

**THE EFFECTS OF ACCULTURATION ON THE L2 LEARNER**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the  
Master of Arts in Teaching degree at  
the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont

December 2003

This project by Raya C. Longto is accepted in its present form.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My very special thanks to Professor Beatriz Fantini who provided me with personal encouragement and her full support from the start of this paper to its end. Without her dedication to intercultural understanding I would never have accomplished this task. She helped me to understand the concept of acculturation and realize that I had written a whole novel on it without ever thinking of it as an identified concept. She made me comprehend that my novel could be a valuable source of inspiration and encouragement for travelers to other countries, all of who undergo the same kind of culture shock as I did to some degree when I, and Indian, suddenly found myself living in Lima, Peru. Thanks to her insightful guidance I have finally understood the length and breadth of my own writing and it feels like a revelation.

My eternal gratitude to Father Antonine Tibesar O.F.M., writer, historian of the Franciscan Order and the late Director of the Franciscan Academy at Bethesda, Washington D.C. without whose guidance and help I could not have written my novel. Much of the historical content on the Franciscan Order in my novel comes from the research that Father Tibesar himself did on the subject and the numerous books that he wrote for his Order's history. All these books can be found in the Library of Congress.

My very heartfelt gratitude to the late Dr. Felix Denegri Luna, well known Peruvian writer, historian and lawyer, whose formidable private library, guidance and knowledge of life in colonial and later, republican Peru and the subject of the Monastery of San Francisco made it possible for me to write my novel.

My admiration and thanks to Janis Birdsall and Bonnie Mennell for making a teacher out of me without my realizing it.

Finally, last but not the least, my gratitude to Ximena Allub for introducing me to the School for International Training.

The School for International Training is a very special place full of some very special and caring people who serve others in some way every single day.

I thank them all.

## FILE ABSTRACT FORM

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Institution: School for International Training

Program: Master of Arts in Teaching Program (SMAT 21)

Degree: Master of Arts in Teaching Program (M.A.T.)

Year Degree  
Was Granted:

Thesis Advisor: Beatriz Fantini

### Abstract:

This paper deals with the deconstruction of a novel (A Sprig of Lemon Blossom) written on the subject of Acculturation. Since the latter half of the twentieth century the world has traveled at an incredible speed towards globalization. Given this reality the number of people who constantly travel abroad for a variety of career and work related purposes is growing by the hour. Under the circumstances the theme of acculturation has become crucial as without an adequate form of this phenomenon people cannot function to the best of their abilities. The deconstruction of this novel addresses the three-fold process of acculturation and shows, through the example of the novel, how enriching and positive acculturation can be for a traveler and L2 learner despite the obvious obstacles and challenges that any kind of change brings into the life of a person.

## **ERIC Descriptors**

Acculturation

Intercultural Communication

Cultural contact

Second Languages

Sociocultural Patterns

Cultural Conflict

Foreign Culture

Bilingual Students

## **DEDICATION**

This paper is lovingly dedicated to my two most precious extensions, Olivia and Constanza Ontaneda. They are my constant source of inspiration and my conquerors of the world.

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## PREFACE

The term “Acculturation” was completely foreign to my vocabulary until I attended a course on Cultural Assimilation within my SMAT (Summer Master of the Art of Teaching) Program at the SIT in 2002. My ignorance turned out to be the paradox of a lifetime when my IPP (Independent Professional Project) adviser pointed out to me that the novel I had written between 1986 and 1995 called “*A Sprig of Lemon Blossom*” was a classic example of acculturation. She suggested that I deconstruct the process I underwent in the writing of this novel for my IPP. I have since acquired a more in depth grasp of her allusion after some arduous research into the term “acculturation”.

The term acculturation refers to the adequate cultural and over all mental and psychological adjustment of a foreigner in a host country. According to researchers within the field an adequate acculturation is a key factor for the success of any foreign venture no matter what the field may be: i.e. the Peace Corps, foreign student, diplomat, businessman, multinational organization officer, the possibilities are never ending.

