

Study abroad as a context for spiritual development: Case studies of undergraduates in France

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In this article, we consider the cases of two American undergraduates, Lola and Audrey¹, who studied abroad for a semester in France. Drawing on interview data collected during their sojourn, we consider their accounts of living and learning in France through the lens of Jesuit spirituality. In doing so, we demonstrate that although these students' accounts offer little evidence of linguistic or intercultural development, their deeply personal reactions to a term abroad in France suggest a kind of beneficial identity crisis best understood in the spiritual terms of desolation, consolation, discernment, and election. Following the case studies, we apply our findings to the outline of a short-term study abroad program in France designed to maximize linguistic and spiritual development.

Keywords: language learning, identity, study abroad

1 Introduction

Although identity was originally conceived of as only indirectly influencing the outcomes of language learning, since the early 1990's applied linguists have increasingly examined how a learner's identity affects learning gains and vice versa. That is, on the one hand, researchers have documented just how much *who* one is influences *how* and *what* one learns (Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2008; Kramsch, 2009; Polanyi, 1995). However, on the other hand, many also have emphasized how learning experiences can leave lasting impacts on who learners are, even outside of the contexts of L2 learning and use (Pierce, 1995, 1997). Of course, most applied linguists are most interested in the first scenario, tied as it is to the measurable gains in linguistic and intercultural competence afforded by study abroad. However, as we have found in the case studies to follow, many American students who are asked to describe the chief learning gains of their term abroad focus on impacts on their identity that have little or no connection to their language learning experiences (Bolen, 2001; Feinberg, 2002; Gore, 2005; Levin, 2001; Wolcott, 2013).

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Many researchers have cited such findings as evidence of the students' failure to adequately immerse themselves while abroad, and call for greater efforts on the part of program designers to force students to engage more deeply with the target language and community while abroad (Engle & Engle, 2002; Kinginger, 2009, 2010). While we recognize the potentially problematic dimensions of students' inclination to represent their time abroad as mostly about their own personal development, we also see this personal development as an outcome of study abroad that is laudable enough to merit deeper inspection (cf. Gmelch, 1997; Hoffa, 2002; Wolcott, 2010; Wolcott & Motyka, 2013).

In this article, we consider the cases of two American undergraduates, Lola and Audrey², who studied abroad in a semester-long program in France. Drawing on interview data collected during their sojourn, we consider their accounts of living and learning in France through the lens of Jesuit spirituality. In doing so, we demonstrate that although these students' accounts offer little evidence of linguistic or intercultural development, their deeply personal reactions to a term abroad in France suggest a kind of beneficial identity crisis best understood in spiritual terms. Following the case studies, we apply our findings to the outline of a short-term study abroad program in France designed to maximize linguistic and spiritual development.

2 Applied Linguistics research on study abroad and identity: From the social to the psychological to the spiritual

Applied linguists conducting research on language learning during study abroad originally turned to theories of identity to account for widely varying individual differences in learning gains post-sojourn. Early on, it became apparent that identity might account for students' inability to adapt to foreign linguistic and cultural norms, either due to rejection by members of the host community or through conscious resistance to these norms. These findings were the result of case studies, often drawing on autobiographical narratives (written or interview) and analysis of student/host interactions (Kinging, 2004; Pellegrino, 1998; Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005; Polanyi, 1995; Siegel, 1995; Wilkinson, 1998). These studies made salient the degree to which learner identity was multiple and the result of social processes of negotiation and imposition (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). As a result, applied linguists largely embraced a post-structuralist approach to identity, which conceptualizes identity as "the multiple ways in which people position themselves and are positioned" (Block, 2013, p. 18).

However, as Block (2007, 2013) has argued, despite a general tendency to emphasize individual agency in this post-structuralist research, most of these scholars offer a thoroughly social constructivist conceptualization of identity, wherein reference to the psychological is conspicuously absent. The error in this approach, Block (2013) argues, is to see identity as not merely socially shaped but fully determined in and through social interaction. In doing so, this view ignores the existence of a psychological substrate or "subjectivity" (Kramersch, 2009; Laing, 1969) that endures trans-contextually as a "psychobiography" or "life career" (Layder, 1997) and provides an individual with a sense of a coherent and continuous self, what Laing (1969) calls "ontological security." Although some of this more subjective dimension is addressed by the notions of "motivation" (Schmidt, 1990), "investment" (Pierce, 1995, 1997) and "desire" (Kramersch, 2009)

in Applied Linguistics (AL) research on language learning, Block (2013) calls for more to be done to account for the various ways in which the deeply personal dimensions of learner experience can drive or disrupt efforts at language learning.

In particular, Block (2013) cites recent work in discourse analysis (Wetherell, 2007) and second language development (Granger, 2004) that uses psychological approaches to account for paranoia and the “silent period” in second language acquisition, respectively. Although only the latter addresses language learning, both share an understanding of individual behavior as potentially determined as much internally/psychologically as externally/socially. Moreover, both consider the darker side of human experience from a psychological perspective – in stark contrast to the optimistic treatment of learner agency in AL – that conceives of some behavior as dysfunctional, even self-destructive or delusional. Of course, in many ways the very rise of post-structuralism Block (2013) charts in his critique was itself the result of efforts to move away from a psycholinguistically oriented AL that, in the minds of many, overemphasized universal norms of language acquisition and, thus, conceived of learners too readily as “deficient” (Block, 2007; Firth & Wagner, 1997). The challenge, says Block (2013), is to recognize the power of the social order without ignoring the ways in which the “personal order” (Wetherell, *ibid.*) plays a role in determining individual behaviors, even perhaps to the point of “transference”, i.e., the “process by which the person animates or inflects the external world with their [sic] internal preoccupations and impersonal meanings” (Wetherell, 2007, p. 676).

