked or something?*

No, they are much younger than me. I am by far the oldest in the flat and they are the usual partying type as well so...They drink a lot over the weekend, go to the Union, that sort of thing.

*How do you perceive this as a German? It is different, I guess, from what you are used to back home. How do you feel about that?*

Basically everything is just fine. There are many similarities and connections between Scottish and German people. The one thing that is quite striking is the partying, drinking a lot, rather than having a few drinks in the evening.

*Yes. Social life here tends to be a lot more centred around drink on its own than food for instance.*

Yes. People here drink in order to get very drunk as well. In Germany people drink a lot, too. But they have food with it, and they are not telling you stories about throwing up. *(I laugh out loud.)*

And even if they [the Germans] did throw up over the weekend, they would not tell you. *(More laughs.)* They would be embarrassed, but obviously it is approved here and a proof that you had a good time. People will tell you about that, which is ok when you are student, because it obviously part of the experience of being a student, which is kind of weird. But I am older and find it slightly weird.

*Is that one of the reasons you may find it hard to meet people here?*

It is difficult to meet people in the pub and they are obviously very drunk. I have seen people shouting at each other in pubs, but usually the accusation does not continue very long, so...

*Does your contract run out soon?*

Yes, the end of June.

*Would you stay on? Would you consider that?*

Yes, I am considering that and have told Mainz if they do not want to send somebody new next year. I talked to Andrew [the head of the German department] as well and he would be please if I stayed on. The other two Lektoren will not be here next year. So it would only be me working within a kind of continuity, so it would be fine.

*And you have been here since...*

August. I have been here for five months. The whole contract runs for nine months. You have to wait and see whether or not it will work.

*Have you been moving around since you have been here and seen different bits of Scotland?*

To be honest I was quite busy with work, more than I thought and I do not have my car over here right now. I am probably going to have it in the middle or at the end of March, then I will be able to travel to the Highlands if I want to. To be honest, when it comes travelling by bus or train, I am a wee bit lazy. I always had a car, so... Yes, I did not even go to Edinburgh before Christmas, by bus. The chance came up to go

with Klaus and we went. I just did not feel like travelling and having to wake up early in the morning. I mean, when you start something new, it is always more demanding than what I was used to. When I started here there was quite a lot of work and I always felt a little bit groggy, especially with the Engineers because I tried to find better material than what was supplied, which meant quite a lot of work as well.

*Would you that that right now your work is taking the most of your time? Is it some kind of priority?*

Yes.

*Do you think it is something that might change if you take on that position again next year and that you will be able to spend more time doing more things?*

Yes, I hope so.

*Do you see that changing?*

I hope so. If I stay on and do the same stuff again, it will be less work to prepare things. It should not be too bad. The work and preparation should therefore be less next year. That means I will have more time for myself.

*How do you deal with the uncertainty of not knowing how long you will stay here for? How do find that? Is it hard or do you just accept it the way it is? How far do you actually feel you are part of this place and will stay here longer? Or do things have a shelf life anyway and will come to an end?*

When I came over I thought, ok, basically it is nine months. After that, am I going into teachers' training or get a job? Now, after the first semester, I said I would stay



on if I could, but did not think that before you know, because I am not sure I told you.  
but I split up with my boyfriend.

*Back home?*

Yes. So that is basically why I say that now I am free to stay here.

*So there is no obligation for you to go back home?*

No. My parents are obviously getting older. I probably would not want to be far away indefinitely, but I think another year should be fine. I still feel I probably will not spend my whole life in Britain, so career wise it would be clever to go back soon.

*Why?*

I am not that young anymore you see. (*Huge laughs.*) I should get settled in a proper job.

*So you find that going back with that kind of experience is a plus?*

Well, it is actually not what I am trained to be. I am not trained to be a native language assistant.

*What is your PhD on?*

Scottish literature.

*Would you consider an academic career?*

Yes, if I get the chance yes, definitely. Even teaching at the University, not as a professor but doing literature and language stuff would still be better than teaching at school.

*So it is good for you basically if you go back to Germany and want to lecture or something, you have that experience of living and working abroad. Is it a plus?*

Yes and no. I think CV wise this time is ok, but it is not the best as I am teaching German, since it is not my subject. That is why I think staying on for a second might be for me an easy and pleasant option, but career wise, it is not the most clever thing to do. If nothing works out there, but it works out here, then fine. If things work out differently, then I will have to decide what I really want to do, because I am feeling very comfortable over here. But obviously, if I want to go back to University in Germany, I will have to do so soon.

*Now, talking more specifically about your job and the fact that you are a foreign language assistant, do you feel different when dealing with Scottish students in your classes? How do you feel they perceive you? Are you aware in a way that you are a kind of German image for them? Are you amused by the clichés and what they any think about Germany? Did you discover these things doing that job?*

Well, I knew that coming and teaching the students I would be as one of the few German people they ever meet and that I would obviously be important for them and I felt a bit awkward about that.

*Why?*

Obviously it has to do with German history to be honest. I mean they probably have grandparents who hate Germans, so they probably have certain ideas, probably negative ideas about Germany. I felt that I would have to be very polite indeed and very cautious with what I say not to offend anyone. I was very much aware that I would have to watch everything and be careful. But there was never any questions concerning Germany's historical past or anything.

*Basically it was not an issue or something that made you feel uncomfortable.*

No, I think teaching here compared to teaching in Germany is...I am nicer over here. People here are generally nicer in the way they talk to each other, but also because I'm clearly...I sort of have to advertise my country and my culture, everything tending to do with it. So, I think the more positive I am, the more they will be comfortable with the language and the culture and the more interest they will develop. Being strict then could therefore put them off German and German culture. Obviously you cannot have everyone liking you so...

*No.*

All least when you are friendly they say: "Ok. At least not all Germans are horrible."

*So you are aware that they will see you as a kind of representative of your culture, which is quite interesting I think. You are in this position where you are teaching something and at the same time you are conveying a sense of identity to other people. So it is not just about grammar exercises and things like that, it is also about who you are as a person. It is amazing actually, because it is mad how people are going to be*

*influenced by you in some ways, which is what teaching is about, the ways in which you may influence certain people.*

Yes.

*Depending on which angle you get, you have a possibility there to be a different person, which is quite strange.*

Yes. What I basically try to convey...They have certain ideas about the Germans. When I am too late for a class, obviously I will talk about the stereotype that Germans are very punctual. It can make the class quite funny really, we have a good time with that and people tend to laugh a lot more than usual at the jokes I make. By now, the students are aware that I am making these jokes, in a good mood most of the time. I can do my grammar teaching in this way, using funny examples and working in a relaxing atmosphere. I usually do that anyway, but over here I try to do that even more. There is something positive in class. I recently did something on stereotypes and it was really good, as they showed an awareness of them in class.

*Do you find that people come back to you after that and that they have a sense of awareness of their own culture? When you go back to Germany for instance, how do you feel about being back within your own culture? Do you any sense of distance, having worked here and experienced life abroad?*

I am more aware of certain things, especially new things. I do see the differences between the two ways of life.

*Do you think the differences are still very strong?*



I think the life we have here at university differs more from the life people have in rural areas than from life at university in Germany. So it is not that different. From a job at university in Mainz to a job at university in Glasgow is not that big a step. But going from teaching at university to teaching at school in a rural area has to be a larger step.

*So you could do this job in other cities the size of Glasgow and not feel a great sense of change?*

Yes.

*The differences are more social than cultural in a way. It is interesting, because I feel that...*

I do not think I felt this way before I did this thing on stereotypes. There was a text and someone said that people living in Istanbul, Berlin or New York actually have more in common than people in Istanbul and others living in rural areas of Turkey, and it is true in a way. Nowadays, at least within Western culture, there is something to it. Life in different large cities will be quite similar, and more different from rural life than different cities in different countries.

*So what do you think the people living in these big cities share then? How is it that they can relate to each other so easily? Where does it come from?*

In Western culture, when you think of it, the music, the books and films are all almost by now a common thing. I would say that only probably thirty percent of the culture that you experience is really connected with your own language and country. Around seventy percent I would say is shared between all the Western nations, between

Europe and America. It is quite obvious in food and music, literature a little bit less. The films and music are amongst the first things people consume in terms of culture. It is only a matter of two months before the release date. Stuff like that is very international by now. The way you live in a town with its supermarkets and restaurants and being able to go out without much effort really is the same way of life wherever you are. In rural areas, you need a car and have to drive for ten kilometres to find a large venue or whatever. It is more difficult to do things. You will probably go for different kinds of...I think you will appreciate things more.

*I just wanted to ask you about the students' motivations when they come to study German here? What do you think it is they have in mind before they start?*

It is a very good question. Some of them probably do it because it was the best subject they had at school. I do not think they have a real concept of Germany as a country that is different. So...Yes. It is really hard to say. With a lot of them, I do not feel there is a real interest in the culture. When I was in Germany I took English first and foremost because I really liked the language and what I knew about the culture then interested me as well, but I am not sure people over here know as much about German culture that I knew about British culture then. I think there is still quite a large gap from their side to ours, whereas in Germany you learn more about America and Britain. When you do the language, cultural studies is part of it. It is not only the grammar bit, it is not only language, there is quite a lot.

*Is it more like applied languages in a way, acquiring the skills in order to achieve something else?*

I think it is a good idea, and on the increase, that because of the European Union, people here should learn a foreign language. Some years ago it was not such a popular idea. This idea for me is on the increase. But it is not really having to do with a deep interest in the literature or the culture. So...When I was reading British literature, I remember this was something I wanted to go on studying. But I do not sort of think they have ever read a narrative text in German really when they come to university. We do literature at school really. We even did Shakespeare. I think it is quite difficult for them to read. They often get the content across but not the interpretation of texts.

*Good. That was excellent. Thanks.*

If you need anything else, just let me know.

*Cool. I will. I might even want to speak to you later on or ask more questions. Thank you.*

## **Appendix B**

### **Carla's Interview**



*The interview takes place in a quiet café in the centre of Paris. I am late and Carla is waiting for me having a cup of coffee. I got her number through a friend of mine who I studied with at university. She is on holiday in Paris for a few days and recently returned from Italy where she had her first working experience as a tourist guide. I apologise for the delay and order a fresh orange. It is early in the morning and I decide to turn the tape recorder on before the interview actually starts. We chat for ten minutes about what she has done in the capital and how long she is planning on staying in France for before returning to Britain. Carla was born in Scotland but her parents are Italian. She studied at a British university and graduated with a degree in Modern Languages. She seems comfortable with the tape-recorder and I start asking her more precise questions.*

*You graduated about 10 months ago, did you not? What happened after that?*

I decided I was not happy with what I had studied and went down to England to get involved in a careers guidance course but did not find the experience very interesting.

*When did you decide to go and work abroad then? How did that work out for you?*

That came about four or five months after graduation when I realised academia was not quite what I wanted to do. I decided to go back to Italy in order to do something using my language skills. I did not see an advert for the tourist guide position, but I just knew that this kind of work existed. So I went out looking for it and found a temporary post in Northern Italy.

*Have you been to Italy before?*

Yes, I studied in Italy and lived there. My undergraduate degree was in Italian and I wanted to go back doing something using that. I then realised that I had to go back, I felt I needed to use my language skills, better language skills.

*Were you thinking of a career in Italy at that time?*

No, I was going back to improve my Italian. The job in Italy as a tour guide was a means to an end. It was simply in order to go back there.

*So how did you feel about working with Italians and no being a student anymore?*

*What differences did you find?*

You feel more important, because, whatever job you do, you have a certain amount of status and status in Italy is very important, and when you are a student -it depends on the job and the profession obviously- but having work, simply being able to earn money and live independently gives you a certain amount of status. I also felt I was more productive. When I lived in Italy as a student, I did not feel I was able to fill my time. I felt I did not have enough to do and with a job I have things to do. Studying in Italy is something that is quite a lonely activity, if you want to call it like that, because on the whole few people go to lectures in Italy and study is very much an individual thing. What you are studying and how you do at your exams... That is not a collective thing like studying in Britain, because it was more of a class situation, and I was happy with that type of learning. In Italy, it is very much you and the books. I found that quite difficult and lonely. With the job, it brought me more into contact with people.

*So what were your expectations of working in Italy? How did you perceive it before going there?*

I did not to be honest. I really was not sure what it would be like.

*Did you expect it to be different from working in Britain?*

I have enough experience having lived a year in Italy, I knew the cultural differences in Italy, between Italy and Britain.

*Was the system really foreign to you, or had you encountered it before? Did it feel like something alien in a way?*

No, it was not alien to me.

*And did you have problems adjusting to it?*

No. Working in Britain is very structured, a nine to five mentality for a lot of people.

In Italy, it is a much more flexible attitude to work, and I prefer that actually.

*How did the Italians you worked with perceive you? Did they see you as a foreigner?*

Yes, definitely.

*Even though you have an Italian background.*

Yes, definitely, although having an Italian background made things easier for me, especially Italian documentation. That was something that made it much easier for me and also the fact that I could speak Italian at a certain level made things immediately much easier for me. Italians still treated me as a stranger and in Italy if you are not...



*Was that a problem for you? How did this manifest itself? How did they make you feel you were going to stay a foreigner?*

You are not immediately welcomed. When you know someone -or you are introduced by someone that they know- then you are welcomed much more easily. You have to work very hard at getting to know people first in Italy before you will be accepted, so there is an investment of time to be made there with people and say hi, introduce yourself, you said what you wanted, talk to them, and then you go back, again and again and again... And only when you go back again and again and when you give them time, give them your time, then they begin to sort of want you. But you cannot expect much from them at the first meeting, whereas in England, in Britain, I think it is much colder, you simply state what you want, and they can either offer you that service or not. In Italy, it is different, you have to give them time to get to know you.

*I believe you also worked with British people when you were abroad? How would you describe your attitude to them? I mean, were you more biased towards them or towards the Italians? How did you feel about this?*

Because I come from an Italian background, I was more biased towards the Italians actually and slightly against the British clients I was working with. I was defensive of any criticism of the Italian system or structure, their way of life, which did not help my work actually. I do not know if this is important, but I found that British clients wanted to have someone working for them who identified very much with their opinions and their values, and their point of view, and someone who was trying to make them see the benefits of a different way of life, another opinion, well they did not like it.



*So where did you stand in the end, because you are telling me you did not really identify with any of these groups? How did that make you feel?*

The truth is that I did not stand either. I was not either, I did not feel fully Italian, and I did not feel fully British either.

*Do you think that is the most comfortable position to be in or do you think it is better belonging to just one group and holding the other as potential “enemy”?*

I think it is idealistic to think you can belong to one group. In reality, the number of people who can actually belong to one single nationality is very few, because in any country there are divisions, there are borders and people who do not feel fully... For example, in Italy, there are many people who do not feel fully Italian. In Britain many people do not feel fully English, or fully Scottish or fully anything. So it is idealistic to think that you can, but it is very difficult also not to be able to identify with something very, very strongly, with one particular nationality.

*Did the fact that most Italians acknowledged you as the “foreigner” make you feel more self-conscious? Did you gain some extra confidence from it or more critical distance, or did you not feel on the contrary that you never belonged and it bothered you? Did you feel like you had access to this different culture?*

I felt I was a stranger until the last six months. I felt like I was only beginning, at the end of it, to have people warm to me. And people were saying to me: “When will you be back?” and a lot of others were adding: “You will be more than welcome to come back and work with us.” It was quite genuine from them and made me realise the time it gets for people to warm up to you there.