It was indeed an eye opener to discover that what I had envisioned as a unique experience for a novel was actually a classic syndrome rather than the exception. On a personal and emotional level it was in a sense vindicating to discover that had I had the right preparation, the outcome of my novel (in part autobiographical) might have been totally different, and yet, on an objective level the question remains... would there even have been a novel had my experience been less traumatic?

The purpose of this paper is to establish through citation of research in the field of acculturation and supporting examples from the novel *A Sprig of Lemon Blossom*, that, within the specific context of the novel, the heroine Noor undergoes a variety of psychological and emotional experiences that can be categorized as her path to acculturation within the Peruvian society. It also highlights how important it is for the L2 learner to feel like a part of the second culture (C2); the lack of an adequate cross-cultural preparation plays a big role in the L2 learner’s acculturation process in the new environment no matter how well he or she speaks the L2 language.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *What is acculturation?*

Acculturation is perhaps best defined as a successful intercultural exchange between a newcomer or foreigner to the new country and the people who are from there. In the specific case of this IPP we are focusing on the acculturation process of an L2 learner who, due to personal circumstances, finds herself to be adjusting to a new country and its inhabitants. A venture of acculturation is judged as successful when the new comer as well as the hosts from the new country can be said to have a relationship free of tension where both parties can grow positively. The three-part criterion to define a successful acculturation process is as follows:

*i) Good personal adjustment*

This is categorized by a feeling of contentment and well-being within the psyche of the newcomer where the person can affirm that he/she is doing and feeling good about him/herself and not prone to periods of depression.

*ii) Good interpersonal relations with hosts*

This is defined by respect for the hosts from the C2, good collegial relations on the job, free time spent with hosts and the sharing of personal information with hosts. A very important part of this process is the opinion of the hosts regarding this matter: if they think that the newcomer is

interacting well and getting along with everybody in general, then this would be a positive indication that this aspect of cross-cultural success is being met.

*iii) Task effectiveness*

This refers to the completion of one's work goals in the host country. This aspect of cross-cultural success pertains to the attainment of task-related goals on the part of the newcomer. These differ from person to person: for the foreign student it could be the obtaining of a diploma or degree; for the overseas businessman, the establishment of trade agreements; for technical assistance advisers, the completion of a development project; for diplomats, the signing of a wider variety of bilateral or multilateral agreements. In most cases this process necessarily includes the sharing of knowledge, resources and information with the hosts where both, point i) and ii) play a crucial role.

All three aspects need to be kept in mind when thinking about the successful acculturation process of a newcomer to a host country.

The newcomer may seemingly make adequate progress regarding one aspect but may develop difficulties because of a lack of attention to the other two aspects. For example, the newcomer may think that he/she is making a great adjustment to the new culture (aspect i), but may be disliked by the hosts (aspect ii). Similarly, strong-willed newcomers may overcome obstacles and achieve their task-related goals (aspect iii), but at a severe cost to their physical and mental health (aspect i).

One major feature of the twentieth and even more so of the twenty-first century is the increased interaction between people from different countries due to globalization. Some common reasons for extensive interaction in other countries are missionary work, diplomacy, military assignments and immigration. Difficulties inevitably arise whenever there is extensive cross-cultural interaction.

A very important factor to mention at this juncture is one that everyone would logically assume; i.e. if the newcomer has the L2 fluency of an educated speaker, then, this process is a lot smoother. Within the process of acculturation *this is often paradoxically untrue*. If anything, it leads to a lot of further misunderstandings. The newcomer's L2 proficiency leads the hosts to think that the newcomer knows a lot more about their culture than is the real case. It is extremely difficult for the hosts to believe or realize that although the newcomer is using the L2 to communicate proficiently, the psychology behind every uttered phrase is dominated by the newcomer's personal cultural (C1) idiosyncrasy. If instead there is a language barrier or limitation if you will, then this whole process is a lot slower and thus, easier to assimilate for both parties. The verbal communication is a lot more limited and careful and the hosts never forget that the newcomer is a foreigner in every sense.