Although we heed Block’s (2013) call for accounting for the deeply personal impacts of language learning, and we recognize the possibility that language learning experiences may have damaging psychological impacts, we worry that to embrace fully the normativity of a psychological model may blind the researcher to the beneficial aspects of the personal crises that figure so prominently in case studies of language learners during study abroad. For example, drawing on the work of Wetherell (2007) that Block (2013) cites, to assume that transference is only an indication of dysfunction, or worse illness, ignores the creative and productive side of self-reflection, even if that reflection borders on imbuing the world with the deeply personal meanings indicative of transference. Indeed, in our case studies of language learners in France, we found that although our participants all represented their experiences as forms of crisis, these crises seemed to operate as much as catalysts for personal development than for self-obsession or dysfunctional despair (see also Pavlenko, 1998 for similar themes in immigrant language learners’ narratives).

As a result, although we were initially drawn to the post-structuralist approaches outlined above, in the end we settled on a conceptualization of the processes and products of language learning that affords a rich consideration of both the deeply personal (seeing the world through the lens of the self) and the agential (acting in the world for the benefit of the self and others): Jesuit spirituality. We see a Jesuit spiritual perspective as offering some of the benefits of both the traditional psychological approach recommended by Block (2013) and the more post-structuralist social psychological work done thus far on language learning during study abroad. In particular, we see the utility of conceiving of language and culture learning during study abroad as akin to a process of spiritual development that is at once fundamentally dependent on crisis (“desolation”, see below) and resistant to it (“consolation”, “discernment”, “election”, see below). Not unlike the dialectic between agency and constraint found in so much post-structuralist research on language learning, the Jesuit

notion of spiritual development's constitutive tension between contemplation and action (Barry & Doherty, 2002) provides a means of accounting for personal struggle with an optimism that is not blind to the potential for trauma or oppression but ultimately sees human agency as liberating.

3 Jesuit spirituality, identity, and education

Jesuit spirituality refers to a method elaborated by the founder of the Jesuit religious order Ignatius of Loyola who contained its principles in his *Spiritual Exercises*. They constitute a set of instructions for a director of a spiritual retreat, and they offer scaffolding for the seeker of spiritual experience. They are based on a personal quest of spiritual transformation by Ignatius, a sixteenth-century Basque courtier, who, immobilized by a leg injury during the war with the French, turned his life upside down: he dedicated all his attention to spiritual matters, went back to school in Paris to study humanities with boys half his age, and eventually became a priest. While at the University of Paris, he surrounded himself with a group of students whom he introduced to his spiritual method. This pedagogic encounter is at the origin of the foundation of the religious order.

The major appeal of this spirituality is that it offers an optimistic perspective on life by looking first for positive and affirming facets of the world and trains to avoid and discourage elements that undermine that optimism. As the theologian Ronald Modras (2008) has observed, Jesuit spirituality can be called “spiritual humanism” (p. 13). In fact, from the very beginning of their pastoral work, the Jesuits studied and taught the pre-Christian classics like Cicero, Virgil, Horace and Ovid in vogue during the Renaissance, the era of their order's foundation. Because they valued the humanistic content of non-Christian authors, they succeeded in their missionary endeavors by seeking and appreciating the fundamental humanity of members of non-Christian cultures. Thus all spiritual efforts concentrate on finding a spiritual dimension in all one does. Moreover, in its affirming attitude toward the world, Jesuit spirituality wants to communicate the worth of living a good life by offering a method of finding spiritual imprints in all things, and above all in teaching. The pedagogical character of this spirituality naturally informed the teaching methodology of the Jesuit schools that, by popular demand, were mushrooming right after the papal approval of the order. These teaching principles were eventually codified in 1599 in *Ratio Studiorum* (O'Malley, 1999).

The document represented a “plan of studies” that laid out the curriculum not only for the formation of the members of the order but also lay students. It included subjects such as literature, history, drama as well as the typically clerical subjects, philosophy and theology. The fusion of spirituality and proper learning resulted in an education that stressed the care for the whole person (*cura personalis*), addressing both intellectual and affective needs of pupils with their intention of fostering natural predispositions. Ignatius of Loyola elaborated an experiential method of spirituality that takes into account the movements of the “soul” in reacting to the world's impact on it.

To understand better Ignatius's method (or Ignatian spirituality), we shall introduce a few key concepts commonly used by its practitioners. The essential concept is *discernment*, which in a specifically Christian context means “the art of appreciating the gifts that God has given us and discovering how we might best respond to that love in daily life” (Lonsdale, 2008, p. 173). In a broader context, it

is the skill of discovering the truth about ourselves by asking who we are, what we like, and what we should do to not succumb to destructive interior or exterior forces that would undermine our self-accepting, positive state of mind. As we proceed to discern, we must discriminate between feelings that cause us to be sad, distrustful, self-centered, closed in, and unconcerned by other people and feelings of joy, peace and satisfaction that stimulate our creativity and involvement in our social surroundings (see our case studies below for similar discernments among study abroaders).

In Ignatian spirituality the first set of feelings, characterized by negativity, is defined as *desolation*, the second set, characterized by a positive outlook and readiness to act, is known as *consolation*. During a retreat based on the Spiritual Exercises that usually lasts four weeks, the retreatant undergoes different phases of discernment. At the conclusion, she or he reaches the stage of the “election” (Au & Cannon, 2008, pp. 199–200). In other words, the retreatant proceeds to making an important decision for his or her life. Based on an affective evaluation of possible choices, one reaches the decision to opt for the solution that corresponds best to his or her constructive desires as she or he discovers them throughout the process of discernment. The decision should be confirmed by a lasting experience of consolation. In our case studies below, a return to their ethnic roots triggers a positive transformation in the lives of both students. The right decision prompts action, bringing about significant life changes. This combination of self-reflectivity/reflexivity that leads to taking action is commonly referred to among the aficionados of the method as contemplation in action (Barry & Doherty, 2002). In both case studies we analyze, the students make life-changing decisions as the result of their self-reflections stimulated by the context of study abroad.