*Would you say that a year is the right period for someone to settle down?*

No, I think that for someone to feel fully integrated you would need at least two to three years.

*Is that something you would be willing to do now? Would you go abroad and spend three years somewhere in order to gain that integration?*

It would depend on the job I was doing. If I was very happy with the job, I would think about it, but I doubt it somehow.

*Did you feel when you worked in Italy that you wanted to spend more time with the Italians or the foreigners?*

The Italians definitely, in fact I was beginning to get very anti-British.

*Why? Was it because you felt you could judge their lack of understanding for Italian culture? Did you actually feel superior to them in a way? Did you feel that you knew more than they did?*

I was not always more knowledgeable than they were, sometimes people came in and they had quite a lot of knowledge, but it was very occasionally. But I think maybe that this is very relative to the fact that the kind of people who came on the type of holiday that were offered where I was working were not very independent and were not the kind of people who made a real effort to know other cultures.

*Is that something you expected from them?*

Well, I expected them... In fact I wanted them to have more knowledge. In the end I realised that it is something they would never have and that the majority of people I dealt with would be at that level.

*Did you try to challenge this?*

Occasionally, but it was not a good idea really.

*Were you thinking at the beginning that you could expand their knowledge and perceptions? Or did you quickly realise there was no use in doing that?*

No, I had this enthusiasm for anything Italian until the end and I tried to encourage their interest in all things Italian. But unfortunately it went down better with the British clients that I had -or most of them- when you criticised the way of life. I felt very much that they came in and wanted to be openly critical towards Italy.

*Why do you think they acted like this? It does not really make sense to go to Italy just to criticise it, does it?*

I do not know but they were very often critical. For example, when I tried to explain to them money and the different types of notes and coins, then there would often be someone who would say: "Why don't they change the money? Why don't they do this?" or "Why are the shops not open longer during the day?" "Why can't I have cold milk in my coffee?" "Why can't I have warm tea?" "Why can't they make a cup of tea?" "Why is there no kettle in my room?" They seemed to want the things they were used to at home and did not seem to appreciate the fact that they were in a different culture.



*Was that hurtful when someone criticised something?*

It was not hurtful, it was very annoying to the point where I did not care in the end really whether they liked it or not and became quite indifferent to their criticism.

*Do you actually have an experience of Italians spending some time in Britain? Does the same sort of criticism come up or do they behave in a different way? I am trying to see whether or not Italians would behave the same way if they were in England.*

Well, I think it is specifically British. When the Italians go abroad they try to speak English for example. Many of them make an effort to speak English, I suppose that one thing that you find with Italians is that they tend to look for Italian food and the British as well, they want their eggs and chips all the time.

*It is quite depressing in a way, because it makes you think in the end that people go abroad, but they are actually not that interested in cultural differences. It is more of a status thing whereby they can go back home and say: "I've been to Italy on holiday." but at the same time there is no real interest for the actual culture.*

Yes, but it is a status thing for the Italians, too. When they go abroad, they are also critical of what they find and they are also making a statement when they go abroad, they are very well dressed, they like to make a fashion statement wherever they go. There is something specific to them, there is a thing like "bella figura" that they have wherever they go and travel abroad. Travelling abroad is a status thing for the Italians because many of them often do not.



*If I asked you right now what sort of culture you identify with the most, what would you choose? Would you need to first of all? I am not saying you have to choose here...*

I do not need to identify but I think I do identify more personally with the Italians.

*Do you think coming from a bilingual intercultural background turned you into a more tolerant person or do you think it made you even more biased? Did it give you this extra push towards foreign cultures?*

Yes, I am more curious of different cultures. For example, when I went to New Zealand as a student I found it very boring because it was the same culture as it was in Britain. There is nothing different about it, and in actual fact, that is why I get very defensive about Italian culture, but I also get defensive of British culture when I am home in Britain. When Italians talk about things in Britain, I get very defensive of it. What I am defensive of I think is difference. I defend different cultures right to be different.

*Did going abroad make things clearer or more confusing for you?*

Probably more confusing because I have made my link with Italy much stronger.

*Do you feel that you have lost something going abroad?*

Yes.

*What would you say you had lost?*

I have lost this strength of contact or the strength of belonging. Since I was born in Scotland from Italian parents, I have lost some of the strength of feeling, of the

closeness I had for Scotland. I do not feel quite that I belong so much there now as I did before, and maybe it is why I am going back.

*Do you think it made things richer in your life by giving you more opportunities or did it make things narrower in the end?*

I think it made things more difficult for me personally but I think it has increased my options as far as employment is concerned, and also given me more experiences that will be useful.

*Do you think gaining this awareness of you as a "foreigner" working abroad increased your confidence?*

Yes, it did.

*Would you still have the impulse to go somewhere you have never been before and work? Would it really excite you right now?*

An impulse? I could go, but I have no desire to do so.

*Why?*

Well, unfortunately, with all the travelling I have done so far, I have lost this sense of excitement. There is no excitement anymore.

*Yes? Why is that?*

After a while you begin to see -as the Italian saying goes- that the whole world is a city or a town. At the end of the day, everyone in the world is striving to live their life as best as they can.

*Do you not think that this has been provoked by the globalisation of the world economy, but also by the fact that we are slowly moving towards a single market and that this is making cultural differences weaker than in the past?*

Yes, it is regrettable because in actual fact we are losing all the differences which -to me- make the beauty of the world and now there is nothing different anymore.

*Would that mean that people will not travel as much as they used to?*

Probably. I mean, they will to an extent because there are always different things to do.

*Do you think the way people travel right now has become more superficial? What do you think the people you dealt with as a tourist guide were actually looking for?*

Actually, a lot of them do not know what they are looking for to be honest with you, a lot of them were just there for a break, a rest, some sunshine maybe, some warmth. I do not think people I dealt with there were looking for cultural difference.

*So were they actually consuming the place, instead of trying to gain human experience from it?*

Yes, I think a lot of them had romantic ideas about the lake and being on the lake.

*Do you think that when Italians go to Scotland they have more of an awareness of what it actually is or do they have this fairy tale image as well?*

No, they have this fairy tale image and that is the problem with tourism, it is very superficial. It is selling a dream, a fantasy, an ideal of the place.

*Did you do that to a certain extent when you were guiding? Did you sell a fantasy?*

Oh yes you are! You have to. That is what they want.

*How do you feel about that?*

I do not feel very happy with that to be honest with you, and that is partly the reason why I decided I did not want to do that job again. Having said that I do see a future for me at least some of the time, as far as career is concerned, in tourism. I think I would like to try and do it at a higher level or amore professional one. Unfortunately, different tourists have different expectations. I was down travelling in Italy the week before and found myself in front of this cathedral which is one of the main tourist attractions in Southern Italy. There happened to be a group of German tourists there, and they were very inquisitive, very interested in the history, and wanted to know every detail, whereas the English tourists, you could have said anything to them and they would have accepted it. So it depends on the tourists really as to what kind of work you do and how well you do it and whether you give them a true perspective of what difference is. Unfortunately, tourism does not pay very well, and a lot of people working in it are therefore not very professional.

*What would then be the best way to experience a foreign culture?*

Not through a tour company and not by taking guided tours either. The best way to experience a foreign country and its culture is to live there. Work and living there, and being part of it, that is the only way that you will experience another culture. How can anyone know about a foreign culture by staying there one, two or three weeks? You cannot. During any season for example, there are different events, local events, community events that taken as a whole give you an impression of the culture of that



area. For instance, the local culture in the lake, local festivals with people in costumes and things, if you come during a week when the festival is not on, then you do not get that impression. So you will stay one week and only get to see that, some fireworks maybe, a tiny piece of what the whole thing actually is.

*Having spent a few months around the lake area, would you say that it is enough to know what it is like?*

I would say I have a fairly good knowledge of it, but I would still have to stay there for another couple of years to get a real feel for it. To be honest with you, you only get a real feel for a culture if you are born in it, brought up in it and you live your life there.

*Can you imagine yourself die there?*

Yes. Ultimately, if you are going to Italy, that is when you really feel you know certain things there. Not only that, but you also have to have a history there and that means having parents and grandparents and so on who behind you have... Actually, it is almost in your blood.

*Thank you so much for your time Carla. It has been a real pleasure talking to you.*

You are welcome! Time to head off for some more sightseeing I guess.

## **Appendix C**

### **Chiara's Interview**

*The interview takes place in Chiara's apartment on the Left Bank of Paris. It is a warm evening night in and she left the windows open. She is renting a comfortable, barely furnished, studio flat in a modern high-rise building. I have been invited for dinner and we are chatting about the flat and how she found it. I got her number through a friend of mine who works for the same food company I will name Vu for the purpose of this transcript. Chiara is twenty-seven years old and recently graduated with a business degree from Verona University and got her "big break" when signing her contract with Vu in 2001. The French company is part of an important food conglomerate specialised in biscuits and snacks. We are talking about friendship and travelling when I realise I forgot to turn the tape recorder on.*

*I have met so many people I have completely lost touch with.*

Me too (*Laughter.*) You meet certain people at one stage and after a while you realise it does not work anymore, so you need to go through an elimination process. (*More laughs.*) But people keep on coming back to you somehow and you just have to go: "I don't want to hear from or see you anymore!"

*I know. It is a horrible thing to do actually.*

I sometimes think that coming here has made me more pragmatic.

*Yes. You learn to toughen up when living and working abroad.*

There are also times when you want to be independent and on your own without really seeing anyone.

*When did you arrive here?*

Six months ago. The thing that strikes me about Paris is how lonely people are here!

*(Mutual laughter.)*

*I know.*

When I stayed in Italy life was easier in a way. I have this job here when I am always on the road meeting clients and living on my own. I meet people in supermarkets but there are all clients. I cannot really socialise with them or anything. That is when you realise how hard it is getting to know people in a big city like Paris. You work long hours, go home feeling exhausted, cook something for dinner and that is it! If you do not already know people who introduce you to their friends when you go out with them, what do you do? There is a shortage of time meaning that work always seems to come first. I met a few guys here for whom it was the case.

*And do you not find that kind of behaviour a bit exaggerated?*

Yes, it is sad. But at the same time, people think they have a good job, they are young and willing to make some sacrifices somewhere. I wake up at six in the morning, come back at seven at night and have no energy left for the kind of small talk a relationship implies. I have actually spent some weekends in bed and I had no desire to go out whatsoever. I hardly go to the shops, even though I normally enjoy it, but I am tired. When you feel like going out, you realise you do not know that many people, and you do not know who to choose...I go to the cinema on my own.

*You often end up calling the same people several times and if they are not up for anything, you just give up...*



Exactly. It is difficult...

*Sometimes you have to insist. People do not give you their trust straight away. I experienced that when I became friends with my flatmate in Italy and clearly felt that her friends perceived me as some kind of threat. It was strange. It was a new thing for them but I found here very hard. It was the same in Germany. You have to struggle to create your own space.*

When you are friends with someone, it becomes totally different. It does not matter how long you are apart from each other, you have lived things with them that make you feel close. You have a past in common. Here in France I sometimes feel like a cultural alien.

*In what ways do you feel like that?*

When I was a teenager I used to travel with my parents every year, which means that foreigners are friends to me and not the opposite. I am an outgoing person and like meeting new people as well as share things with them. This is how I have been until I arrived here. I think this experience has made me older and more self-aware I guess. It teaches you to manage new situations a lot better and learn how to deal with things. You are judged on your results at work and have to demonstrate what you are capable of. That means behaving like an adult really. As you get older, you realise that people change their attitudes. You become more set within your own ways and little habits. Basically this whole thing has made me really old! (*Roars of laughter.*)

*Old and with no social life! (Mutual laughter.)*

Exactly. I feel serious and old! Like a responsible mother who would have to answer for everything. And I do not like feeling this way. I think I am a creative person and my work is not creative in any way.

*I have come across some people who expressed a clear desire to belong to their working environments and they seemed quite focused.*

At the end of the day, it is work that gives you social status and a place in society. If you do not work, people look at you differently, unless you are studying for instance.

*Do you find French people here to be narrow-minded?*

Yes. I do not think they make much of an effort to get to know people and consider themselves superior to others. When I arrived here I did not know anyone here in Paris and my only point of reference was my boss. They put me in a hotel, gave me my company car, told me about the area I had to work in and that was basically it!

I saw my boss once a month and had to manage on my own. I had to find a flat, open a bank account and all the rest without anyone's help. I did not have anyone I could call really. I could not call my boss and tell him I was finding it hard and felt low. I called my brother all the time, which resulted in hefty phone bills! I did not feel welcome by my colleagues either. No one ever thought I might feel lonely here in Paris or struggle with things. In Italy, it is not the same. Your colleagues make sure you feel comfortable if you are new in the team. Of course there is a lot to do here, but not if you do not have anyone to do things with. The job itself is not that stimulating either. Intellectually I felt more challenged when I was a student in Verona.

*How was your working life different in Italy?*

When I was working in Italy before arriving here, it was easy, after a period of time, to build up relationships with your clients. We sometimes went for lunch or coffee, but you could not really meet them in the evening or anything, since most of them had a partner or family lives.

*When I stayed in Italy, I always found people were less formal than here in everyday situations. People said “tu” greeting me in shops for instance. This would rarely happen here! It was actually quite shocking at first, but then you get used to it.*

It is different at work though. The people I worked with there tended to use “Lei” most of the time actually. And I also got to meet them outside work. Here I have to admit I feel quite lonely most of the time. Since I work long hours as a “*commerciale*” for Vu, it is difficult finding time outside work to meet other people. It makes me mad sometimes to think that there are so many interesting, smart lonely people out there! You feel like you have got so much to give to others, but you do not succeed in reaching out to them.

*Yes.*

And it is a horrible thing. I was once on the Internet in this huge French chat room and there were thousands of people logged on at the same time, desperately trying to make contact with someone. There are all these people and yet no real sense of communication! They do not know and do not meet each other at any time. People use fake names and do not actually *talk* about anything.

*It is a very artificial world I guess.*



Awful! Horrible!

*Have you ever experienced chatting to someone, finding them great and then meeting up with them and nothing happens? That happened to me in Canada once.*

I have made good friends on the Internet though. But it did not happen here. Here all you get is these guys asking you to marry them! *(More laughs)* Which goes back to how lonely people actually feel here! Time flies and if you do not have or make opportunities to meet people outside work, you end up living your life working, going back home and watching television every night without ever meeting anyone. My main goal is to be happy and in love! *(Laughter.)*

*People are getting more and more selfish and egocentric though.*

True. I used to see someone here a couple of months ago but things did not work out. He is my downstairs neighbour.