In their own cultures people are socialized to accept a relatively set and narrow range of behaviors as "proper and appropriate". Those behaviors not perceived as "good" are perceived as less desirable and, in extreme cases, as absolutely wrong. Furthermore, those who engage in those less desirable behaviors are seen as backward, ignorant, or just plain ill-mannered. In

everyday words, people become accustomed to doing things (eating, courting, working and interacting with others) in certain ways, and the behaviors surrounding these activities are seen as proper. However, when they interact with people from other cultures, those “proper” behaviors are not always forthcoming from the C2 people. In addition, behaviors that the person may consider down right “improper” may be the norm in the C2 and practiced on a routine basis. Common responses to this confrontation of past learning with present experiences are intense dislike of culturally different others, leading to prejudice, negative labels or stereotypes and, a refusal to interact with the others or discriminating against them.

The reactions of prejudice, stereotype formation and discrimination occur even with people who voluntarily, and with the best intentions, move into cultures other than their own. People of good will who live in other cultures will inevitably encounter differences in behavior that are at odds with their expectations. They must adjust their own behavior so as *not* to be discriminatory or judgmental. However, there are *so many* adjustments to be made that the process becomes overwhelming; The C2 people make friends in different ways; they have different work and eating habits; they do not communicate their desires in familiar ways; they evaluate information differently; and their ways of decision making are totally incomprehensible. The demand on the newcomer to make *so many* adjustments is one key reason for the phenomenon called “culture shock”. No one specific demand is overwhelming: the newcomer is used to making adjustments everyday to new pressures or to new information in their own C1, but the multiple demands to do so within a relatively short period of time within the C2 can cause severe frustration during an extensive period of cross-cultural interaction.

Thus, the acculturation process, even at its best with all three aspects being taken care of, is challenging, let alone when not adequately focused upon or, worse, ignored.

In the specific example of the case to be discussed within this IPP, which is the story of a young newcomer called Noor to Peru in the novel, **A Sprig of Lemon Blossom**, the L2 fluency of the learner did not help her at all with the acculturation process in the new country; instead, if anything, it completely foiled the success of points i) and ii) and ultimately, when even point iii) was thwarted due to personal family circumstances, it led to severe depression, frustration and ultimately, a mode of denial to be able to survive.

The process of acculturation has been the subject of a lot of research within the past forty years due to such an increase in global travel. One aspect that all researchers unanimously agree on is that although there is a fairly accountable number of aspects to consider (such as the ones mentioned above), there is however no set time in which to accomplish them. Each individual traveler to a new country undergoes the process at his or her own pace of psychological assimilation. Adequate preparation and training can mitigate the culture shock, but no amount of training or preparation can eliminate the necessary process of adjustment, mind change and ultimately, the broadening of one's prior perspective which comes only with time.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Outline of the novel, A Sprig of Lemon Blossom*

The novel, **A Sprig of Lemon Blossom (ASLB)**, evolves around the head-on cross-cultural collision that occurs when Noor, a young woman from India comes to live in Lima as the wife of a Peruvian diplomat, Sergio Monserrat, accompanied by their two infant daughters. Completely unaware of the process of acculturation and culture shock that is awaiting her, she is fairly confident that as a fluent L2 speaker, things can hardly be that bad for her in the new country. In Lima she is engulfed in a sea of intercultural adjustment intensified by virulent terrorism, a rocketing inflation and a tight college routine. Soon Noor's only refuge becomes a derelict Baroque Franciscan Monastery called *San Francisco de Lima*. Its Moorish contours remind her of the Mogul architecture back home and provide her with some peace of mind in a totally unfamiliar world, no matter how well she "speaks the language". In time, the vandalism, mismanagement and "restoration" she witnesses within this World Heritage Monument that she has come to love moves her to write a novel about it. Under so much pressure her life becomes a paradox in which her marriage steadily deteriorates and she responds by escaping into a world of the past through her research. In this fantasy world she meets a deceased Franciscan monk and renowned art historian, Friar Benjamin Lopez-Barron. Back in time, together they witness the inception and construction of San Francisco in the sixteenth century and solve a glaring political intrigue in the seventeenth century within the very walls of the monastery that has puzzled historians for centuries. Noor falls deeply in love with Benjamin while in her real life, her husband, Sergio is diagnosed with cancer and dies a brutally sudden death that tears the whole

fabric of Noor's stability to shreds. The rise and fall of San Francisco seems to be an echo of her own life as she struggles to find the answers and pick up the shattered pieces of her life.