As faculty members of a religiously affiliated institution in the Jesuit tradition, we benefit from the long-lasting tradition of an education that is grounded in the spirituality of the Jesuit order. In our pluralistic social reality of postmodernity, Jesuit spirituality has more clear relevance than in the modern period when sheer empiricism was used to discredit spirituality as non-scientific and therefore irrelevant to the concerns of modernity. It encourages taking personal initiative in relating to the social ethical values inherited from the previous generations by choosing what appears to be most fitting for a concrete life situation (Muldoon, 2008, p. 287). We are aware that spirituality might raise suspicions among researchers who favor empirical and quantifiable approaches in education. However, referring to the work of Pierre Hadot, a French intellectual active in the second half of the 20th century and member of the Collège de France, we maintain that educational activity should be connected with spiritual practice in order to engage holistically the human person (cf. Coleman, 2013 in study abroad research on “whole people”). Hadot (1995) postulates a return in educational institutions to the philosophical practices of Greco-Roman Antiquity when philosophizing was a practice involving more than intellectual speculation: it engaged the whole of the person, one’s thought as well as one’s imagination and sensibility. The outcome of this spiritual exercise is a conversion of the self, which consists in rising above one’s particular fears and inner limitations in order to embrace a cosmic vision of the universe and one’s place within it. We believe our case studies provide evidence of precisely this kind of conversion of the self, and we suggest that a spiritual perspective may in fact be better suited to accounting for study abroad experiences in a globalized and postmodern context.

4 Spirituality, post-modernity, and study abroad

In his discussion of the relevance of Jesuit spirituality in the age of postmodernity, Muldoon (2008) has suggested that the advent of postmodernity with its openness to cultural pluralism offers new possibilities to live one's spirituality in a new creative way (p. 286). Postmodernity is suspicious of received ideas with their claims to the authority of the institutions that transmit them. Individuals have more freedom to approach a faith tradition that makes sense to them independently of the tradition in which they have been brought up. It proposes the use of imagination, discredited by the experimentally minded modernity, by inviting the person to picture herself in the current state of her life and make a critical judgment about it. The person is encouraged to ask herself why she does what she does and whether this way of living makes her fulfilled, and more importantly, whether she is internally free in her undertakings, or whether there might be a force, inner or exterior, that makes her do what she might not necessarily like doing. Thus, this spiritual questioning leads to the crucial existential problem: the issue of individual freedom. These concerns were central to Ancient philosophy that integrated without opposition spirituality and purely rational inquiry as Hadot (1995) has argued. Thus, we believe that understanding students' identity crises while abroad in spiritual terms provides a robust alternative to sociological or psychological epistemologies, and introducing a spiritual dimension into a study abroad curriculum offers an exciting chance for personal transformation of participants (see Pedagogical Implications section below).

Study abroad offers a platform for significant spiritual development, as we intend to demonstrate through our case studies. The studies unveil the pedagogic potential of study abroad programs for personal development beyond the traditionally conceived objectives. In our case studies, although they do not contemplate the kind of "cosmic" visions Hadot (1995) describes, both students' struggles abroad ultimately lead them to a keen sense of their place in the world³. Of course, the emphasis on interiority might appear at first glance as an invitation to introspection and dwelling in this contemplative mood. Yet a very important aspect of Jesuit spirituality is its movement from the self to another reality (Gray, 2008, p. 71). It leads to the realization that one is not the center of the universe but a small fraction of the immensity of the world. The contemplative pose triggers a reverence due to the realization that one is a part of some grandiose reality veiled in a mystery of being. Contemplation in its nature is not an intrusion in the contemplated reality but an admiring gaze that concludes in the affirmation of one's own position in it. The contemplative awe results in joy and acceptance of one's predicament and empathy for the reality. Empathy and love invite action on behalf of the reality that might find itself out of balance at a given time. This is why the Jesuit educational framework stresses a growth in empathy for the world by encouraging social involvement of students in extracurricular activities or programs that are integrated into the curriculum such as service learning. Our case studies show that this element is missing from the study abroad program in which our interviewees participated and thus led them to focus more on themselves than others.

From the perspective of Ignatian/Jesuit spirituality, education is, therefore, a soul education, a care for the person, first for the perfection of one's own soul/person and second for the salvation of and perfection of other persons one has in one's educational care. This spiritual approach to education is foremost a

hermeneutic, an interpretative outlook on life that leads to help the person and subsequently the others to live more fully their humanity. Gray (2008, p. 66) summarizes this principle as an appropriation of personal experience, its social implications, and its reconciliation within a broader framework that is pluralistic. Study abroad can serve as a scaffolding for a transformative experience for students who seek re-construction or affirmation of their identity in the complex ethnic and cultural reality of post-modernity.

The twenty-century French philosopher and theologian Simone Weil (1952) has drawn an analogy between the obligation of the collectivity/community to assure for its members “protection against violence, housing, clothing, heating, hygiene, and medical attention in case of illness” (p. 6) and the obligations to provide the nutrition required for “life of the soul.” Weil (1952) refers to the former as the “spiritual treasures” accumulated by the past generations and points to the future of the collectivity/community to which this food must be transmitted in order to perpetuate the life of its soul. One might approximate Weil’s (1952) term “spiritual treasures” as language and culture. Individuals deprived of nutrition of the soul suffer uprootedness.