*Why did you break up?*

Well, one of the main problems was that he did not understand my work. He did not understand why I worked so much and had to wake up at five in the morning to drive up north to meet some clients in a supermarket. It is obviously quite hard when you are with someone who cannot understand your ambitions or desires. I met this guy here recently who works for Marimma *(a famous pasta company)* and thought: "Great! Here is someone who can relate to what I do and understand my work since he has a very similar job!" We had a dinner date which went well. He drove me back home and that was it. Then he invited me to have dinner at his place. Nothing happened but he was very friendly and nice to spend time with. Then he invited me



again, introduced me to one of his male friends who was married to an Italian and everything seemed to be going well. We started dating but the problem was that I started getting really bored after a few weeks. He just worked, went home and watched football most nights. I mean he had a great flat, a collection of watches, smart shoes and a comprehensive collection of DVDs, but after a month I started feeling like part of the furniture, you know? We just did not have much to say to each other I guess. (*Mutual laughter.*) Then Xavier invited me to go to his parents' home close to Cannes with some of his friends who happened to be couples, too. They were all very nice but I told him I wanted to go out and dance and see things, but he seemed to be quite happy watching television all day with his friends or playing computer games. I went back to Italy in the meantime to see my parents and got back to Paris a few days after. I went round to his flat and made him some coffee while he was still in bed. The first thing he told me was: "Listen, I've got a very busy day today and I don't think I can see you tonight." I thought: "Fine!" (*More laughter*)

*Sounds like a good start to me!*

Then his birthday came up, and although I did not feel very motivated, I bought him a *Coloniali* fragrance gift box. Have you heard of that make?

*No.*

They are specialised in body products and fragrances for men and women. I got him a nice gift box with aftershave, soap and bodywash. It cost about 60.000 lire I think (*about 20 pounds*). Well...he got me this (*showing me the watch on her wrist*).

*Nice.*

An APC watch that is worth about 1.500 francs (*about 155 pounds.*) I asked him if he got it for me because he did not like the one I had before, but he did not give me a precise reply. I told him I would call him later to meet up and he told me he was sorry, but that we would not actually meet up again.

*Was that a leaving gift then?*

It did not make much sense to me at the time, but I forgot about it when my parents came over to visit from Verona (*Chiara's hometown*) with a Norwegian friend of mine who worked with me in Verona and who is like a sister to me. I tried calling Xavier several times but he was impossible to reach. I finally spoke to him inviting him to spend time with us, but he said he was too embarrassed to come. I mean, I do not want to sound money obsessed here, but would you buy someone a thousand francs watch after five weeks? Would *you* buy someone you hardly knew a thousand francs watch if you did not care about them? I mean, would you give that to someone and dump her the same day?

*(Eloquent silence.)*

I am not getting it at all! He is buying me a thousand francs watch and dumping me instantly! I do not get French men at all!

*Maybe you should have told him you did not understand his behaviour.*

But it does not make any sense to me! At least when I am in my own environment back home I can relate to people and understand what they do. Here I feel lost, like a kid trying to work out everything. I just do not know how I should behave. And even when I go out and meet people who are nice and offer to meet up again, I call them

and get no answer back! I just do not understand it. I do not think I do anything wrong anyway, but it just puzzles me. I cannot seem to be able to relate to their way of thinking. My mental structure is different from theirs. I react in different ways to things. With my French boss, for instance, I do actually spend quite a bit of time not understanding where he comes from. He just confuses me half of the time! He escapes my understanding I guess. I do not understand what his motives are or what exactly he wants from me. I mean I tried to tell him about it and I think he realises I do not understand his ways, but I am finding hard to communicate since I never really know what goes on in his head. There is, in fact, a communication problem between us, although I speak his language. It is terrible!

*These kinds of misunderstandings occur quite often though. Sometimes you just cannot avoid them. People can be on a completely different wavelength from yours and it gets harder trying to relate to them.*

Ok, that can happen once or twice. But it just cannot happen all the time and become the rule. The fact that you cannot...

*But I think you have to be yourself, too.*

But I am myself here!

*It is not know that you will change who you are.*

The thing is...I am *always* myself. I am Italian and think in Italian ways, even though right now my thinking is more...I just cannot seem to understand why I cannot relate to people here, or at least reach some kind of bridge where I can understand them. I do not get it!!



*It is perhaps the first time this has happened to you.*

Yes. These things kill me but I do not understand them (*Laughter.*) And I really feel like...

*I think it can be a positive thing though. I went through the same kind of thing as you when I lived in Italy and Germany as a student. I did not know how to behave with people. I often felt like I was invading people. But now I can look back and say I was not scared. I was not frightened to make an effort and confront people sometimes. If you come across someone who is scared of you, then it means they do not approach encounters the same way as you do. I mean, it is normal getting a bit hysterical sometimes...*

Yes!

*Also because you have the impression that you do not know what the rules are and do not know how to behave the right way.*

If I like someone back home, then I want to spend more time with them as well as see them regularly. It is normal. But being confronted with people like this and their rejection has made me... You just cannot be yourself anymore. Every time you feel like doing something, you end up doing the wrong thing! You just cannot act on the same level as them.

*It is difficult, but I guess it is about learning, too. It is one thing saying you have no choice but be yourself, but you have one person next to you who does not necessarily see things the same way. The challenge is trying to win that person over, if you think he or she is important. You can do that and change the way you are when you behave*



*with that person. And changing there is not hurtful, because what you get in return is that person's trust. This is when you can actually start building up something with that person. It is hard coming here and being confronted with a completely new environment. It often feels like there is nothing secure or trustworthy.*

True. Apart from my work perhaps! (Laughter.)

*But work is not enough. You have to create your own world and it takes so long. It just cannot happen overnight. I spent my first year in Scotland and then decided to spend my second year in Canada. Then I went to Italy, which means the people I had met in my first year were actually...*

Gone.

*Yes. Then I went back to Scotland, trying to find and recreate something. Six months after, I was in Germany.*

Oh God!

*And then I went back to Scotland, which means the way you look at things is radically altered by such experiences. When I first experienced that, I was really scared of losing people, but I ended up realising that life goes on and that you cannot always do something about it. You just have no control over that aspect. Instead of trying to control situations and have strategies with people, maybe you should try to engage with them in spontaneous ways and only do them if you feel like it. When you are yourself and behave in more relaxed ways, you end up attracting people to you because they see something genuine in you and generally respond to that. I noticed that with my flatmates in Glasgow.*

Yes.

*The things you give people you will get in return. I really believe that.*

Me too.

*It is a kind of experience that really gives you something, and most of the time you only realise what you gain once you have left. I think what you are doing right now is very brave and it will make you stronger in the long term. It is important being able to cope on your own, too. If you cannot do that, it means you are not at ease with yourself.*

And you spend all this time on your own, counting the hours. *(Her tone changes and she seems more vulnerable and open.)*

*It can be depressing, especially if you have always had people around you.*

I just never experienced having these sorts of problems when I was working back home. I cannot even remember spending an evening without getting a phone call or going out to meet with friends. It never happened to me, and having to start from scratch is really crazy.

*You do end up feeling a bit “schizophrenic” at times, dividing yourself between different people and places. You need to find your own space really. I really struggled with letting people go before, and now I am beginning to slowly accept it. At the end of the day, you did the things you did because you felt you had to do them, because they made sense at the time. There is nothing to regret.*

That is true. That sort of experience makes you grow anyway. In fact, my boss told me he was giving himself a year to turn me into a French woman! (*Mutual laughter.*)  
I am Italian but...

*That is part of the process anyway. When I go back to France, I feel detached in certain ways. I have lived and experienced different cultural contexts and will never try to promote France telling you it is great and the only place to live in. It annoys me really since there is always so much more to see. I do not have this mentality, since living abroad has forced me to reconsider things. If one does not go through that kind, going back home is perhaps the safer option.*

And what is your thesis about again?

*I am looking at graduates working and living abroad for the first time, trying to analyse their experiences in cultural and personal terms. I interviewed two people working for the same corporate cosmetics company and I was trying to get a third interview from someone working there, but it did not happen. Basically I am trying to understand what life and work abroad really means for the graduates. I am interested in the reasons why they decide to leave their country to come work abroad.*

That sounds really good. Shall we eat now? I am starving! (*Dinner is now ready and I decide to turn the tape recorder off.*)

## **Appendix D**

### **Claire's Interview**



*The interview takes place in a Japanese restaurant in the centre of London. Claire lives in a two-bedroom flat owned by her father in the West End of town. She graduated from a British university with a degree in Languages but was born in Switzerland and grew up in Norway. At the time of the interview, she was working for an Italian bank in the City and considering possible plans for further study. She offered to meet up somewhere central for dinner and arrived on time. I ask her about the tape-recorder and she does not seem uncomfortable with it. We chat about her day at work and the interviews starts.*

*What did you decide to do after graduation? Did you just want to go on a holiday?*

I mean, I did not have any specific plans. I knew I had to get a job at some point, but I needed a holiday before that. So I went back to Norway.

*Did you graduate in 1999?*

Yes, I did.

*How long did you stay in Norway for? You were born there, right?*

No, I was born in Geneva, Switzerland.

*And did you stay there for a long time, or did you go back straight to Norway?*

I stayed there for a couple of years. And then, because of my mother's work, we went back to Norway. Then I went to this école maternelle [Claire went to a French Primary school in Norway].

*So you went to French school.*

Exactly, in Norway. And that was until the end of la seconde [Secondary], then I went to the international school for the last two years because the people you got to know at French school in a small country like Norway, they were mostly diplomats' sons or daughters, so you never really got to know anyone.

*What were the differences between the French and international schools in terms of teaching?*

Amazing! Huge. The French school was extremely disciplined and mine was probably more so than what you would find in a normal common school in France, because the teachers such a huge amount of work basically, and they were very strict. We also had so much homework to do, so it was really quite a tough school. When I started going to the international school I was obviously a lot older, but it was more influenced by the Norwegian classic system, and this system is extremely relaxed. It is very good in many ways because it focuses more on the children's artistic sides rather than the scholastic ones. It is a lot more creative. They leave much more room for the children to use their own imagination and creativity.

*So how did the whole British thing come about? Why Britain?*

When I was finished with my international baccalaureate, I decided I wanted to take a year off. I was just really fed up with schools and everything, having gone to French school, it was so demanding. I had worked so, so much since I was little that I felt I was fed up and really needed a break. Even though it was a gift from my parents to go and study abroad, I decided to work for a supermarket in the delicatessen section. I was packing and ticketing things.

*Was that your first job experience?*

No, I had job experiences before that. This was my first job that I went to everyday for eight hours. And I kept it from September to just before Christmas. And then I decided to go to Italy because I am very interested in art and drawing and painting, so I thought I was going to go and learn to draw and paint, you know. So I had a look and discovered that in order to do that, you had to speak Italian. And all the schools, their main emphasis was on learning Italian and then you could take some courses. I went to a language school in Florence and I took a drawing course where I was the only pupil who was actually interested, and I took a cooking course as well. It was so much fun because I met people, we went out a lot.

*And then you went to Scotland. Once you arrived there, did you feel like a foreigner or could you relate to the Scots? How did you feel?*

In the beginning, I mean, obviously the language... I mean... I was amazed. I took a taxi from the airport to the student village I was going to live in and I did not understand a word when the taxi driver talked to me. At the beginning of the lectures, I felt that I just could not understand. Then you get gradually used to it, I guess in Britain it is easier for certain kinds of foreigners, I would not say towards all of them, but especially the Scandinavians I think... They love Scandinavians because of the common roots, the Vikings and everything. And I always felt very welcome in Scotland, although you feel as a foreigner anyway because you cannot completely relate to a Glaswegian mentality.

*Did you enjoy being a foreigner and having this critical distance, or did you feel sometimes that you could not belong to the place you were in?*



No, that did not bother me at all. I belonged to my community, to student life. I always met other foreigners as well, since the university was so big. What I felt maybe was that as a foreigner it was quite hard to get to know British people, because in a way it was as if they felt that you were only passing through, so they did not really need to build a relationship and although there was never a language barrier for me, I think they probably felt that I was a bit different, because of other factors as well, not just because I was a foreigner, and that I found a bit sad.

*You knew that you were different but did not want to give up on it just to feel that you belonged. I was happy to be different because it would be boring for them if I was exactly like them.*

I think that maybe some people feel threatened by foreigner's differences, but that could also have happened if they had met someone from Britain.

*How long have you been working in London for?*

About a year.

*How do you feel here? Do you feel like a foreigner or are you part of something else?*

Well I have to say that when it comes to Britain, although you are a foreigner, it is not a feeling, you just know it, so that is the way it is, but it was never a bad thing for me, since I always felt welcome.

*What sort of ideas, clichés and perceptions people had of Norway? What did you think of people's ideas about it in Scotland and London? What comes up when people talk about it?*



When I talk to British people about Norway, something that I do not do very often because I think they know more about the country... It is more when I talk to Italians or French people that I realise they do not know what Norway is about. But I think there is more of a bond between Norway and England.

*So what sort of job do you have here?*

I am working in a bank, which is an Italian bank. I did Italian and French at university. In First Year I also took Management Studies but dropped it for French in Honours. I mostly work with Italians, even though there are quite a few British people, too.

*Do you find it better to work with other foreigners? Would you find it boring just to work with English people?*

I think I prefer to work with a mixture. I mean I like British people a lot and I think Italian people are interesting to work with, too. But I think I would not mind working with more cultures than in a purely British company, which would be different from now where it is a typically Italian working environment.

*How do you feel yourself? Norwegian, Swiss, French, British? If I asked you just like that, what is the culture you could relate to the most?*

That is a question I have never been able to answer, and I do not think maybe that I ever will be.

*Can you feel comfortable anywhere or are there places where this is not possible?*

There are places where I know I do not feel comfortable as I should in order to live there, like Italy for instance.

*It is interesting what you said about the French school because I remember a friend of mine telling me he did not want to live in France, and I am wondering now if that was not because he had an idea of France that was quite strict through his experience of the schooling system there as a child. You tend to associate your memories of a place with your memories as child, do you not?*

Yes, you really do. I cannot say that I belong a lot more to the Norwegian culture than I belong to any other culture, because there is not just one, I guess if I had to choose it would be Norwegian, but I would say I have my own culture in a way.

*Are you critical towards Norway or quite accepting? Do you feel that sometimes you see things in a different way?*

Yes, exactly, definitely, my sister even a lot more than I do. She went to boarding school in Switzerland whereas I went to the international school in Norway, then she was remote from Norway as well, and I think she sees the differences even more than I do. I guess I am critical in many ways, not so much of the individuals but I could say the young generation sometimes, how they behave. I guess I am quite critical in a way.

*Are you more biased towards Norwegians than you are towards the British?*

No, not really, no. Being Norwegian myself, I have so many Norwegian friends, that is my mother tongue, but I think, as far as culture is concerned, that I have had a lot of Mediterranean influences from my dad.

*Does your father come from an Italian background?*

No, his mum was Norwegian and his dad was Russian and Italian, so he had to flee the Russian revolution when he was fourteen and he came to Norway and stayed there, but my dad grew up in Switzerland as well. It is a very international background and I think I just feel like a mixture.

*And how do you feel about this identity not being precisely defined? Is it something that is good or a bit difficult sometimes? Are you happy about it? Has it been positive for you?*

I think I am very grateful for it and can basically see the privilege that I have had growing up in this sort of environment. I have been very lucky because I guess very few people have had that sort of opportunity, but I mean it is a bit strange I guess when I am around totally Norwegian people because I do not feel that I totally belong, although I am at home, in brackets “my country”.

*Could you live and work in Norway now?*

Yes, I think I could. It would not be right for me now at this stage of my life, but...