## CHAPTER THREE

### *Analysis of the novel from the perspective of Intercultural Adjustment.*

#### *i) Anxiety*

Anxiety is an unpleasant feeling involving a sensation of discomfort regarding some object or event. It is very similar to the feeling of fear. However, unlike fear which is focused on something specific like, for example, a fear of heights, anxiety is a more vague and amorphous feeling that cannot necessarily be pin pointed. All cross-cultural experiences cause anxiety because people, especially newcomers, realize that information and behavior patterns previously learned in their own culture are not always useful in the C2. The new circumstances produce many unfamiliar demands where the newcomers quickly and painfully discover that if they use their previous knowledge, they will often be wrong. They will make mistakes. Nobody likes to be confronted by mistakes over and over again. This realization causes more anxiety, which communicates itself to the hosts and compounds the adjustment problems of the newcomer. Further anxiety stems from the need to make decisions in the host culture despite imperfect knowledge. Besides anxiety, this situation also produces intense feelings that engage the newcomer's emotions, causing a sense of displacement and unfamiliarity and highlights their status as outsiders.

One of the best ways to reduce this type of anxiety is to try in the measure possible to identify the source of the anxiety and address it directly with key information or action, as the case requires.

In ASLB Noor describes these very feelings in the following passage before her arrival to Lima:

In the course of the first two years we had two beautiful daughters; we named them Gia and Abril and life seemed perfect. The doubts began to creep in during our last year in India when Sergio's posting as a counselor at the Peruvian Embassy came to an end in 1986. In spite of our age difference, Sergio seemed unable to perceive that I was feeling extremely anxious and confused about leaving India. All of a sudden I felt hollow. I felt life had changed too fast from when I was nineteen and just a happy student with no responsibilities to when I was twenty-two, and a mother of two children. Somehow everything seemed to be moving out of my control. Sergio seemed totally engrossed with the idea of returning home. His attitude said I was making much ado about nothing. It seemed that he couldn't care less about how vulnerable I felt. I withdrew into a protective shell and just "functioned" mechanically while my anxiety at the thought of the prospective change began to work on the principles of inverse proportion.

That was about when my Turkish friend, Zainab had tentatively suggested that I consider going back to university in Lima. The intellectual activity, she had said, would keep my head from turning into the proverbial devil's workshop. I had since clutched firmly at this straw and no amount of persuasion could convince me to the contrary.

What neither of us had foreseen were the additional activities that my life in Peru would entail. These included cooking, cleaning, clothes washing (by hand) and tending to Gia of barely two and Abril of seven months...in my mother-in-law's apartment. Our own house was still under construction. And, last but not the least, the success of this entire academic venture hinged on my ability to reach university everyday using the colourful public transport system of Lima. Sergio had firmly refused to give me the car in the hope that that might deter me from going to school as driving in Lima was a perilous adventure best avoided. His lack of cooperation however made me even more determined to prove to him that I could do it and do it well, in spite of all odds.

Back in India, in the air-conditioned luxury of our apartment, studying translation as a sequel to a Spanish Honours degree had seemed wonderfully logical. Here in Peru, the idea appeared to have lost a considerable amount of that logic during the past two weeks. (Khedker, 1995, 6)

One way of coping with anxiety and frustration is physical exercise. Researchers suggest deep breathing, meditation, heavy exercise and engaging in pleasurable activities and substituting positive for negative thoughts.

In ASLB Noor reflects this in the following passage:

When I began to wake up during the small hours and find that even half awake, my mind was full of San Francisco, I decided that it was high time to start running again. My body was used to organized exercise and I hadn't had any of that in the last seven months. (Khedker, 1995, )

*ii) Cognitive and experiential training*

As mentioned in Chapter One of this IPP, in today's twenty-first century world acculturation plays a huge role in the lives of professionals who travel frequently and extensively to new countries for a variety of purposes. Given this reality, researchers have come up with training programs backed by relevant literature to ensure that this process takes place in as short a time and as smoothly as possible. One of the back bones of this kind of training involves a cognitive orientation for the newcomer where he/she reads extensively about the new country and culture and attends lectures, group discussions and question-answer sessions with "old hand" travelers who have lived in that country for several years.