In the American cultural landscape uprootedness derives primarily from the immigration experiences constitutive of the American identity. Even as globalization seems to shrink space and time, most Americans seem themselves as distinct from the identities associated with the cultures of their immigrant ancestors; however, many Americans feel this as a lack and yearn to more fully understand one or more of the cultures and/or languages of their forebears. The case studies below are, then, perhaps relatively typical of the generation of millennials looking to remedy their American uprootedness.

5 Methodology

5.1 Participant selection and program details

Lola and Audrey were undergraduates participating in an American public university’s study abroad program in Paris during the fall semester of 2006. Participants were required to have completed at least one course of college level French. Most students were at the beginner to advanced beginner level, and none of the incoming students were French majors or minors. Although the program was originally intended for first and second year students, the majority of participants were third or fourth year students. Students generally took two to four courses, all in the humanities or social sciences, which were all taught in English except the required French language course. Students were invited to volunteer to participate in the study via email correspondence. These self-selected students represent a convenience sample insofar as it was impossible to ensure a representative sample of the broader population of students. However, while one cannot generalize from two cases, interactions with the rest of the program participants through an author’s work as a researcher, residence advisor, and assistant instructor suggest that Lola and Audrey shared many of the same goals and attitudes as the majority of their peers. Neither Lola nor Audrey were students in the author’s course; however, both lived in the dormitory where he worked as resident advisor and where he interacted with them both on a nearly daily basis.

5.2 Data collection procedures

The following case studies draw on interview data collected by one of the authors during a semester-long study abroad program in Paris, France in 2006. In these semi-structured interviews (Smith, 1995), some pre-scripted questions/prompts were used during interviews, yet the informants were encouraged to chart their own narrative course within the thematic boundaries of the question set (see Appendix 1 for the interview prompts).

Lola was interviewed twice, once in early November and once in early December (the program began in early September); Audrey was interviewed once in late November. Although follow-up interviews were also conducted after their return to their home campuses, none of the excerpts cited in this article draw on those data.

All interviews were transcribed, then coded according to emergent themes. The present analysis grew out of a consideration of a collection of interview excerpts coded for “identity.” Although originally considered exclusively from a post-structuralist analytic perspective (Wolcott, 2013), the following case studies were later re-examined through the lens of Jesuit spirituality; in fact, this study and a previous publication (Wolcott & Motyka, 2013) grew out of discussions between the authors on the areas of conceptual convergence between these two seemingly distinct analytic paradigms.

6 Case studies

6.1 Lola

In the section we provide a data analysis from a case study conducted during a study abroad program in Paris. One of the staff members interviewed selected participants about their motivation for choosing to spend a semester abroad and about their experience of being in Paris. The interviews appear highly revelatory regarding a transformative impact the sojourn had had on young participants. The case of one interviewee named Lola¹ shows how the contact with the French language and culture turned her life around by bringing her back to her French ethnic roots in a way she had not anticipated.

- T: Why didn't you want a homestay?
- L: Um (.1) because I, I have, family friends in Paris, my mom lived here for ten years on and off in the seventies, I was staying with them, it was, you know if I would've done a homestay I could've done it with someone I *knew* already, I didn't *need* like a French family to teach me French [...] I'm just a very, *very* independent person in general, and I thought that uh (.1) I just thought I don't need to meet a French family to, to know France, I already have so, so many connections, um.
- T: Yeah (1.5) ok, so::: um, ok, so the first question's pretty straightforward, why did you decide to study abroad in France?
- L: Ok, I always knew I wanted to study abroad
- T: Uh huh

- L: [...] I had come to Paris when I was nine, and didn't really like it, my dad's French and we never had a relationship, he always lived in Paris, so like um, I was really against it a lot, like for most of my life, like didn't want to come to Paris didn't want to learn French or anything, um, and then when I was 18, um I was studying Italian, I started having all these like *weird dreams* about my *dad* like showing up and being like 'Don't want to see you!' so I was like damn I need to like (.2) deal with this (.1) situation you know and just go see him, and get it out of the way you know, if I want these dreams to go away (.1).
- T: But you said your mom lived in France but you didn't grow up with French in the house because your father, who was French, was living in France? =
- =L: Yeah he was living in Paris yeah (.1) and if *she* had tried to speak French to me I would have been like *shut up* I don't want to hear it I don't want anything to do with France and French (.1) um (.3) but then I came and I was like *oh my god* I'm a part of this *great amazing* (.2) thing, that's so big and wonderful and that so many people have loved (1.0) and I felt that French came more natural *naturally* to me than even Italian (.1) whereas it's supposed to be one of the harder languages to learn because of the pronunciation, the rules about how you pronounce words and everything but um (.1) it *wasn't* and issue for me at *all* (...) But yeah I probably get it from her [her mother] (.1) and from being French just by genetics but (.1) when I was here in 2005 and 2004 I kinda felt like (.1) [...] listening a lot to people speaking French that I *had it* already in my brain and maybe because of genetics but I *had it* already in my brain and like I just needed to kinda *tap into it* like if I just took a class and learned the rules and learned the words (.2) that it would like *come very naturally* and it *totally did*. (Interview 1, see Appendix 2 for transcription notation conventions)

Lola's case is basically the quest for roots. As the interview data indicates, the most valuable outcome of this student's experience of study abroad had been neither intended in the selling package nor anticipated by the participant herself. Instead, already in her intention one may detect a non-pragmatic, not-goal-oriented desire toward exploring her own bi-ethnic status. That intention is not clear at the beginning but through the process of striving to utter that desire in the interview we witness a slow process of self-discovery. It is the beginning of the process of discernment. The interviewer is placed here in the position of a medium that catalyzes self-reflectivity. The interaction leads to a self-disclosure commonly found in spiritual practices and referred to as spiritual accompaniment or direction. Lola's trust in the interviewer grows (although she had been made aware of the interview as a research tool), and she undergoes the stripping of the layers that had built up her complex subjectivity. We believe this process can be labeled as "spiritual."