*Do you think you will go back at some point?*

I probably will, but I am not sure. What I say is that it all depends on circumstances.

*On your work?*

No, not work, because I am not very career-oriented, more the sort of people I meet.

*If I told you tomorrow: "Come on, let's pack and go somewhere!" could you do it easily, or do you feel that right now you need to have something stable and secure, or do you still feel that you could live out of a suitcase?*

Well, I have travelled quite a lot, and I do not want to live out of a suitcase. I am very happy in London at the moment, and this is where I feel I want to be now, I do not know for how long which again all depends on circumstances. But one thing that I really want to do and that I never got the chance to do is travel around South America. If a friend came to me and said: "Claire, do you want to travel around South America with me for a few months?" I would pack immediately and say yes, of course.

*At the end of the day, you do not really feel like a foreigner in London since you are surrounded with other foreigners. It is also quite a cosmopolitan place and this is probably why you feel comfortable here.*

I think so, too. You will end up having so many friends from different countries here, so many international as well as British people, which is very important to me because I would feel very sad living in a country and not have friends from the place. Anyone could feel at home in London.

*Have you been in situations before where you felt you had to defend Norway? Do you feel defensive if someone criticises it?*

Yes, I feel a bit defensive. Especially when Italians criticise Norwegians and their behaviour.

*What do they say about Norway?*



Well, I guess it may be true in a way, but they have this idea of Norwegian girls being cheap bimbos, doing anything. And I sometimes see that myself, too, although my Norwegian friends would not agree, the girls there can be a little bit... But when Italians start talking about that I get really defensive and I do not really know why.

*And what happens if Norwegians start criticising foreigners?*

It depends. I do not like racist comments. For example, there is in Norwegian a very downgrading word which is like “nigger” in English, and I get very angry when people use it. I do get angry when Norwegians criticise foreigners, definitely. Italians can look at Norwegians and think that they are cheap. Fair enough, but do not include me in that stereotypical view, because I am not part of it you know, it is strange to explain in a way.

*Yes, but you have been brought up with different values and have had this distance from the very beginning.*

Exactly.

*I mean it is not bad. What is interesting is how you deal with it, use it and live with it on a daily basis. Some people find it difficult and some rather easy.*

My parents also had to travel so much for their job that I grew up with au pairs. I think we had, like, nineteen different people, so I have always lived with either French or Swiss people.

*So I guess you do not feel very different at work.*

Well, I guess I do feel different in a way, because there is no one at the bank with the sort of background that I have. They are all either Italians or completely English, or they might be Italians who grew up in Britain, but I have not met anyone with the same sort of background so far, and I guess that makes me different.

*Do you feel superior?*

It would sound bad if I said yes, would it not?

*No, not at all. You can say yes. Do you think it has made you a better person?*

I think it is something that is better because it broadens your mind, it made me more open to different sorts of people. It is the way I grew up and it is easier for me to get on with people.

*Do you not think it is much easier to grow up in just one culture?*

It probably is, as long as you can stay in your own culture, but then I think that as soon as you leave it, then you start to encounter problems. It is probably easier, but then it is not as interesting. It is very good as well, because it keeps the cultures together in a way. I mean you can tell for example the girl that I work with in my team, she is so Italian in every single way.

*So you feel positive about it.*

Yes, I feel very lucky and I am very thankful.

*Thank you for your time Claire. Shall we get the bill?*

## **Appendix E**

### **Lara's Interview**

*The interview takes place in a quiet restaurant at a Scottish University. Lara came back from Germany recently and I decided to interview her since she worked there for an international IT firm. When I talked to her in 2002, she had just started a Masters in Research and was considering a possible career in academia. She was in contact with one of my German friends at the time and we arranged to meet up for lunch at University in order to get to know each other. She was on her lunch break and advised she did not have much time since she had another meeting later on in town. We are both late and order some food and drinks quickly while heading to the dining room upstairs. The place is quiet and I can get all “set up”. Lara is Irish, twenty-five years old and was born in Dublin from English parents. She graduated with a degree in Modern Languages in Ireland and speaks German fluently. We are talking about what she did after graduation.*

*So what did you do after graduation then?*

Well, that was a bit of a trauma actually. I knew I wanted to pursue studying at some stage, but not yet. So I started sending my CV around to every single firm I thought would be interested me. I was doing temping at the time.

*Was that in the UK?*

No, it was in Ireland. I was not specifically looking for a job there but I quite enjoyed staying at my parents while figuring out what I was going to do later. It also made sense financially I guess.



*What languages did you study at University?*

I studied German and Russian. I was lucky I was at the right place at the right time and got two job offers within a month after I graduated. They were both in Management Consultancy and I just could not do it! (*Mutual laughter*) I ended up working for this really small company helping out with contracts and translation work, which was better than tempting in certain ways. They had to train me because I did not even know how to use Windows!

*No IT skills whatsoever! (Laughter)*

They then wanted me to go abroad and work on IT contracts in Los Angeles for a year but circumstances got in the way and I did not do it in the end. One of the contractors working for us had an offer for a two-week job in Germany and I ended up staying there for two years!

*Was it an American company you were working for?*

Yes, it was, and they were more than happy for me to stay in East Germany and make lots of money there for them! I worked for them in Ireland for less than a year, and that was it. I also had to go to Los Angeles four times in two months before moving to Germany, which was quite exhausting.

*Four times in two months?*

Yes.

*Right. And did they send you there for a week each time?*

Yes. It does sound very glitzy, but by the end of it I was always so exhausted and miserable... They never had any proper accommodation for me there, which explained why I could not stay there any longer than a week at a time.

*And when you were in Germany, where did you live?*

I stayed in Iena, a very small town near Weimar. I was not sure I was going to stay there though.

*And did you spend your Year Abroad in Germany before that? Where did you go?*

I went to Berlin. I was keen to go back after that. They offered me a good salary and because I had had such a good experience staying in Berlin, I was keen on going back to Germany and live abroad again. It is funny because going back to live there was not something I had planned at all. I had good memories of life in Germany and was given the opportunity to work there for the first time.

*So what was it like working there then?*

Creepy. *(Mutual laughter)* It was a big IT business with some kind of family ethics that I found irritating to be honest.

*What do you mean by family ethics?*

Well they try to make you feel like you are part of a big family of IT workers. It is such crap! There were no unions whatsoever and other people from Eastern Europe were getting paid considerably less than I did for some obscure reason.

*And would you describe your working environment as a multicultural one then?*

Yes, it was fairly multicultural. I was the only European native English speaker at that time. There were quite a few Californians obviously, but being Californian they were Italian-Californian, French-Californian and so on. There were a couple of Indians and Russians as well.

*Did you socialise with them?*

I tended to mix with the Americans and Germans most. I ended up getting to know the Germans from other teams, too.

*And how were you perceived there? Were you identified as a foreigner?*

The problem was that I did not have any computer training and they were all IT engineers who were quite advanced at their level. They were also a lot more informed about the IT world than I was. That was the main difference at work. I guess I never really felt that foreign anyway.

*And were you expected to get on with it straight away?*

Yes, I was. But it was fine.

*Were you under a lot of pressure?*

Yes, but that was more... It is the nature of the industry, as you always try to get your product out on the market before other companies do. If someone else has the idea first, then you lose copyright opportunities. This explains why there is so much pressure to come up with new ideas all the time. You also have to secure certain markets and reinforce your presence there. The problem is, I did not take the whole thing too seriously, however stressful it became at times.

*Right.*

There was this interesting combination of Californian efficiency and willingness from the East Germans to acquire that new technology which meant extended working hours and spending most of your life at work! I think the company offered a substitute or projection for some kind of cultural identity there that made individuals feel like they were part of a big technological family. People felt protected and sheltered by the firm I guess. It was a community, but when times started getting hard, people were competing against each other and that really showed.

*Did you notice hints of a family discourse working within the “Firma”? Did the company organise social events for its employees?*

Absolutely. We had a company newspaper and they organised a lot of events for us. Most East Germans I knew there were younger than me but were already married with kids, which sort of emphasised the family element. Their wives never worked and looked after the children at home. In that way it was very different from the Californian model where a lot of women would prioritise their career and ambitions before considering the option of a family life.

*And how many hours did your team work weekly?*

A lot! It was a minimum of sixty a week, but plenty of people were actually doing more than that. Some of them never went on holiday either and seemed to have no life outside work. It is funny because I always thought I was working very hard, but when I compared myself to other people, I realised I was not even close!

*Did people actually work from Monday to Sunday then?*



Yes.

*Wow! Did they work every Sunday, too?*

Yes, they did. I always felt like I was being a bit dishonest though... Well, not dishonest really, but when I saw what other people were getting paid for the number of hours they put... A lot of them were paid in stock options and could have lost everything very quickly. But that is also the nature of the E-business and its constant changes and fluctuations.

*I guess people would also want to maintain certain lifestyles, which is why they worked so much.*

Yes. Some management guys went a bit over the top with the money actually. I remember this guy who ordered a customised Porsche with his name embroidered on the seats.

*Like some status symbol in an Eighties, conspicuous, kind of way.*

Yes. It was fairly in your face and blatant most times.

*And how did you cope with working so much? Did you have any time for yourself?*

*Did you want to learn something about the culture you were in?*

Yes, I tried. I was lucky that my flatmate was East German and worked as a librarian. That meant there was something real there! We talked about literature and I got to know her friends quite well. I guess it kept me grounded in a way and that was important considering the sort of job I had. I was meeting successful executives at

work while my flatmate's unemployed mother lived alone. She was middle-aged, with few skills, and was rejected everywhere she went.

*Was there a lot of unemployment where you were working?*

Yes, it was quite bad. If you are a middle-aged woman with few skills...

*So would you say that other people in the team were mixing with Germans or not?*

Well, there was one guy who actually came over because he had an East German fiancée and they got married a couple of months after he started.

*Did they get married in the "Firma" (Laughter on both sides)*

I mean it was something that happened quite a lot actually. I knew this Australian guy who had met a girl there and wanted to get engaged. The other Americans tended to work in America most of the year but came over for two or three months stays which meant they did not really get to meet or mix with anyone there. But at the same time it is harder to break in German culture than it is in the West.

*Why?*

They are more reserved and have fairly strong anti-American feelings making their vision of the West quite biased.

*The greed factor?*

No, greed is good. It has more to do with arrogance and imperialistic tendencies. So I was really trying to push the whole "I am not from California you know, I actually

grew up in a “poor” European country.” card. (*Mutual laughter*) I had to wear second-hand clothes, too.

*I had a friend who was running a similar IT business back home in Paris and it really felt as if people involved in it were just running around chasing some kind of project that fulfilled their lives in rather obscure ways. They practically lived at work and often they did not even spend what they were earning because they did not have time to buy anything!*

I know. A lot of it is not about money though. I guess I enjoyed watching new technologies unfold but... It was not enough of a motivation to keep me going for years.

*What kind of basis did they hire you on then?*

I was hired on the basis of my previous working experience within them and the fact that I had proved myself earlier on. They also knew I would be flexible and would not mind travelling back and forth to California if required.

*And how do you look back on that experience now?*

Well, I suppose there was a team atmosphere and I enjoyed getting to know my flatmates’ friends and family.

*Have you kept in touch with them?*

Yes, I have. We are very close actually! I guess I became more tolerant in certain ways of how much more traditional and patriarchal such societies can be. You get used to that kind of thing, men always wanting to get the bill and so on. I guess I felt

very disillusioned as far as work was concerned and felt rather alienated from day one.

*Why do you think people worked so much then? Why were they willing to sacrifice their free time and chance to discover another culture?*

Well I guess it is an industry where people get really sucked into their jobs and technological changes. It is also a very fast-paced environment where one has to keep up with constant changes and adjustments. I guess some people there are passionate about what they do, which is fair enough if that is what you really want to do, but when you work twenty hours a day... Is it alienated labour and does it really belong to you? I think this is what upset me the most.

*That means you could live anywhere and have the same kind of experience I guess.*

Absolutely. Cultural discovery is irrelevant in that case. It is interesting because people get sucked into this whole work culture and fabricate this lifestyle fantasy, probably because they are individuals running away from their backgrounds or motivated by personal reasons. The funny thing is that people tended to find me threatening at work.

*Really? And why?*

Well, a lot of it was about knowledge I guess. People were a bit shocked when they found out I had near native fluency in German for instance. They always thought I was American most of the time. That upset me a lot actually! (*Laughter*) I think people felt quite scared if you were too critical or showed too much interest in what was going on. Sometimes it helped trying to make them believe I was thick instead of



the opposite. And then there were other times when I felt I could really be myself and people responded to me in very positive ways. I guess I was very pleased about that, too! A lot of problems there had more to do with being a woman than coming from a foreign background and working abroad.

*Would you consider living and working abroad again?*

Yes and no. You tend to think you will forget you are abroad, but you never do really. There are days when you just want to speak your native language, go to a shop and not have to worry about how your accent is going to sound.

*Does that mean you still felt self-conscious after living there for a year?*

Well, it was second nature, but it had more to do with living in such a small town and finding ways to integrate within that context. I remember going to the bank and having to speak very slowly in order to make sure I would be understood properly. You just felt as if you were constantly being reminded of the fact that you were foreign.

*It is interesting. Did you feel being a foreigner was a plus in that context?*

It is hard to say. I guess I was able to challenge people's preconceptions about Ireland and was interested in trying to subvert the usual stereotypes. I guess that, within the workplace, I was also the least devoted individual in the whole company, which meant I still found time outside work to meet up with people and discuss things together. Things that mattered so much to other people and worked as some sort of substitute for cultural identity never appealed to me.

*You sound like you were very aware of how things functioned in your working context, but did you actually conform to it in other ways?*

*(Long silence and shared laughter)*

*That is a good question, is it not?*

I did try to work hard, and I did the “good work”, but I did not feel like I had to prove anything. I did not want to “perform” the way other people did.

*And were there anything such as cultural induction programs to welcome you within the company at first?*

No, not at all. The thing is, the working ethic is so strong that not much else is required. My impression was that people were quite happy to work there, regardless of the stressful conditions and bad salaries. Even though employees were controlled and monitored, they still felt like they belonged somehow.

*Do you think you were overqualified for the position?*

No, I would not say so. You have to bear in mind that I had almost zero knowledge of IT before I started working there, and what I did, I did it very well and worked a lot along the other members of my team. It is just that I never felt passionate about it and it was quite mechanical in the end. One thing that really struck me in cultural terms was the fact that people did not want me to speak to me in English. The East Germans working there insisted on me speaking German and got quite upset if I sent them e-mails in English for instance.

*That is interesting. Do you think they were resisting the dominance of English in the workplace and “global economy” in general?*

Yes. I guess East Germany had cultural references more oriented towards Russia than the West and quite a strong anti-American stance...

*...which of course was rather paradoxical considering they were working for a Californian company and adopting Western lifestyles.*

Exactly. I remember one episode when I went out clubbing with my flatmate and talked to her in English as we got in. She was really annoyed and asked me to switch to German straight away.

*That is quite strong!*

Yes, it is. I guess they also have a sense of their own identity and values that they want to preserve and perpetuate. This stems, again, from a clear dislike of any imperialistic tendencies America may have, which is another contradiction I suppose.