Another kind of training is an experiential training that puts an emphasis on activities in which trainees participate. Typical methods include role playing potentially problematic situations such

as negotiations between a boss from one culture and a subordinate from another; a student from one culture and a professor from another; peers from the two different cultures etc.

In ASLB Noor was not given any such training or preparation for her impending journey to Lima. All she knew was that she was extremely anxious and she did not even know why. Her husband Sergio, who perhaps, as a seasoned diplomat, should have had some clue why she was feeling this way, was too engrossed in his own work and feelings to pay much attention to Noor. She states as much in the following passage:

In spite of our age difference, Sergio seemed unable to perceive that I was feeling extremely anxious and confused about leaving India. All of a sudden I felt hollow. I felt life had changed too fast from when I was nineteen and just a happy student with no responsibilities to when I was twenty-two, and a mother of two children. Somehow everything seemed to be moving out of my control. Sergio seemed totally engrossed with the idea of returning home. His attitude said I was making much ado about nothing. It seemed that he couldn't care less about how vulnerable I felt. I withdrew into a protective shell and just "functioned" mechanically while my anxiety at the thought of the prospective change began to work on the principles of inverse proportion. (Khedker, 1995, 6)

Such training is invaluable as it provides the potential newcomer with at least some clue as to the thinking process of the C2 people. It triggers some psychological defense mechanism within the newcomer's mind that prepares him/her to expect different reactions and answers than what he/she is used to in his/her C1 society. It promotes a greater understanding of the C2 as judged by the hosts themselves. It decreases the usage of negative stereotypes by the newcomer. He/she starts to develop a more complex thinking process (sophisticated thinking) about the target

culture which replaces the oversimplified, facile thinking to which hosts from the C2 react negatively.

Once in the new country, such prior training produces a greater enjoyment for the newcomer who begins to interact with the members of the target culture and perceives reciprocation from the hosts. The newcomer begins to become better adjusted to everyday stresses of life in the C2. All this leads to a better task performance, especially in cases where such performance is influenced by specific cultural practices.

### *iii) Cultural Self-Awareness*

Cultural Self-Awareness is a state of mind that can only come about through introspection. It is absolutely crucial for an L2 learner about to travel to a new culture to examine some root cultural concepts that mark his/her C1 as opposed to those that are predominant in the C2. Two key concepts that differentiate the Oriental cultures from the Occidental cultures are collectivism (in eastern cultures) as opposed to individualism (in western cultures). Understanding that there are fundamental differences between what different people believe to be right or supportive behavior is very important within the acculturation process of the L2 learner.

In ASLB, Noor, from India, hails from a totally collective society where there are servants to help with household chores; the elders of a joint family to make sure that the younger members of the family are adequately fed, clothed and housed; children who are constantly baby sat by mothers, grandmothers and any elderly female member of the extended family, in short, a collective approach to living one's everyday life. In a matter of days she is transported to this

new world of an individualistic western society in Lima, Peru where everyone takes care of only their own personal needs and those of their very immediate family of minor children.

Temporarily housed at her Peruvian mother-in-law's apartment, she cannot understand why her mother-in-law is so unsupportive, and, in her perception, even cruel in terms of what she will not do for Noor herself or her own little grandchildren. From Noor's collective society view point, the loss of social support is devastating while probably a totally "normal behavior" on the part of her mother-in-law.

The following passage from ASLB reflects this sentiment:

I always took great pride in affirming that Logic was the guiding star of my existence. So what was I doing in this old olive grove in such awful weather? The answer was painfully logical: I was struggling to copy five weeks of university notes that I had missed due to my belated arrival. And why couldn't I do this in the comparative shelter of my worthy mother-in-law's apartment... only two tantalizing blocks away, within the elegant neighbourhood of San Isidro? Because the dear lady had made it amply clear through word and gesture that in her opinion, my "choice" of returning to university was an extremely capricious one. My duty lay at home with my husband and my two infant daughters and not in chasing wild, academic geese. Bitter experience had taught me that any attempt at intellectual pursuit in my temporary home was impossible. If I insisted on continuing upon my errant course, this park it would have to be, regardless of cold days, wet days, grey days, May days... or even Sundays. (Khedker, 1995, 5)

A newcomer often feels that he/she is the only person to have unfulfilled expectations, the only person to feel anxious and helpless and harbor negative feelings towards the hosts. In actuality, virtually all newcomers go through periods when these feelings overwhelm them.