Lola's desire for roots involves a discerning quest for an imagined "fatherland". To the question about homestay, Lola reacts quite sharply by rejecting the idea of being assigned to a home with strangers for her Parisian stay. She does not want to be treated as a typical American staying with a French family. We notice here an analysis of her current situation (context). She takes the initiative to follow the ethnic thread that links her to France. Accepting a homestay situation would imply a betrayal of her striving to reclaim her French roots. It would mean to accept the status of a foreign student in a host family. We notice here the capacity of testing Lola's own feelings of desolation and consolation. In her imagination stirred by the disconnect from her French father, for Lola, France emerges as a mythical homeland of which she had been deprived by the breakup of her parents. The absent father who does not particularly care to

be part of his daughter's life triggers the desire for self-reinvention, for filling out the missing elements in the identikit. The feeling of rejection by the father entices the conflation of the father with France as a mythical "fatherland." It causes desolation that generates the imagined land with a purpose to fill that very clear sense of uprootedness. As the conversation unfolds, it becomes clear for Lola herself that choosing France is/was grounded in anxiety about her identity that emerged in her dreams, "I started having all these like *weird dreams* about my *dad* like showing up and being like 'Don't want to see you!' so I was like damn I need to like (.2) deal with this (.1) situation you know and just go see him, and get it out of the way you know, if I want these dreams to go away." Dreams come across as a call to clarify her predicament. We observe here a strong desire to come to terms with a liminal situation of being a Californian and a would-have-been Parisian.

From the point of view of spirituality, these initial statements of the interview might be seen as expressing the phase of desolation in their intense desire to look for some assistance in sorting out the complex and confusing situation. This could be an initial point of a process of spiritual discernment whose aim is self-understanding through a process of reflecting on one's current discomfort and limitations. The study abroad program created a pilgrimage-like or retreat-like situation. The temporary displacement created a favorable environment for Lola to face her dreams and the anxieties related to them. We are in front of a crisis that offers a chance for Lola to go eventually beyond the confusion and brokenness, i.e., desolation, she felt as a result of her family situation. The desire to make a pilgrimage to the land conceived in her imagination engenders the vulnerability necessary for revisiting the wound inflicted on her by family divisions. The displacement to the land of her father and the presence of a trusted interlocutor make it possible to confront and reflect on her relationship to her father, to Paris, and to her American homeland.

In the next section of the interview we notice still the lingering desolation through a nostalgia of a childhood that could have taken place in France but it did not French due to the parental breakup.

L: I just, I don't know, part of me wishes (.1) cause we were *supposed* to come, to live in Paris I was supposed to be raised French (.1) and it like changed all at the last minute, my mom and my dad split up when I was like two weeks old, but she had bought an *apartment* and had it all *furnished* and ready to go, and we were all supposed to come back to France (.1) and then they split up, and we stayed in California but I would have *been* like (.4) I would have been a French person like going to bilingual school, you know, so it's kind of like=

=T: How old were you when this happened? =

=L: I was like just a day, I was like just born [sips water] I was a new-born when they split up but I found out *later*, like she told me later on, 'you know you were supposed to, we were supposed to live in *France*,' and I was like 'oh great' but now I'm like *WHOA* what if I had been a *French person*! (.2)

The past putative and conditional utterances signal the spiritual state of desolation. In the statements in which Lola expresses regrets that she has not become the person she "was supposed" to be shows signs of desolation in the spiritual understanding of the concept. Lola feels trapped by the circumstances caused by her parents' split early in her life. There is a detectable feeling of guilt

that perhaps her birth might have caused her parents' separation. Yet the strongest feeling is that of a lack of a clear identity. The possible French identity has evaded her, "I'm like *WHOA* what if I had been a *French person!*" As the interview unfolds we observe a rise of agency on Lola's part. It seems that the return to her birthplace allowed her to process the feeling of ambivalence about her identity. She states, "I'm kinda happy that I, that I've had English as my first language just cause it's such an advantage (.2) um, internationally, and you know, just makes everything a lot easier (.1) um (.2) and also I can still *be French*, I can still take advantage of everything, that it has to offer, and=" We notice that the "coming home" has allowed the integration of the conflicting elements in her personality. Although she was deprived of the opportunity to grow up as a French girl, she has been moved to act to amend the circumstances that made her feel divided between her Californian upbringing and her Parisian roots. She has realized in Paris that instead of living in the past conditional of "what if I had been," she actually sees the potential for building on her background by integrating the split parts into a new whole. "I'm kind of happy... I can still be French." When asked by the interviewer "What do you mean by that?", she replies, "Well I'm going to get my citizenship...I just have to do it, I just have to go to the consulate and get the papers from my dad."

The decision to seek French citizenship is the fruit of Lola's discernment. Discernment is the capacity to interpret or evaluate feelings and to be moved to action as a consequence of this reflective process (Lonsdale 2008, p. 179, and above). The interview with Lola leads her from the state of confusion to a constructive attitude that involves taking charge of her own life in a realistic way. The realistic solution at this given moment of her life is the French citizenship. The election (an important life decision) is accompanied by a feeling of relief; we might qualify it spiritually as consolation. It is also a pretext to involve Lola's father more directly in her life. She expresses happiness at the idea of requesting the French citizenship. Citizenship as a source of consolation points to the new openness to the world that consolation implies. Whereas before Lola seemed conflicted and dismayed by the tensions and contradictions inherent in her ancestry, here she has reconciled that tension through a decision for practical and positive action in the world, i.e., "election":

I feel *so at home* here and so comfortable and really I do not miss California at all (.1) uh, I just miss my dog, if I could bring my dog I feel like my life would be *complete* like (.1) I don't even *care* that like I don't have a *boyfriend* and like (.1) I'm *happy* that I don't have a boyfriend to *miss* but (.1) like, eh, just *being here*, I'm *fine* being single, I'm, it's like this *great* feeling of *independence* and like, *Paris* as my *lover*, you know, I just *love* living here so much I don't need anything else (.1).