*It also leads us to the following key question: do you think your German speaking skills have increased the value of your cultural capital as a worker?*

*(Smiling knowingly).* I hope so. I am a very good at selling myself anyway. *(Mutual laughter)* Just look at my CV and you will see... Listen, it is really nice talking to you, but I am afraid I will have to run to meet someone in town. Maybe we could meet up another time.

*Sure. Thank you for your time Lara. We had a really nice chat.*

## **Appendix F**

### **Laura's Interview**



*The interview takes place at a friend's flat before dinner. I have been trying to interview Laura for weeks but we could never seem to find the right slot to meet up. We are both very hungry and I have just realised she is looking quite nervous as I switch the tape recorder on.*

*Could you give me a brief summary of what you were doing before you got your first proper job here in Glasgow?*

I come from the South West of France and studied English at the University of Bordeaux and it is really thanks to my university that I was allowed to come here in the first place and spend some time abroad, my first experience being in Wales, in Swansea. I really enjoyed it actually. It was a really good way to be more open-minded and more receptive to other things.

*Were you still studying at that point?*

Yes, I was studying part of my degree in Swansea. After I went back to the University of Bordeaux to do my Master's which I really enjoyed as such, but I did not enjoy coming back to France and being with my relations. I had a totally different perception of France and French people.

*So was it like a reverse culture shock sort of thing?*

Yes. And so I just decided to go and spend another year abroad and had the opportunity to teach temporarily at the University of Sheffield as a language assistant which was a brilliant year.

*And were you still studying at that point?*

Yes, I was at the beginning of my PhD or D.E.A. And it was great because I had my own room and was completely independent from my parents. I also had a great relationship with the students, a lot of partying and great relationships with my French colleagues actually. So I made some really great friends down there. And after that I managed to find a similar post in Glasgow at university as a language assistant and I stayed there for two years.

*And then you completed your D.E.A.*

I completed my D.E.A. the year I was in Sheffield, came back to Glasgow to prepare my CAPES teaching qualification in France.

*Did you know what you were going to do at that point? Did you have an idea of what sort of career you wanted?*

Well, I definitely wanted to stay in teaching but I was not so happy about the university I was working at.

*Why?*

Just generally because I thought it was too pedantic and not socially involved enough.

*You mean socially involved as in, like, within the Department or...*

No, within society. It was a bit of a separate world and very, very privileged one and I sort of wanted to try to be more socially involved.

*In what ways do you think it was privileged?*

Well, it was in terms of the pupils you have to deal with, the people generally you have to deal with who obviously have a very good character and a very good education and all open-minded and ready to learn. And I did find the students were a bit stifling, in the sense that it's all based on money spending and going out. But do not get me wrong, I really did enjoy the years I spent teaching Modern Languages at university but after that I really wanted to do something different.

*So how did things go from there?*

From there I just passed my qualification as an English teacher in France and completed the examination the first year I was in Glasgow and decided to stay as a gap year just because I really enjoyed Glasgow and wanted to stay on for a bit. At that point I met my partner, which was a rather (*starts giggling*) determining point in me coming back to Glasgow afterwards.

*Is he Scottish?*

He is actually English. But I did have to go back to France in order to complete my teaching qualification and do my practical year hoping I was going to be able to gain some experience which would be recognised in this country.

*So you really wanted to come back then.*

Well, yes. There was no way I could have maintained the relationship without coming back.

*Was there a dilemma for you in terms of career by thinking that by not remaining in France you were closing down some options? Was that something you thought about?*

No, I do not think I actually closed any options really. I was not very tempted to do the job in France I had a qualification for anyway. In any case, and for the reasons I gave you earlier on, I was not going to teach at university either. I actually really enjoyed my practical year as a teacher, so I was obviously I was keen to come back for personal reasons but also because I had enjoyed teaching so much here. And I just had such good memories of Scotland and Scottish people who had been friendly, welcoming and pretty relaxed basically, as the sort of deprived part of France I was working in during my teaching year in France. (*Laura was teaching in the Beauvais area.*) My biggest dilemma was leaving France and not having the guarantee to find a teaching job here. I mean it was secure in a way since I could always go back to France and get a job anyway and I just wanted to keep that as a kind of independence and security.

*So you came back here then and started looking for a job. What sort of job were you looking for?*

Mainly teaching.

*Was it teaching languages again?*

Teaching French in secondary schools, really concentrating on them. I had really done most of what I wanted to do at the university of Glasgow and there was not much point for me going back there, you know, not in terms of opportunities or chances. I think I could have got another year of being a language assistant, no problem, but I was not willing to do that. So I basically got into contact with the General Teaching Council in Scotland while doing my practical year in France advising me how I could make my teaching qualification valid in Scotland teaching at secondary schools over



here. I started doing all these applications around December and January last year and got an answer at the beginning of August, so it took a good six to seven months.

*What were you doing in the meantime? Were you working?*

I was still doing my practical year at that point and I was being paid as well.

*Oh, ok. So that is how you ended getting your first job then.*

Well, I got this first job purely by chance. I remember driving back from France on a Tuesday and I had this note from a friend who told me he definitely knew of a teacher who was looking for a French teacher at the very last minute because she had been let down by another teacher. So I met this lady in...the pub and she asked me: "Well, can you start on Monday?"

*Is that the job you are still in just now?*

Yes, I actually had a temporary contract to start with and then applied for the job and got it and I have been there since August now and am planning on staying for another year.

*So tell me how it has been when since you first started teaching at secondary school.*

*Tell me about the job and the environment you are in, the sort of people you work with and the pupils you teach. It has obviously been a very different experience from teaching at university which you described as a very privileged environment to evolve in. Can you tell me more about these aspects?*

Well, to start with I had heard all sorts of things about secondary schools in Britain and how badly behaved they were because of the private system. I was really

expecting the worst, especially after that the lady who employed me told me that it was not a great school and that there were lots of problems and it was not going to be easy. I have to say I was really down for the first two months because I did find it very difficult.

*What was difficult?*

It was just difficult to deal with the pupils. I had all sorts of problems, mainly discipline problems. Generally they just did not respond at all...

*How did they treat you?*

It was obviously lack of respect most of the time, not for all the pupils obviously but some of them with a lack of respect and testing my limits all the time, which is what seems to happen to any new teachers at school, particularly if you happen to be a young female teacher, with on top of that being French, having an accent and feeling that they could take advantage of that. They could start swearing using their own language just to make sure I would not be able to understand them. And most of the time I did, but to be honest, most of the time, I did not react quickly enough, because I was not familiar with the discipline system and all of that.

*Were there moments where you were thinking it was all getting too much or did you stick to it?*

Well, it was difficult at times but I also knew that when you start to teach at first and are faced with a difficult group, with a different language, you then just have to deal with emotions differently. Generally, I was just very determined to give it a real go.

*How did you feel the pupils perceive you?*

I think they were really curious to be honest. It was not negative at all for most of them, not negative or xenophobic. They were just really curious and quite happy about it actually, happy to have a native language teacher. I heard this girl in the corridor once commenting that they now had a real French teacher in school. They value the fact that it is my native language.

*Do you think that as a native teacher you had some kind of authority others teachers did not have?*

I think I do have a certain credibility that not many teachers previously working in my position were enjoying, since other teachers were making mistakes and things like that.

*How old are the kids that you teach?*

Between 12 and 18.

*How do you feel then about the image you give them and the fact that, as you said, you are the real thing? What sort of image do you try to project of French culture?*

I do not think I do that at all because you cannot allow yourself to be French in that context. You cannot allow yourself to be too different otherwise they do not connect to you at all, and there is absolutely no communication if you decide to be too different, because they are quite narrow minded and they also have never learnt French as a subject. But they are extremely curious about the way of life and how things are in France and what you do.

*So they are annoyed with the subject as such, including the grammar and all the rest, but they are curious about the way of life.*

Yes.

*Is that like a tourism thing?*

Not really. Most of them actually go to Spain on holiday. Hardly any of them has ever been to France. Probably less than fifty percent have been to France.

*So do you feel really exotic then?*

Yes, in a way I think I am a bit exotic, you know, maybe in a teenager's way. Most of the pupils enjoyed the classes actually, apart from one where it did not go well at all because they could not accept the fact that I was French.

*Really?*

Yes. Some just thought the class was too French for them.

*A French class?*

Absolutely. They made absolutely no effort every time I was trying to tell them stories about French people, they just started to snigger and just undermine the whole thing completely.

*How do you explain that? How do you account for their lack of response?*

It is a mixture of being a teenager, being poor and being scared of anything different, as well as showing no interest for difference.

*What do you think the students think of you then? Do you think they see you as being really French?*

Not really.



No?

Yes, there is a strong part of me as an image that is French and that is my main characteristic as a teacher in the school, since I am identified as “the French teacher” or “the French girl”, but on the other hand I am also a teacher and have to behave like one if I want to have any sort of relationship with them. And that is extremely important, being understood by them all the time and speak English to them and be interested in their personal life, too. And some of the pupils really respect that actually.

*And how do you find it now compared to when you started?*

I feel more comfortable to be honest. It obviously comes from a better knowledge of a different system but also from knowing what my assets are as a French teacher and a native speaker.

*Do you not find it strange looking at yourself and coming to think of your own role as a French representative when you are telling me that you have to be like them in order to interest them? How do you deal with all these contradictions? At the end of the day you are French, but you also have to be a certain way to try to interest them. How do you get all these aspects to reconcile within? Is there a conflict there or is it actually ok?*

A conflict between me and the pupils?

No, I mean...

Myself?

Yes.

Survival skill. (*she starts laughing and I join in*) I do not have the choice to be honest.

*Did you feel they were attacking you or something?*

Some of them definitely. I would say a few. A handful of them just could not accept me. And I do not know if that was because I was French or I was a woman, or because I was a young woman and they could not accept any authority from me.

*So you have had to work on that.*

I have, yes.

*Being respected by people.*

Yes.

*Do you think you have their respect now?*

From most of them, yes. But not from all yet. For instance our math teacher has no respect from any of her teachers at all.

*And did you encounter such problems when teaching at university?*

Not at all. There is a lot less responsibility at university to start with. The pupils are more autonomous and responsible for their work and in class. It is a very different relationship which means you cannot treat pupils the same way as you would treat students.

*Do you think some pupils come out of your class feeling challenged and thinking twice about what you say? Do you think that, by just being who you are, you actually*

*challenge them? It sounds a bit like that anyway, because it feels as if they do not really know where to put you.*

Yes, you have to be challenging. They enjoy it. That is what they like basically. The teaching is all about challenging and creating something to solve this little information gap and then be willing to move forward basically. It is about trying to give them more knowledge about things they want to know about really.

*And how do you see your career evolving? Would you like to stay in the same sort of school?*

There was a school in the private sector, right next to where I live, where they were looking for someone doing the same job part-time. It happened a few months ago and I was going to apply for it, because my relationship with the pupils was not so great at that time. I also had the commuting, which meant spending ages driving to work every day. And then I decided not to, mainly for ideological reasons, just the fact that I did not want to work in a private school. And if I was going to be a teacher, it was not necessarily to work in a deprived area, but in the state sector. I did not really feel that pupils should pay for their education.

*Do you think this experience has changed the way you look at Scottish people?*

Well, it changed it and it confirmed all the things I had been studying about, basically poverty and the fact that there are such pockets of poverty in Scotland, and Britain in general. That was something I really was not aware of at all, as well as class separations, which is something I find striking here.

*Yes. The social system is actually a lot more class-conscious, which I guess is a big cliché about Britain being actually true.*

Yes, and it is so true. I became aware of religious division as well. It really shocked me at school seeing the oppositions between Catholics and Protestants, whether it be amongst pupil or staff. These are things I would never have suspected before, especially from teachers who are supposed to be tolerant and not openly biased. I have been quite shocked by that. I have also been able to look at both French and Scottish educational systems in a critical way, and there are such different approaches in the two to school teaching and learning.

*Would you ever consider going back to university?*

Not really. I now feel more comfortable now with my teaching in this country. I have had a really challenging year but now I really enjoy it. It also has to do with the fact that I now have pupils in my class who had British language teachers before, which makes it a completely different approach to the First Year pupils who are fresh and not so much subject to peer pressure. Just teaching pupils at different levels of their schooling years just completely shows you the difference. I have been shocked, for instance, by the fact that certain pupils had really strong religious and racist opinions. There is racism towards Asians, for example. I was also shocked by the fact that they start drinking so early, sometimes from the age of 12 and end up really drunk so young, which is something that does not exist so much in France.

*It sounds like you now have a much more realistic vision of what certain parts of Scotland are about and your vision is also quite critical in a way. Do you think you still feel that you can be happy here?*



Yes, absolutely. Yes, yes and no. To be honest if I ever have kids I do not know if I would like them so much to grow up in that kind of countryside deprived kind of area or...

*I was about to say, if you had kids would you send them to your school?*

No. *(smiles and further laughter)*

*Why?*

Just because it is a completely different culture. The food is really bad, and there is a lot of bullying.

*This is really interesting because I had a conversation with an Austrian girl recently who told me: "Oh, there is no way I could stay here because I do not really agree with the educational system here, etcetera..." And I was telling her: "But what if you met a Scottish guy and fell in love with him, would you then not change your mind about it?" But she was really definite about the whole thing, she was just saying: "There is no way I would let my kids grow up here." So it is kind of strange, because you are actually seeing someone who is English, so do you not think it reconciles certain things?*

Oh, it does. At the end of the day, I would not really have a choice but I would not like to send my kids to the school I work in for instance, simply because I would not like to live in this sort of area. I mean some kids end up getting really high grades there, but the environment and certain structures in school are not suitable, as far as I am concerned.

*How do you see your future then? Do you see yourself staying here?*

I can definitely see myself staying here for quite a few years, as long as I can go back to France regularly, because of the weather and the heat and the family obviously, the culture and the food. And also, it makes sense as a French teacher to be in contact with France and French culture, and, you know, keep going.

*Can you imagine moving from Scotland?*

Yes. I do like living in Scotland though, I do like the lifestyle and there are some real quality things as opposed to French culture. Yes, and I do like the countryside, too. The only thing that bothers me is the darkness and the cold. And that is about it.

*The tape comes to an end. I turn it over and Laura briefly talks about the area she lives in. We are both starving and decide to join our friend who is still cooking in the kitchen. I thank Laura and switch the tape recorder off.*

## **Appendix G**

### **Marie's Interview**

*The interview takes place in the kitchen of Marie's small studio flat. It is located in a quiet, residential area in the centre of Paris. She invited some friends over for dinner and kindly asked me to come over. After serving dinner and chatting to her Irish and Scottish friends, we head back to the kitchen and talk for a while about the flat and how she found it. Marie really likes the area because it is central and ideal for getting around. She did not have any major problems finding the flat and lives there on her own. She is seeing a French guy and thinking of moving at some point. I turn the tape recorder on and realise that Marie is not nervous at all. We start talking about what she did after graduation.*

*What did you decide to do after graduation? When did that happen again?*

I graduated in July last year [1999] and came to Paris straight after. I had been looking for a job for several months and went to Barcelona for two weeks to visit friends. The ideal for me was to work within an international organisation and to find a post within the Personnel or Human Resources department and I realised it was going to be rather hard to find.

*How long did it take you to find a job?*

I had to start with temping at the beginning of September.

*And had you already made up your mind about coming to Paris or did it happen by chance?*



No, I had made up my mind for a while because I wanted to get to know France better.