The statement reveals that Lola was able to make a fundamental decision about her life. She elected to return to what she believes are her legitimate roots: France. This fundamental decision is evocative of what one finds in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. The Spiritual exercises are meant to lead to that major decision which Ignatius calls Election (Lonsdale 2008, p. 184). The Election is the outcome of discernment. Lola's Election is to live in Paris by embracing generously what the Parisian community has to offer.

Lola's case study might be seen as particularly fitting for our claim about the role of study abroad in helping American students address their sense of uprootedness. The fact of Lola's father being French makes it particularly easy to

establish a thread to her French roots while sojourning in Paris. However, as our next case study illustrates, even students without European ancestry faced similar issues regarding their roots.

6.2 Audrey

Our second case study, Audrey, shows comparable movements of the soul that we see in Lola's accounts. Audrey is of Korean-American descent and her choice to study in Paris is not motivated by any atavistic impulse. When asked about her motivation to study abroad, she provided an answer quite typical of the undergraduates deciding to do it (...I really didn't, ((laughs)) I honestly didn't think about it before I left, very much, it was more just logistical, like I need to do this...) Yet the question of identity emerges from the very beginning of the interview with a new intensity which triggers a crisis which in Jesuit spirituality is referred to as "desolation" (see above).

- T: Is there any way that being here has made you think about your biculturality in any new ways? Like do you feel mostly American? Or do you ever feel Korean? Or Asian? Or anything like that?
- A: I wouldn't say that I necessarily feel Korean here, or that it's made me feel more (.2) I definitely you know felt the whole American thing, um, a lot because I was not, like acculturated to French culture very much and the language and everything, um, I felt Asian here maybe more because in California it's just so accepted, you know, it doesn't seem like a big deal, but here maybe a little bit more (.1) I think a lot of people here too, uh, a lot of people here will kind of question like 'oh, what are you?' I mean I get that a lot in America too but, I don't know I've heard people talk about me on the metro and stuff, like 'oh what is she? Maybe she's Japanese?'

The experience of French life unexpectedly causes Audrey to reflect on her ethnic identity. Whereas in California the ethnic identity issue could remain dormant under the surface of all-encompassing ethnic acceptance, in France the curiosity of the French about Audrey's racial identity propelled an important reevaluation of her identity, raising questions about her parents' past and their attitude toward America and its culture. Audrey was surprised by this frank acknowledgement of her otherness. The realization of otherness reinforced by the fact of being stereotypically assimilated to the "Chinese" origin resulted in the feeling of desolation:

- T: I've heard a lot Asian students say that everybody just thinks you're Chinese, she reacts, "A: Yeah yeah yeah, everyone's like (.1) I've said 'je ne suis pas chinoise' so many times ((laughs)) but um, or you know I learned *matisse* pretty early on, like I learned that as like a vocab word because a lot of people asked me that too.

Although here the interviewer provokes a reflection on identity, it is Audrey who must face the question who/what she is, which in California remains veiled for political and cultural reasons ("in California it's just so accepted"). The uncanny frankness of Parisian bystanders reawakens the ethnic sensibility that California/US culture neutralizes. It is definitely a reminder that ethnicity cannot be easily replaced by cultural attempts to assimilate the individual into a homogeneous social landscape. Audrey confronts what her Korean father sought to overcome by adhering forcefully to the American dream. The question "what are you?" triggers a crisis, a state of desolation in terms of spirituality. Audrey

feels clearly that she does not belong to the Parisian scene because of her race and ethnicity. The fact that all Asians are placed under the label “Chinese” aggravates the feeling of desolation. The seriousness of this crisis might have been addressed more effectively if the study abroad program had anticipated these types of crises. As it was, it was left to the imagination of the interviewer to help the student.

Desolation caused by questions regarding identity leads to a reevaluation of Audrey’s relationship to her ancestry, now cut off from its direct Korean roots by her parents’ attempt to assimilate fully into American life. In Europe her otherness acquires a new importance and prompts her to reevaluate the importance of who she is in a new light. It leads her to questioning the attitude of her Korean father who addresses his own uprootedness in the new country by trying to cut with the past and fit into a new cultural mold. As in Lola’s case, little by little the desire for roots emerges in ways that speak of a deep desire for the “spiritual treasures” Weil describes. This is noticeable in her answer to the question about her future plans that leads to a disclosure about the relationship with her father.

T: How would your dad feel about you going to Japan?

A: *Oh my god!* ((laughs)) It’s funny that you ask that question *Tim*, because I had this conversation with my dad while I was here, and usually like over the phone, our phone conversations are kind of hard cause, you know, my dad obviously speaks english but his english isn’t that great and he’s kind of the type of person like over the phone he has certain points he wants to make and *that’s it* [...] um, but I told my dad about the possibility of me, cause he *asked* me, he said, like he’s been pushing me you know to look into graduate schools, and what I’m going to do, and I really haven’t been, but um, he asked me and I said, ‘yeah, I’ve been thinking about doing the JET program actually,’ and he’s like ‘what’s that?’ and I explained it to him, teaching abroad, in japan for a year, and they help you a lot, they find you housing, it pays pretty well, and he was just like, ‘OH! OH!’ he’s like ‘this is not a simple *thing* you are thinking about, this is not a joke’ and he like *went off* on me for seriously like half an hour=

=T: Saying what?

A: ((laughs)) He just kept saying like, ‘you think this is an easy thing you want to do’ he’s like ‘you don’t know’ he’s like ‘you going to to go to this foreign, like, far away country’ he’s like he’s like ‘when I came to america, it took me like two years to actually be able to function and assimilate into the culture’

T: But they don’t make you assimilate into Japanese culture on JET=

=A: Exactly, I tried to explain that to him, I was like ‘dad, I’m not trying to become Japanese, I’m just going to go teach english there’=

=T: Exactly=

=A: You know, and he was like ‘I’ve heard stor- I saw like a *Dateline* thing about these girls getting *raped* on those kind of programs’ and he’s just like ‘you think this is so simple’ and then at the end, I knew at that point not to really argue with him, especially over the phone, it was kind of not worth it, so I was kinda like ‘uh huh, uh huh, uh huh’ and then at the end of our conversation he was like, uh, he kept saying like ‘it’s 180 degrees different than America!’ and then at the end he was like ‘I don’t think this is something that me and your mother can support.’ And I was like, ‘ok’

T: What if you said Korea?

A: Basically the same. Um, he'd probably prefer me to go to Japan over Korea ((laughs)) well just because it's, because, well maybe Korea because I do have some family there=

=T: So you'd have support and stuff

A: Eh, maybe, I don't know, I have an aunt who lives there, the last one of my dad's siblings who lives there, but, my dad didn't talk to her for twenty five years because there was some kind of family feud, so I mean I'm sure she would, she's really rich, so um, that's clutch, but um, Japan cause he probably thinks it's safer, cause he's like 'North Korea this' and 'nuclear weapons that' and I'm like 'dad, like ((laughs)) there's danger in the world everywhere'

The father's attitude unveils the complexity of the relationship of Korean immigrants to their home country and to Japan given the past marked by armed conflict and atrocities committed on the Korean civilians. As in Lola's case, Audrey reaches a moment of courage to go beyond the family taboo and crosses the threshold that leads her out of the artificially protected environment of her parents' California to the roots that have been implicitly present in her family history. Audrey's intention to go to Japan represents a return to the family roots. It seems to be accompanied by consolation. She does not decide to go directly to Korea but elects a rapprochement through the neighboring country with which the Koreans have an ambivalent relationship. It is noteworthy that the phone conversation between Audrey and her parents about her going to Japan originates in Paris during the study abroad program. In terms of spirituality we observe here the movement from desolation triggered by the renewed awareness of insurmountable otherness within the French reality to an intensified reflective process. The phase of desolation leads her to reevaluate her own family history of which Audrey's parents tended not to speak in their efforts to have their daughter fit better into American culture. Only when Audrey disclosed her intention to look for employment in Asia did her father open up about his struggles to assimilate ("when I came to America, it took me like two years to actually be able to function and assimilate into the culture"). The father's silence about his relationship to his relatives in Korea ("there was some kind of family feud"), his uneasiness in English ("my dad obviously speaks English but his English isn't that great") reveals ambivalence about his subject position. He wants to project on his daughter his dream of overcoming the liminality of his subject position as an immigrant by dissuading her from reconnecting with his own Asian past. Audrey discerns, however, that, in order to reconcile the conflicting elements of her own subject position, she must not reject her ethnic roots. She must redraw a continuum between her father's Korean past and the rupture brought about by his own efforts to be a good immigrant. This reflection on her roots leads to the acceptance of her ethnicity – we see that this reevaluation of her Korean heritage brings about consolation. She is ready to make major decision in her life: she challenges her father's denial of his roots and embraces fully her Asian identity.

As a result, she elects to take the job as an English teacher in Japan. Her election goes against her parents' wishes and feelings, but for her it is the best way to build a bridge between the culture of her ancestors, her racial heritage, and her status of a young Asian American. The next stage in her spiritual journey might be a decision to go to Korea and to initiate a conversation between family members at odds for some twenty years. The quest for the roots appears to be an underlying force of this process that was catalyzed by the study abroad experience of

desolation. The first stage of this return to the roots ended with the election to go to Japan accompanied by the feeling of consolation achieved by revalorizing her Korean ethnicity.

In both case studies we see a process that we might qualify as spiritual. Lola and Audrey are quite representative of American college students who seek their place in society. The question of ethnicity plays a considerable role in this search. The sense of uprootedness, characteristic of modern society, is amplified by personal circumstances of parental separation or the trauma of immigration, and represents the main cause of desolation and crisis. The temporal displacement in a retreat-like setting of the study abroad program creates favorable circumstances for self-disclosure accompanied by a staff-member, an educator who facilitates the spiritual journey, driven by spiritual reflection and discernment that proceeds from a crisis marked by desolation to a decision (election) encouraged by positive feelings of consolation.

7 Implications for pedagogy and study abroad program design

Following our assumption that study abroad offers a transformative opportunity for participants, we want to outline a six-week summer program, "French in the Community," which incorporates in its design structures means of facilitating the reflective processes that undergird such personal transformation. Based on our case studies, we have concluded that if the program in which the interviewed students participated had more explicitly incorporated reflective components in its structures, the students could have processed more exhaustively and constructively the deeply personal facets of their study abroad experiences.