*Ok. I would like to recall briefly that you come from a mixed background family, as your father is English and your mother French. Did you find that, coming here to look for a job, you were being treated like a foreigner or a French person? Do you feel treated equally or do you have the impression that, because you grew up in Oxford, people still have this idea that you are not completely French?*

Yes.

*And how do you position yourself regards that?*

I position myself as bicultural actually, with a slight tendency toward the English side since I spent most of my time in English speaking countries, even though I am perceived as an English woman.

*And is that good or bad?*

Well, it has its advantages and disadvantages. The biggest disadvantage is that an academic linguistic background in Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan and French is neither accepted nor valued in France. It has therefore been difficult to be accepted in France with a British educational background.

*Is there a slight discrimination process that takes place then?*

Yes, there is. Geographical frontiers are not that open yet for mentalities to change and accept people. In France, it is all quite strict and exclusive: what appeals to the French are the business and engineering schools as well as the “grandes écoles” [elite

French schools aiming at the education of future politicians, bureaucrats and the military]. Besides that, language education leads to teaching and translation posts.

*How did it go with your very first job? Did you work with French or foreign people?*

*You have just switched jobs now, haven't you?*

Yes, I have. I was temping with my Canadian and Belgian bosses. Then I was offered a C.D.I. [permanent working contract] by this company where I had six bosses. Four were French, one English and one American. Then I ended up in a purely Franco-French environment where I am now.

*Do you prefer that or was it better where you were before? What are the differences between the two?*

I think relationships are very important at work, and it is true that, as far as cultures are concerned, I feel more comfortable within a multicultural environment, not necessarily Franco-English though. I now work for a company managed by French bosses. But there are many people from different cultural backgrounds working there.

*And do you sometimes see or socialise with them?*

Yes, I do and usually speak English to them.

*That is nice. And what exactly are you doing at the moment?*

I work in recruitment. My exact title is "associée de recherche" [research associate]. My job is to find candidates for posts and I specialise in the field of technology. I work in what is called a "practice technologie".

*Do you select people then?*

Exactly. We have three ways to select them: one is from an already completed European database, another is through contacts, and the last one is using identification on the Internet, newspapers and private sources and businesses.

*And how do you find working in France? Does it suit you? Are you satisfied? How do you feel about it?*

Well, I am very satisfied as far as work is concerned. It is true that it took me time to get here; I had to change several times before finding a stimulating environment and position I felt comfortable with. It would have been much easier in England. With a British education one finds jobs more easily in England, but I feel very good here, even though I am not used to certain ways of doing things in France. At the same time, there are certain things that are hard in England, too.

*Does one equate the other then?*

Yes, but I am happy to be in France because it is a change, I need to balance the “half and half” part a bit more.

*So the fact that you grew up in Britain and that you studied there...If I asked you what side you feel closer to culturally, where would you lean towards?*

Well, that is a little complicated because I spent my childhood -ten years- in the United States. I kind of lost the American identity a bit, even though my accent has been slightly affected by it. People still make remarks about my accent, but I do not feel American any more, and I feel really French and English. I think that culturally I

am more English since I lived and studied in English-speaking countries, but maybe emotionally I feel very close to France, too.

*But what is it that attracts you the most culturally? In terms of culture, lifestyle, food, environment, could you imagine yourself living in Britain, too? Is that not a problem?*

It is true that for the things you have just mentioned -such as lifestyle, environment and food- I prefer France, but as far as customer service is concerned, I find it a lot more pleasant in Britain.

*So do you think you are capable of being objective and not fall for one country or the other? You are comparing the two I guess.*

Yes. I think I feel equally comfortable in both countries. The reason I am in France now is diversity and the discovery of something I do not know so well.

*And how did the fact that you come from a multicultural background help you be open and travel? How do you feel about being in-between two cultures? Do you experience that in positive ways or is it sometimes difficult to know where you stand?*

No, it is true that it has given me a taste for variety, for travelling and changing countries, but I also think I feel good about it and it does not bother me.

*And if I asked you to pack up tomorrow to go live some place else, would you do it as easily as you came here?*

Well, I think that getting older [Marie was 25 at the time of the interview] made me appreciate stability a bit more and I can see myself staying in France for at least



another two or three years. Changing countries every year is not something I want or aim at for the time being. But if I was offered a good post or a nice opportunity...

*So does that depend on work then, is that important to you?*

I am now beyond travelling for travelling sake. Whenever I travel now, it is because I want to work and live in a country, and play the tourist.

*Do you think that this is the best way to get to know a culture? Is it living and working abroad, or do you think that tourists can get to know another culture well? What seems the best to you?*

The best way, I think, is without any doubt to work and live there.

*And how long for?*

It depends. The longer you stay, the better you get to know the place, but I would say that I need at least six months to feel comfortable in a country

*Six months is good actually. Did you manage to make French friends and meet people within that timeframe then?*

Yes, except that, as far as university environments are concerned, you are surrounded with people sharing the same centres of interest so... When you start working, you have less time because of your working hours.

*Perhaps it is because you spend more time with people at work that it is going to be easier to go out and socialise with them, as you get to see them more often. Are the people you know working with you or are they outside work? Is it a bit of both?*

Yes, I got to know most people through work. That does not apply to the people I am working with at the moment, since I have only worked there for two months. There are also people I see here who are related to my parents.

*And do you go back to Britain often? How many times a year do you actually go there?*

I arrived here in July last year but spent Christmas at home, and I had been there once before that. I go there three to four times a year.

*So can you picture yourself staying in France for a while then?*

Yes, I do.

*And what is this going to depend on? Will it be work related or linked to this idea of stability you mentioned earlier on? At the end of the day, what is the most important for you?*

There are many things coming into account, but I think the most important thing is to follow your instinct and that is not something I know for the time being. I will see what happens, what kind of opportunities I can get and how I feel about things.

Maybe I will feel like moving again sooner than I think.

*Ok. And if I asked you to name five positive and negative things about France, what would they be?*

What is negative in France is people's lack of friendliness, especially in Paris. People are often quite abrupt and very unpleasant. As far as shops are concerned, you do not get much patience here...

*And no customer service?*

No, there is also the way people sound on the phone sometimes... They are often very aggressive.

*And can you get used to that?*

Yes, I understand now that to get what I want I have to do the same thing, you just have to do the same really. What is unpleasant in Paris is the lack of cleanliness as well. There are lots of dogs' droppings everywhere. In England you do not have to look at the pavement when you walk. Apart from the dog problem, Paris is a rather clean city, but this shows lack of respect and consideration for others. It is the same in queues, people are a lot less disciplined here than in England, and people always push you when you get on the bus.

*So is the environment more aggressive then?*

Yes, it is.

*But if you were in London, New York or any large city, do you think you would experience the same things?*

I often compare it with London, but I find Paris to be a nicer city, even though the pace of life is more pleasant in London. People in London are more polite and respectful than in Paris. What is positive about Paris is that it is smaller than London. What I also enjoy here is the quality of life and good food. There are lots of small restaurants, good inexpensive wine, and it is easy to go out and get around with the R.E.R [regional train]. Public transport is great, and you rarely have problems with it.

*How did coming here affect your vision of Oxford? Are these two cities clearly separated for you?*

I spent five years of my life in Oxford, and apart from the fact that my parents live there I do not have any strong emotional ties to the place. I have as many ties to Scotland where I spent five years, too. I kind of see Oxford the same way, I like going there without having any strong emotional ties to it.

*Does each place correspond to separate things then?*

Yes, that is right.

*Are there any conflicts between these places?*

No, but at the same time it can create some, you still have two identities, and it annoys me when people call me English, because I feel this is not completely true, and it is the same when they call me French.

*And does that bother you when people criticise English things here?*

Yes, it does. I work with this English girl for instance who is a lot more defensive about it than me. Maybe I am different from her, but it true that certain things annoy me because they are ridiculous. I grew up in an environment where I saw things from a British angle. I have British reflexes, so I defend a lot of things as a result.

*And it will be the same on the other side.*

Yes, that is true. When French people are being criticised I tend to... I criticise the French more than the English.



*Why?*

Because there is an arrogance and certain superiority... So you obviously defend the most criticised I guess...

*So it is not possible to say that you feel closer to one culture than the other.*

No, it is not. I would not be right if one was taken away from me, but the two are just as important. When I return to England, I appreciate a lot of things I had not noticed before. At the same time, it happens to me to feel foreign in Britain. I was in the London underground once and had not paid the full fare for the journey. The man thought I was French and told me with a very strong English accent: “Deux francs!”... Well the amount I had to pay anyway, but he told me that in French.

*Would you say that your vision of France is objective and non-idealistic then?*

Well, it is true that certain things disappointed me here. I thought I would be more valued in professional terms. There is so much red tape nonsense in France, and I find that extremely annoying. I do not have a national insurance number at the moment, and although I applied for one more than a year ago, every time I call I am told I am English, even though I have the French nationality. And then they answer: “Yes, but you were born in London, so I will need such document.” And I say: “But I have provided you with that one already.” And their reply is: “Yes, but you gave it to another office.” And I say: “Did they not send it to you?” and so on... There are little things like these that can be amusing, such as going to the doctor’s several times and leaving without paying, as I did not understand well how the system worked. There are little differences, too, and the French are very proud of their doctors and health

care, but I personally find it better in Britain. There are for example more advantages for students in Britain than there are in France.

*Ok, that is great. Thank you Marie.*

## **Appendix H**

### **Mario's Interview**

*The interview takes place in a busy restaurant situated off the Champs Elysées in Paris. I meet up with Mario who has just finished work. A friend of mine gave me his number and he agreed to meet me for dinner. It must be about eight o'clock and we are both hungry. I offer him to chat in Italian but he advises me he would rather speak in French. We decide to order and as I put the tape recorder on the table, I can feel Mario is not too happy about our conversation being recorded. I try to reassure him explaining that all school, company and personal names will be changed and that the privacy of the graduates as well as the businesses employing them are therefore protected. I put the tape recorder on the table and start joking about the recording in order to ease the atmosphere.*

*Now everything you say will be used against you! (Mutual laughter) Can you tell me why you decided to come to France? What made you choose it? I was told you had passed your baccalauréat in the United States. Is that true?*

Yes. I stayed there in high school for two years. I first came to France on a school exchange for my Master's programme.

*Was that part of your business school curriculum?*

Yes. I was studying in Italy at that time but I enrolled within an international exchange programme where you got to spend one year in a European country getting work experience and sitting business school exams in order to qualify for a degree recognised within Europe. I did my Fifth Year in France, including six months at CHE [an established and prestigious business school in Paris] and then I started



working as a marketing intern for MVLH [a French conglomerate specialised in luxury goods]. Then I moved on to Floral as they had an offer for me. It was half chance, half planning. I did not know whether or not I was going to live in France but I had already signed my Floral contract before joining MVLH as an intern.

*Really?*

Yes. I had been sending CVs around to Italy, England and America and...

*Did you think of staying within a luxury group?*

Not really. I was more thinking about “grande distribution” at that time. The reason I joined Floral was because they offered me a position straight away.

*And how long have you worked there for?*

I have worked there for a bit more than a year now. I have been in France for two years though.

*And did you go back to Italy between the end of your internship and starting your new job?*

Not really. I have been back and forth for short holidays and weekends, but I am pretty much based in Paris at the moment.

*And how are you finding it?*

I am very happy. I enjoy working abroad.

*Why?*

There are two main reasons. The first is that it is very good for my career. I think that in the future companies will need international and European managers to join them who are also multicultural and speak several foreign languages.

*Which ones do you speak?*

*(Mario orders his main course with a glass of Brouilly; I order beer and a salad.)*

*Are we ordering water as well?*

Yes. Flat mineral water for me please. Within ten years time, it will be essential for managers to have work experience abroad. The second reason is that I find it very interesting and enriching to live abroad and learn new things, getting to know a new culture that is different from mine.

*And is that something you had programmed before? Did you know you always wanted to do this?*

Yes, definitely. When I was at business school, I had already opted for an international strategy.

*And is that commonplace amongst the people you studied with?*

It depends. The persons who chose my programme did it, too. We all have international profiles given the university and internship experiences we had before working. I think eighty percent of my friends live and work somewhere between France, England, Italy and the United States; New York, Paris, London. But it is not that normal: in Italy there are not many people who do that sort of thing.

*Is it a small world then?*

Yes, it is a small group indeed.

*And are the business schools located in bigger cities such as Rome and Milan?*

Yes they are. I guess they are more open and forward thinking. When you study at one of these famous business schools, it often implies you will get a job for a big company straight away, because these companies know about the schools and they know that the people who studied there can live and work abroad. If you come from a small business school in Italy, then you will struggle trying to get a job in France.

*And was the internship easy for you to get?*

Yes, it was very easy. Finding an internship and work contract were both greatly facilitated by my study period at CHE.

*And as far as being intercultural is concerned, how comfortable do you actually feel here? Was there any shock for you when you arrived?*

No, not at all. I had quite a few experiences abroad before working here. I went to High School in the States, spent seven months in Vienna in Austria for an Erasmus programme organised by my business school and then wrote my dissertation in China. Staying there was more of a shock actually! Then I did my military service in Manchester in England. I spent a lot of my life abroad and being in France is just like being in Italy for me. Of all countries I have lived in, France is the closest to Italy.

*I guess it is close to Northern Italy perhaps, but I went to Rome and it felt very different.*

Yes, that is right. It is not the same thing, but there are a lot of geographical and cultural similarities between France and Italy. People here are friendly and welcoming.

*Even here in Paris?*

Yes. They have the same habits as in Italy. If people go out together, it is because they want to catch up and have a chat, not just drink. It was completely different in England.

*That is true. I tend to notice that now when I come back here: people tend to drink less in France than in Britain.*

People tend to get drunk over there in order to communicate. Here it is a completely different lifestyle in terms of socialising and going out. When people come to France they are expected to adapt to the local culture anyway. But it has always attracted foreigners and had this image as an open and progressive country which is strange I guess. Britain is a lot more multicultural but I find it more racist a society than here. People do not mix as much as they do here.

*It is the main difference between intercultural and multicultural societies. I think that, in multicultural societies, difference is tolerated but people are not encouraged to exchange cultural experiences and backgrounds with each other. They tend to stay in separate groups.*

My experience is that the British are racist anyway. It is not visible but after a while you begin to notice it in the way they address you. I also found it hard to make friends other there when I was in Manchester. I really get the feeling that they are very proud



of being English and act as if they were at the centre of the universe. Maybe you get a similar arrogance with the French, but then I find them more willing to know about other cultures and mix with them. There are a lot of prejudices concerning the French that are not justified. They are meant to be snobbish, narrow-minded and arrogant, but I never experienced that myself. I find the English to be more like that.

*And when you arrived here were you confronted with the usual stereotypes about Italians, such as their dress sense, their reputation as charmers not being trustworthy? I am interested in seeing how you dealt with these perceptions and if you used them to your advantage perhaps.*

It depends. The more you go down in terms of social class...I mean, the lower the income, the less they travel, and the more they will believe in that kind of stereotype. The higher the income, the more open-minded people are. There are a lot of clichés about Italians here but in Floral, for instance, the atmosphere is very open and you hardly get that kind of attitude from colleagues.