The Jesuit spiritual approach we offer, despite its Renaissance origins, is in fact ideally suited to the demands of the 21st century study abroad. In fact, the Jesuit institutions of learning updated the principles of Jesuit pedagogy, with its central focus on *cura personalis*, to the demands of contemporary teachers and students in *The Characteristics of a Jesuit Education* (1986). The document spells out the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm, which applies the spiritual concepts of discernment, desolation, consolation, and election to teaching. The paradigm contains five themes: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. Reflection is the central element in which, as Mountin (2015) has put it "memory, understanding, imagination and feelings are used to grasp the essential meaning and value of what is being studied, to discover its relationship to other facets of human knowledge and activity, and to appreciate its implications in the continuing search for truth." The personal context of the student, the feelings accompanying the experience of the subject matter, must be processed through reflection that leads to a decision and action regarding the personal situation in the world. Eventually, the student evaluates their decisions and actions against the sets of values they hold and stand by. For example, in our case studies, the personal context of the two students is the point of departure for evaluating the entire experience of being abroad. It appears to overshadow progressively the intended purpose of being in Paris: the study of the language. The experience invites the reflection on the students' relationships to their ancestry and leads to important life decisions, i.e., Lola elects to become a French citizen, and Audrey chooses to explore the possibility of working in Asia. Had the program had a component explicitly facilitating such processes, these kinds of personal reactions could have

been addressed earlier on and perhaps even used to encourage Lola and Audrey to engage more deeply with the target language and culture.

Although there is no way to fully anticipate students' deeply personal reactions to the study abroad experience, we believe that the curriculum can be designed to anticipate and facilitate them through a triple emphasis on the humanities, language learning, and service learning. Following Nussbaum (2010), we recognize the importance of the humanities in preparing students for productive lives in a democratic society. By engaging students with French literature and the visual arts, our program will foster "positional thinking" (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 36), i.e., the capacity to see reality from the position of another subject. Positional thinking, according to Nussbaum (2010) is very helpful for forming sympathetic emotions. Sympathy, which results from the capacity to identify with others' feelings, will likely result in empathy and helpful conduct toward others. We will facilitate this sympathy in our program design by incorporating writing and discussion opportunities for personal reflection on a variety of subjects including their struggles with learning a foreign language, works by francophone authors who speak of their experiences trying to fit to new social contexts, and the ideas of French authors and intellectuals, for example, the recent controversial novel *Soumission* by Houellebecq (2015).

Moreover, in order to reinforce this inclination toward helping others and to deepen their linguistic and cultural immersion, we will incorporate a service-learning requirement into the program. Students will work three days a week (two half days and one full day) for a human services not-for-profit, e.g., a senior citizens center, where they must conduct themselves entirely in French. Additionally, this service learning experience will provide the data for their final project, a written or audiovisual report that documents and reflects on the kind of linguistic and cultural practices central to their service work.

All in all, we hope to create a program that explicitly harnesses the movements of the "soul" during study abroad. By "soul" we understand that which Nussbaum (2010) defines as "the faculties of thought and imagination that make us human and make our relationships rich human relationships, rather than relationships of mere use and manipulation" (p. 6). Our proposal is inspired by the Ignatian paradigm that starts with the reflection on the study abroad context, then proceeds to analyzing the experience itself and its meaning to the students, and facilitates important decision-making (for example, regarding future plans). Finally, it helps evaluate the soundness of the choice by teaching students how to read their affective responses to the choice of action.

8 Conclusion

Our spiritual analysis of Lola and Audrey's trajectory points to the transformative potential of study abroad programs. Of course, these study abroad experiences were not intended as spiritual journeys; the program was meant to be a linguistic immersion above all. As we look at it, however, the unintended personal outcomes of this sojourn are of much greater importance than the immersion into the French language and culture. The setting of the study involving interviews had features of a spiritual retreat insofar as the relationship between the interviewer and student was marked by trust and confidentiality (the participant knew that the data would be protected by anonymity). Based on this experience, we would like to propose a study abroad program that explicitly encourages or

elicits a spiritual experience from the participants. We claim that if the features of spiritual exercises are successfully implemented into a study abroad program, students can more readily overcome the state of desolation marked by self-centeredness and achieve consolation, a state characterized by empathy, tolerance to otherness, and readiness to serve the community with generosity. In that case, the gains of such an experience would be valuable not only for developing better students of language but also eventually for forming better national and global citizens.

Endnotes

¹ Pseudonyms.

² Pseudonyms.

³ In his study Nicholas Austen (2014) evokes the work of the psychologist Mihály Csíkszenthályi whose theory of flow presents parallels between Jesuit spirituality and positive psychology.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview prompts

1. Why did you decide to study abroad in France? In Paris? At this study center? Are you planning to stay one semester, or will you continue on to another EAP program in France?
2. What are your linguistic goals? How proficient in French do you expect to get during your time here?
3. Are your linguistic goals related to any of your academic goals? That is, will you be using French in your future studies?
4. What are your career goals?
5. What are your social goals this semester/year? Are you interested in making French friends? If so, how/where do you plan to meet them?
6. Are you living in a dorm in a home-stay? Why did you choose either one? If you are in a home-stay, what do you think so far of your situation? How much interaction have you had so far with your host family? If you are in a dorm, what do you think so far? How do imagine your dorm life will fit into your social, academic, and language-learning lives?
7. So far, have your expectations for this experience been more or less confirmed? Were your expectations not met in any significant ways? Try to think of how you imagined it would be here before you left the USA.
8. In general, how does your life here differ from that at your home campus? And your home town?
9. Have you had any trouble orienting yourself to any aspects of your situation here? To France in general? In particular, can you remember any difficulties (miscommunications, culture 'shocks,' etc.) you've had so far that you either:
1. still don't understand, or
2. now, looking back, see as learning experiences vis-à-vis the French (or Parisian) language and/or culture?

Appendix 2: Transcription notation

- , = quick pause, less than .1 sec
(.1) = pause in tenths of sec
? = rising intonation
italics = emphatic stress, slight increase volume
CAPS = high volume utterance
(word) = best guess at unclear utterance
(unintelligible) = unintelligible utterance
so::::: = elongated vowel sound
= = latching utterances
[= overlapping utterances

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