*But is there not more uniformity, too?*

Yes, true. Everyone has had previous experiences abroad and...

*Are people quite similar to each other then?*

Yes, they are. Clichés should be dealt with accordingly as soon as they are identified as such. Italians have this reputation for chatting women up all the time, and I made sure I never approached anyone in the office for instance. I just had to be careful.

*Do you find that annoying having to make a conscious effort?*

Not really, you just have to pay attention to situations at the beginning. After a while it is fine and people stop worrying about stereotypes.

*Do you think your vision of Italy has changed since you started working here?*

Well, Italy is my country and I love it, but as far as the country is concerned, I do not think it is placed on the same level as other European countries.

*Does this mean you are now more critical towards it?*

That is right. I do not think I would react the same way if someone here criticised Italy though.

*What if you were listening to someone in Italy criticising the French? How would you react then?*

I do not react. I would still defend France but...

*It does not feel as emotional as Italy then.*

Yes, if someone criticises Italy it disturbs me, but I can criticise it if I want to.

*I guess you develop this ability as a foreigner living abroad. You start having a slightly different vision of your own environment.*

I guess it depends on what vision and experiences you have had before. Eighty percent of my friends have had very similar experiences to mine, which means that when we are in Italy, we can actually relate to each other. We understand each other really well even if we meet up in London or Milan for the weekend. As far as my other Italian friends are concerned, I do not have the feeling I have changed either.

When I decided to study in the States for High School, my friends over there were wondering what I was doing and tended to disapprove. When I came back from the U.S., I realised how disorganised and anarchic things were in Italy, whereas order ruled in the States. That is obvious if you compare the road system for instance. If you are a pedestrian in Italy, you are lucky if you do not get killed crossing the street! Little things like that annoyed me. It just felt as if Italy were a Third World country at times. And I noticed a change when I came back from America amongst my Italian friends, too. Everyone found me really different for some reason, and I got tired of it and changed all my friends there at that point. But now the situation is completely different. When I go back home now, nothing has changed.

*And can you see yourself staying here for the rest of your life?*

Yes, I can. France is the only country in the world where I could actually live. I could travel to other places such as Austria but never actually live there. I can see myself marrying a French girl and having a family here, too. In the U.S. everything is superficial, God is money and vice versa. You have two thousand friends and only connections. In Austria things were quite dull as everyone obsessed over the rules all the time. It was unbelievable, they had police everywhere and everybody was controlling everything. I found it very racist, too. There was really bad service in restaurants, too. But I think it has improved a bit now.

*I guess people do not really want to make an effort and get close to you because they know you will only stay for a short time. That is understandable I guess. You meet many people but it is actually hard to make friends in the long run.*

But you also attract people because you are different and that tends to fascinate people.

*Yes, but when you move a lot it is hard to keep stable and long lasting friendships. I am quite happy being a foreigner myself, too. When I return here, it feels as if my vision of France were postcard-like, as if I had an ideal of the place rather than the actual reality.*

When you live abroad and go back home, you start finding everything small, do you not? When I go back to Milan I feel like I am in the countryside, you know. At the end of the day, when you decide to go and settle down abroad, I think you are the one having to make the effort to adapt and understand people. It should not go the other way round. Once you understand the French, you realise how amazing they are.

*I also think you have to have the ability to be “someone else” within.*

True. That is part of the choice of living and working abroad.

*Do you feel that, in Floral, foreigners are treated like foreigners?*

No, you are just treated like anybody else. When you are Italian, you do get specific jokes about la mamma and macho men. You just have to get on with it but it can be heavy at times. But Italians are also perceived as talkative and friendly individuals, which is good. When you are German or English, there is a different kind of baggage you have to carry along.

*And do you play with that?*



Yes, of course. I use that to my advantage. I play with it. I had this meeting recently with the CEO board and people were laughing and clapping during my presentation. When you are a foreigner, you need to play that card and use it for your own benefit. But it can be annoying at times when people doubt your credibility. There are times when I do not feel like being funny and want people to take me seriously.

*Do you not feel a kind of pressure there, in the sense that people expect that kind of performance of you?*

No, not really. Having an accent, making mistakes when you talk and sounding different all create situations that are full of humour. At the end of the day, people would rather work with someone friendly than a complete bore.

*Are there a lot of foreigners working for Floral?*

No, there are not that many foreigners actually. In my team there is one guy from Lebanon who studied in France. I actually consider him like a Frenchman since he speaks French fluently and was educated in France. Even though Floral is a global business, I still see the company as a French one in organisational terms.

*Do you not find that strange that foreigners come to work for Floral and that they are treated like anybody else within the company? Did you feel a particular interest towards you because you were foreign?*

Do you mean in Floral or in general?

*No, I meant in Floral.*

In terms of hierarchy and business, there is a real interest for foreigners since they can be utilised in different ways...

*What do you mean? Does that have to do with any skills in particular?*

It has to do with languages and culture. The fact that France has this centralising tendency means that it is good for Floral to work with foreigners in order to get a better grasp of the market in Europe. That means that you can still be an Italian, but you will have been trained by a French organisation.

*Is that like an assimilation process?*

Yes, it is. I guess Floral has a more international spirit than other companies based in France.

*Is it more “anglophile” in a way?*

Yes, that is for sure. But it is nevertheless still very French for me.

*And what exactly is your job description then?*

I am a “chef de produit” dealing with the development of two Floral brands within the French market. My job also involves looking after advertising and coming up with new product concepts as well as operationalise them.

*And what does operationalisation mean?*

It means promoting products and being responsible for their development. I have to come up with new development ideas and choose advertising strategies in order to launch them. That means looking at the product from all angles. I also work with the

laboratories trying to come up with new formulae for products and basically supervise every step towards the finalised product. That means briefing and controlling new concepts. Once you have come up with a new concept, you need to introduce it and issue a formal presentation in front of the marketing directors' board. You have to think about the packaging with agencies specialised in that.

*Are there companies only dealing with that?*

Yes, there are. They deal with the practical execution of my project at the packaging level. I may have something very clear in mind, but when I do not, then the agencies help me come up with the right propositions that I then select until I find the one that is right. I basically decide what the product is going to look like and have the final say. Then I present my concepts to the general directors' and marketing board. I have to come up with new concepts on a regular basis and as often as I can.

*And how long does that take for your new products to come to life?*

It usually takes between three and four months. I basically enjoy myself for a couple of months, being creative and coming up with new concepts while working under a lot of pressure. Then you have to make a case for each product and defend them in front of the board. You also have to be aware of all the new products coming out in Europe and in the world in order to increase your global awareness of that market.

*And that can take more or less time depending on the project.*

Exactly. It normally takes between two and five months to find the product that performs the best. I also deal with fragrances for products and their production on a large industrial case. Once a product has been finalised, I need to make sure the same

results can be obtained with industrialised machines. That is what we call the development of the product. Then I deal with advertising agencies whose job is to promote the product.

*And do you choose the advertising agency?*

No. As far as budget and advertising are concerned, decisions come from higher up. I basically brief the agency we work for. At the end of the day, it is impossible to do everything yourself since you will be working with at least three thousand people involved at each specific stage of the production. I am the creator and conductor for each product, dealing with its development and operationalisation.

*Sounds like quite a lot of work for one person!*

Well it is!

*Do you have an assistant working for you?*

I have interns helping me. The most fundamental thing in my job is analysing the market and coming up with detailed consumer reports and briefings. I would say I spend fifty percent of my time doing that. We carry out studies and have to have a perfect knowledge of the market.

*And is there room for error?*

Well, that can happen. But it is rare to experience failure, because everything is tested before. You sometimes make mistakes but it can cost the company a lot of money and...



*What happens if someone gets it wrong then? Is the product being rejected as a result?*

Yes, it is, and you, too. (*Heavy silence on both parts*) You have to be very focused if you want to succeed and give it all your time and energy.

*Would you say that work is the priority in your life at the moment?*

At the moment it is. It is a bit strange, I guess, starting work at nine and finishing at ten...

*And is it like that every day?*

Yes, it is like that almost every day. Sometimes it is worse or better. You sometimes have to work weekends, but it is my life.

*Is it a choice, too?*

Yes it is. When I was at CHE I was partying every night. It was the same during my internship. I was going out three to four times a week. Now I come back home most nights and feel tired.

*And how old are you now?*

I am twenty-seven years old. And I think it will remain my number one priority until the age of thirty. It will be easier afterwards, because I will have less work and will be better at managing my schedule and stress. I will also have time to think about a family and have children.

*Is your job very stressful?*

Yes it is, but it is the Floral aspect that is the most stressful.

*Ok. Are you under pressure?*

Everything is designed to put you under pressure! The “chef de produit” has to present products to the whole hierarchy, ranging from the marketing director of the company to the French and European CEOs as well as the world director. It is mad! I do not know of any other business when you get to reach such high levels and that is very stressful. You only meet the world CEO three times a year, but if something does not work, then your career may be at risk. And if it works well, then you can speed up the whole process. You have so much work to do, so many presentations to write, that you do not always have time to be prepared for everything. And if something does not work out, then we are usually held responsible for it as we operate in the middle between all these different levels. That amounts to a lot of stress and is, I think, typical of companies such as Floral or Blocker and Tumble.

*Do you think you will be able deal with such high levels of stress for a long time?*

I can for the time being. After I do not know. I can deal with stress better now I guess than when I first started with Floral.

*And do you think you are better when you work under pressure?*

No, I am not. But there is no choice really. That is just the way things happen in my job. It is really hard being so stressed but that is part of the Floral plan to make us act as coordination agents between all the various levels. You end up working so much that you do not have much time for other things. You have no family, no life besides

work and there are difficult moments. If something does not work out, then you feel as if you are completely on your own. (*Long silence*)

*And what do you do in that case?*

I try to acknowledge it but tell myself to go for it and not lose my motivation because it is important. You have to go for it really.

*But do you not feel that you are stuck in a situation where you have so many things to do that there is hardly any time left for you to actually think about what you are doing? It sounds to me like you have some kind of distance towards it since you are able to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in your position.*

Yes, of course.

*Do you still feel like you are controlling the situation then?*

I control it much better than I used to. You have to learn to manage your stress. The more confident you are, the less stress there is.

*Are there people who fall apart at the seams?*

Oh yes! I have been in Floral for a year. There are twelve “*chefs de produit*” and nine have already left because they could not deal with the company stress any longer.

*And how are people “thanked for” then?*

Well...People are sacked and yet they are not. One basically makes them understand that they can stay if they wish, but they will have little opportunity to progress in their careers.

*So if there is a crisis, it is the individual who gets the blame, not the organisation itself.*

The thinking behind it is that the individual should be capable of dealing with stress.

Everyone is stressed because the world CEO stresses the European CEO who stresses the French one who stresses the marketing director and so on and so forth...

Everybody is stressed; you just have to get on with it. The thing is, stress is not perceived as a negative thing in Floral. People believe in it. *(He starts laughing)* You have to give the maximum, and it is all about getting the right mix between all these factors.

*But what happens then if you are telling me that you work very long hours and do not have much time for anything else? How does that affect your experience of life abroad?*

Well, you end up working with the same people for so long that...

*They become your friends?*

Yes, sometimes they do. Working for a foreigner is also a way to integrate oneself within a new society. I have the chance to be in contact with about three thousand people because of my work, and out of these three thousand, there may be two or three people I may get very close to. For instance, there are two people working in marketing I consider my best friends here. We go out, have some breaks during the day, leave work at ten and go for dinner together or something... We even go clubbing or travel together.

*Does it become like a family then?*



No, I would not say that but the company becomes your life. That does not mean, however, that there is nothing for me on the side. I still have a lot of friends outside work who are French and that I see -not very often because I do not have time- but keep contact with regardless, at least twice a month. The third group is the foreigners I know here. We do not see each other very often, but because we are experiencing the same things, we are close as a result. Each month I meet up for dinner with people who studied in the same school as me and we catch up with what we have been doing. It is clear that I do not want Floral to take over everything and have no private life as a result, because that matters to me, too. My goal is trying to find the right balance between everything. The thing is, it is important for me to make a good impression and have a great career, even if I sacrifice a lot of things in order to achieve that. Then you have to give yourself limits and refuse to work weekends for instance, even if it is hard sometimes.

*You need time to work out that balance I guess. Is it really hard for you sometimes?*

Yes, it is hard. I do not know of anyone not going through a tough time when living and working abroad.

*And when did that happen to you?*

For me it had a lot to do with work. I was being asked impossible things, my stress levels were too high and I was sometimes working until three in the morning for two weeks without anyone showing appreciation of my work or trying to help me motivate myself. If something does not work out, you are being criticised for it straight away, but if something is working, you are not being told anything. It is hard...but then it goes away. There were also times when I thought to myself, here I

am, working all the time, being twenty-seven and questioning what my life is about, usually coming up to the conclusion that it was a crappy life where I did nothing but work all the time. And you know, these are basically moments where you work a lot, and after two or three weeks, you eventually get some sense of satisfaction. I sometimes experienced culture shock, too, but not in France. It was all work related really.

*I guess you also realised everyone was being treated the same regardless of nationality.*

Yes.

*So is being foreign a “little extra” then?*

Yes, it is. The thing is, I have to perform as well as a French person and I am judged on my results. My aim is to become the director of an international company before I turn thirty and I am willing to sacrifice a lot in order to achieve that. I am ready to work until four in the morning every night for a month and never go out, do nothing apart from work in order to have success. I love being abroad, too. The things I can tolerate here I could never tolerate back in Italy. I enjoy living abroad and it is my choice to be here. It is as if I felt more alive here somehow, since there is no sense of routine in my life, whether this feeling translates in positive or negative terms. Even though I enjoy contrasts, I do have a sense of stability in my life. My family is very important to me and we are always in touch and see each other often. My parents keep me grounded in a way.

*It is reassuring I guess.*

Yes, it is. They are an important part of that balance I try to achieve in my life. My relationship to them is extraordinary in terms of emotional, psychological and financial support. I could not really have the same lifestyle I have without their help.

*Not even today?*

No, not really. I could not achieve that without their help, which gives me great reassurance. I have also had the same girlfriend for four years, but I also need dynamic new things in my life.

*I guess I can relate to that, expect that it is difficult finding a balance when you go through such extreme things in your life.*

Yes. Shall we ask for the bill? I will get this.

*Ok. Thank you so much.*

# **Appendix I**

## **Serge's Interview**



*The interview takes place in a restaurant. It is lunchtime and we are both on time. I decide to forget about the tape recorder for a while and order food first while Serge is on the phone to a friend. The starters arrive when I decide to put the tape recorder on the table. It does not seem to bother him and we start the interview.*

*I would like to start the interview with you telling me what you did after graduation. I believe you studied here in Scotland in order to be able to teach in Primary School afterwards?*

Yes. I graduated in June 2003 with a BA in French and Spanish at the University of West Lothian. In March 2003 I had an interview for the P.G.C.E. that was successful. I started my P.G.C.E. in August 2003 at Berry College.

*What exactly is the P.G.C.E? Is it some kind of teacher training?*

Yes.

*And how long does it last?*

One year.

*Will you be teaching straight after?*

Well, I will get one year of what they call "probation" here, which is like an intensive internship when one acts and gets paid like a teacher but only working three days a week. You are guaranteed a post for a year. I applied for it at the General Teaching Council and gave several regional options of places where I would like to work. They

then work it out with what is available and what kind of staff they are looking for. If everything goes according to plan, I will have a post commencing this year in August as a teacher. The following year, it will be up to me to find a post. This will consist of sending CVs to school directors, checking out ads within local newspapers.

*What are the reasons for which you live and work here?*

Why did I leave France? Is that what you mean?

*Yes. Why are you in Scotland right now?*

I left France because I wanted a change of scene. I was a bit fed up with living in the same place. I lived in London for a year and moved to Edinburgh thinking it would be as cosmopolitan as London. When living in Edinburgh, I realised I wanted to do something with my life and that working within call centres was not really a job for me. I had always wanted to be a teacher anyway. It was always something I had in mind for the past ten years. My experience in Edinburgh triggered that desire in a way. When I lived in France I wanted to be a Physics teacher, but it did not happen because I was not mature enough and wanted to do other things. When I arrived in Scotland, I wanted to be a teacher and thought about teaching French. At that time I had contacted Berry who advised me that, with a French diploma in Physics, I did not have the necessary qualifications to be a French teacher here. I had to pass a language degree here or have an interpreting degree. These were the only two options. I checked for interpreting and realised it would be very difficult. You had to be almost as good in English as in French, and I was not capable of that. The only solution left was therefore to enrol for a three-year degree. I was still working at the call centre in the first year, but the following year I had the opportunity to be a French assistant at

Primary and Secondary levels. After two years I realised I did not want to teach languages at Secondary level. I got my degree and started last August.

*So your career as a teacher has started now.*

Absolutely. The reason why I am here is more about luck than anything else. It was not a career choice for me to come to Scotland. It was a personal choice because I wanted to leave London but I did not feel like going back to France. I enjoy working here, too.

*What is it that suits you here in terms of work?*

As far as teaching is concerned, it is much easier to find a job here. In France you have to go through the *concours* giving you a qualification, but no post. Here you just have to apply for jobs straight away, whereas you have the *concours* selection process within the French system. If you are number 201 on the list and that only 200 vacancies are required, then you will not find a place. The grades you get will also influence the choice of the working place you will end up in. If your grades are high and you want to teach in Toulon, for instance, then you will have chances to get a job there. If your grades are not sufficient, then you will usually end up teaching in rough Parisian suburbs.

*What about the salary? Are there differences between the two systems?*

Well, the salary is not a motivation for me. I reckon that teachers get paid better here than in France, but as far as I am concerned, it is not important. I do not think that teaching conditions are better or worse than anywhere in France. As far as Primary is concerned, I think the picture is the same. As far as status is concerned, I am not sure

here if... It is probably easier to become a teacher here, I guess. The fact that I am foreign also acts as a plus, too.

*In what ways is it a plus for you?*

As far as the government is concerned -and also depending on the council- languages are being promoted within Primary level. For a school director, the fact that I am French means that there is no need to train me to teach languages, whereas a teacher here needs training to teach languages at Primary level. I think the training last for twenty-seven days that can be spread out during several months giving them the required qualification. This means that the school does not have to pay for training someone since I am probably more capable of teaching than someone here in the same job.

*How long can you see yourself here?*

I do not know. Five or six years maybe.

*And then, where do you see yourself?*

In France.

*And do you think going back there with your professional experiences would be a plus or a minus?*

I do not think it would be a minus actually. It will either be a plus or nothing else! There would always be possibilities for me to find alternative solutions for teaching at Primary in France. There is a third way in France whereby you can obtain a teaching post depending on your previous experience and the number of years you have been



teaching abroad. In fact, I know of someone who did this and got a job back home after teaching abroad for a few years.

*And as a foreigner here, how do you view your role as a teacher? You told me that it was an advantage, as far as the institution is concerned. But do you feel that, throughout your teaching work, you have been giving a certain image of France? Do people respond to you in interesting ways? What happens in that situation?*

I think there is a bit of everything really. There is curiosity and surprise amongst the children and some staff. Why would a French guy teach at Primary in Scotland? But then, they realise that it is an advantage for me to be French and that I will also bring something to the institution, in personal and French terms, since I have lived all my life there before coming here. Even though French and British cultures are not that different from one another, there is still a difference. As far as the children are concerned, most of them have probably never been to France, so seeing a French guy in front of him they can interact with and taught by is different, although they will be treated the same way as other members of staff would treat them.

*Does that mean you could live in various countries having the same kind of work without feeling a huge cultural difference?*

I think so, yes. I could live in Canada, South America, Italy or even in France and have the same kind of experience. There are questions and surprises at first, but very quickly people forget that I am a foreigner. Even my own friends often forget I am not from here!

*Do you think this is due to the fact that you have changed experiencing life here or do you think it is more the reflection of a global phenomenon within Western contemporary societies where differences are not as important as they used to be?*

Yes. I think differences are not as important as they used to be, but there is also an effort from my part to adapt myself to a new culture. I wanted to be integrated and belong here, and I have had to change. Well, maybe not changing... I think I have been able to be myself here. People accepted me the way I was and I had a strong desire for integration.

*How did that desire for integration translate into your life?*

As soon as I arrived in Britain I stayed away from other French people and French centres. That was one first personal step. After that, I made sure I made contact with British people and reading books in English. I also went to see films in English, whether they were English or American. I also made British friends, or at least people that spoke English and not French. Without rejecting France too much, I was nevertheless trying to cut myself away from it.

*And as far as the children in school are concerned, what do you think their motivations are for learning French? I know they are very young, but what do you think motivates them?*

As far as the Scottish and British governments are concerned, this means an acknowledgement that one lives in Europe, in a world where it is very easy to travel for one country to another. You can also work in any country through the European Union; that means fifteen countries, which will then be twenty-five quite soon. There is this kind of mobility first of all. There is also a realisation that Britain is not the

centre of the world and that there are other cultures involved, other differences that need to be acknowledged and perhaps integrated.

*And how do you think the children you teach react to this situation?*

I think they love learning new languages. They find it fun and interesting thinking they can express themselves in a foreign language. As far as European and cultural integration is concerned, it is another story. I do not think they acknowledge that fact that Britain is not the centre of the universe. I think it comes from the culture, what they hear at home or in the media, through their parents, grandparents or friends. I do not think they realised that Britain is a very small country and that, although English is the world language, they do not seem to take speaking five words of Spanish or Italian or French very seriously. As far as the government is concerned, there is a push towards opening up one's horizons, but I do not think people here necessarily have their eyes open.

*This is interesting for me because you are not working on the same level as other people I have interviewed within Education. The woman I interviewed who was teaching at University did not have the same approach to cultural curiosity, since she reckons there is a lack of it amongst students. And I find interesting that...*

I mean, they are very curious! They are amused by it.

*There must be something happening then from schools to universities, if you think that your pupils might end up there at some point. This curiosity seems to be lost somehow.*



Well, I think that the British have this surprise reaction to language assistants. They are amazed to see someone coming from another culture, speaking a different language, with a different lifestyle. It is the same with food, this frogs' legs thing or football, as far as French culture is concerned. I think the children lose this initial curiosity.

*Why do they lose it?*

I think France cultivates this curiosity for and interest in other cultures and cultural difference in general. It may not always be true, but as far as learning English was concerned, I was always told I would have to speak it otherwise I would not be able to go anywhere. Music from America and Britain -such as Pop for example- contributes to this phenomenon going back to the Sixties. It is the same with film and fashion.

*Is it a one-way thing though?*

Yes, it is, given that we are bombarded with McDonalds. I mean you will maybe have one French film that you can see, but it is restricted to specific places and audiences. You can go to France and see "Demolition Man" everywhere, knowing you will not have any problems finding it!

*Difference is being threatened then.*

Yes, completely. And it is a one-way process. It is film, music, food, everything! It is true that French culture is not promoted here as much. Even though they are being taught French at school for four or six hours a week, there is not much around them reminding the children of France, apart from looking at the map thinking: "Maybe we'll go to France on holiday this year." And when they go there, people will speak to



them in English anyway. Curiosity is therefore not promoted here. There is no pressure really, since they know that wherever they go, they will always find at least one person able to speak to them in English and understand them. When I was learning English in France, I knew from the start that French would not be enough, apart from bits of Switzerland, Belgium, Québec, Morocco or Algeria.

*What is for you the main advantage working in an English-speaking country?*

*(Heavy sighs and silence).*

*If you are planning on going back to France...*

That will not depend on me you know. It will not be a personal choice. It is Douglas [Serge's partner] who definitely wants to live in France. If it was up to me, I would maybe live there as well, but not within the next five to six years. It would probably take ten or fifteen years before making that decision. Maybe I will go and live somewhere else, Canada, or who knows where? I will go somewhere where my P.G.C.E. can be recognised, since it is not recognised in France anyway.

I guess the advantage living here is provoking this kind of curiosity from people towards France, which is perhaps not comparable to reactions to German culture.

You were talking beforehand about the German assistant deploring the students' lack of interest, and I was actually talking to a German friend once who told me, in fact, how she noticed the reaction was not the same here towards French culture. And it is true that I always had positive reactions to my "Frenchness". One speaks of the Auld Alliance in historical terms. I think it goes back Mary Stuart and implies that the French helped the Scots against the English who were the shared enemy. It is not the

same with the Germans. The curiosity is here to start with, but one tends to forget it after a while. But I think being foreign in this country is an advantage.

*Where does one find differences now then? You were telling me earlier on how you could picture yourself living somewhere else having the same kind of job or lifestyle. At what level would difference then manifest itself? Can you imagine yourself going to these places and being confronted with something completely different?*

I do not know, but I do not think so. It has never happened, but I do not think so. I think France is perceived in a rather positive way internationally. Perhaps things have changed in America after the boycott, but I am not so sure that the Americans...I am not sure. I talked to French people who have been to the States since 9/11 and not many Americans have changed their vision towards France. There is still some kind of curiosity towards France. I think it is still perceived as a place offering great cuisine, where food is good and healthy. Then you have fashion, perfumes and culture, cinema and literature. You will always get certain categories of people responding to that.

*For you, it is therefore a more positive image than German culture.*

It seems to me that this is the case. The German girl I mentioned before told me she had felt something a lot more negative here. It can also be explained, given that that Second World War is not so distant in terms on time. There are still people here who have experienced it during their lifetimes. Things might change in fifteen to twenty years time. This is what she told me; I did not verify that myself, but, in a certain way, it seems almost logical. There is nevertheless curiosity towards France, at least within Europe, and possibly on a global level.

*And when you get back to France, how do you think you will experience it?*

I am not sure. I am not looking forward to it anyway! I am a foreigner here amongst the British.

*And is that a status you enjoy?*

Yes, completely.

*Why?*

Because, in a certain way I am separated, not in the margins since I am integrated but...

*Does that mean you still feel different in a way?*

Absolutely. And I keep that sense of difference, too. When I am in France, I will be just like any other French person, although I will have lived a long time abroad. I will be fluent in English, but still French.

*So difference here is not something difficult for you.*

In the contrary! I cultivate it in a way.

*Is it not heavy to bear sometimes?*

No, never.

*Has it ever been difficult?*

No. From my first day here until now it has never been difficult.

*Is it losing this sense of difference that frightens you when thinking of going back to France?*

Yes, it is. Being normal.

*But do you not think you will be different anyway by having missed out on years of French culture and French life? Do you not think you will go back there and feel different anyway?*

I hope I will feel different. I think I will always feel this way. But it will be more insidious and less obvious.

*Is it only cultural this sense of difference that you have?*

It is at every level I think. It is cultural and intellectual. I received an education and lived in a country which were both different from here. This means I often have a slightly different way to look at things. I do not have any precise examples to give you here really, but I often compare France to my life here.

*But do you not think your romanticised vision of France might not correspond with its current reality?*

Probably.

*The fact that you live here means that you can only follow French life from the outside.*

As a matter of fact, I hardly follow it anyway! It is a vision of France the way it was five or six years ago.



*Maybe what worries you in a way is not being able to find this again on your return. You may not find what you left behind and be faced with a reality you may even dislike.*

Yes.

*But from what you told me, there is a sense of pleasure in difference that is, nevertheless, confronted with a certain uniformity, since your professional life would not differ so much from one place to another. I am therefore interested in your vision of difference as something individual and personal, even private.*

Well, my vision is an ambivalent one. I keep my difference wanting integration at the same time. I want people to perceive me as different, but also treat me as someone from here. When I start teaching next year, I want my English to be perfect, because I do not want parents thinking that because their son has a French teacher, there may be something missing. I do not want them to treat me differently and I do not want them to think that because I am French I am not serious, or that my English is not good enough to teach them to their kids. It is therefore always ambivalent, on the edge, like a knife. I do not want people to use that difference against me in a way. In my private life, I cultivate that sense of difference but I want it to stay an advantage in my professional life, and not the opposite. It is obvious that, even though I am familiar with Scottish history, I do not have the in-depth knowledge of someone who has grown up and lived here.

*To sum it up, is the main motivation behind your stay here difference itself?*

Yes, completely. My motivation behind leaving France was also the chance to reinvent myself, since I had always lived there and felt that my friends perceived me

in ways that were not necessarily how I saw myself. I wanted to be myself. It is strange thinking that I did not feel myself amongst my old friends since they knew me very well, but I sometimes felt their vision of me did not fit with how I saw myself.

*Do you think you identified with British culture from an early stage?*

Absolutely. I feel Franco-Scottish or at least have a culture in between the two. It is not the case really, since I have only been here for almost six years. I had a complete desire for integration from the start.

*Do you think that being in a relationship with a Scot played a part, too?*

Of course! I met Douglas three weeks after coming here. And I have lived within this Scottish context for more than five years. The Scots have -like Brittany and Corsica- a strong sense of their identity that they want to maintain.

*And if there had not been this relationship, do you think you would have been as keen?*

I do not think it would have changed anything.

*It was real desire then.*

Completely. I probably would not even be in Scotland by now! I would maybe go out with an English guy and not live here but I would have stayed in Britain anyway.

*Is there a form of "ennui" thinking you will go back to France and not feel that different in the end?*

Yes.

*Do you think that -staying here all your life- you would still retain your sense of difference?*

Yes. Douglas has a German friend who has been living here since her childhood and is now in her fifties. She is still different in a way. I have to work on myself in order to retain that sense of difference. Going back to France, I may still be different since I see myself as a human being with his own personal identity.

*And how do you define difference? It is a rejection of codes around you? How does “being different” translate into your life?*

Being different is rejecting certain codes that do not suit you while embracing others.

*Is it always against the flow?*

Sometimes yes. Sometimes no. It depends on the circumstances but does not automatically imply the rejection of what is around you. It can be acceptance, too.

If you rejected everything, then you would make integration impossible. I accepted a lot of things in order to integrate...

*...while keeping your own sense of difference intact.*

Yes. Difference to me equates individuality and could therefore be defined as such.

*This means that, regardless of cultural uniformity, there is still a place for difference.*

And there is also room for being individual.

*Is that something you noticed in other foreigners you happen to know?*

Yes, I did. You see it in extreme cases, such as within certain ethnic minorities where difference is being “cultivated” at the expense of integration. This is one of the reasons why I did not want to go to French centres or organisations. It is the easy option I guess.

*We finish our main course and order some coffees. I thank Serge and get the bill.*