*iv) Attribution perspective*

Attribution perspective refers to the understanding and interpretation that people from different cultures attribute to a given event. The way in which an Asian person understands and judges an event and the conclusion he/she comes to are totally different from that of an African or an American person witnessing the very same event and so on. At a multicultural level and/or in a case of acculturation this is a big issue as many misunderstandings stem from how one same situation is interpreted by a newcomer versus the host culture people. For example, a student disagreeing with the position taken by a teacher: such behavior can be attributed to disrespect of authority in one culture and desirable individualism in another culture. In their own culture people learn a variety of appropriate attributions to a wide range of stimuli. In the host culture an appropriate attribution is difficult to formulate because the stimulus received is so different and unexpected.

One such incident reflected in ASLB is illustrated in the following passage:

So, on this unsuspecting day, there I was, in the park, pouring over my papers and notebooks as usual, when, out of the corner of my eye I saw a police car stop by the roadside. I paid no attention to the matter until, suddenly, I found a policeman by my side.

"Please show me your documents Señorita," he said to me.

Misunderstanding the "documents" to be the papers I was studying from, I extended them silently.

"You're identity documents Señorita!" he barked angrily.

"I...I ddon't have them here. They're at home," I stuttered in perfect, idiomatic Spanish.

"Then you'll have to come with us to the police station. Right now."

"But what have I done!?" I asked, panic-stricken.

Some neighbour had apparently misinterpreted my academic zeal in the park every afternoon and mistaken me for a terrorist, taking detailed notes of the surroundings... to make the bombing of specific locations easier at a later date. I was, naturally, document-less as Sergio had told me they could be stolen and no amount of pleading seemed to persuade the policeman of my innocence. I stood arguing and pleading alternately, requesting the policeman to come home with me. I could picture my seventy-year-old mother-in-law having a heart attack if I called to report my predicament from a police station. Worse still, I did not even know her phone number. At this juncture heavenly justice intervened and brought my two Basset hound-owner friends to the scene. What I had failed to resolve in twenty minutes of fluent Spanish was resolved in two flat.

"What's the problem officer?" asked Ana sternly.

The policeman seemed to have shrunk in size. "Err, this lady takes notes here everyday...she doesn't have documents...".

"Officer, here are *my* documents, I belong to this neighbourhood. This lady is a friend of mine so please would you be kind enough to stop bothering her and leave."

"But Ma'am...she doesn't...", began the policeman again.

"Officer, here is my telephone number. If you have a problem, please call me," cut in Ana firmly, leading me towards her car. I burst into tears of relief and began trembling uncontrollably from shock. (Khedker, 1995, 9)

Cross-cultural adjustment is greatly facilitated and many potential misunderstandings are reduced when a newcomer knows when, how and why certain attributions are made under certain circumstances. When the newcomer learns to make the correct attributions under the C2 circumstances these are called *isomorphic attributions*. The rendering of such isomorphic attributions may never become a part of the newcomer's psyche, but they will come to define at least some general principles that lie behind the thousands of specific behaviors that they will observe in the C2 country and make the process of acculturation easier.



v) *The importance of Task Effectiveness*

The definition of task effectiveness has already been given in Chapter One, point iii) of this IPP so at this point I will directly analyze the role it played in the story of Noor in ASLB. To my mind task effectiveness, which refers to the successful completion of goals by the newcomer in the host country is perhaps the straw that can either make or break the camel's back. In a sense, even if aspects i) and ii) of the acculturation process fail, the feeling of achieving ones goals despite the costs gives any newcomer a powerful boost and, in many cases, just the impetus they need to carry on.

In Noor's case, a strong-willed person by nature, this feeling of accomplishing at least one important goal (aspect iii of acculturation) lay in her successful university accomplishments that would ultimately lead her to getting a B.A. degree in Translation and Interpretation. In spite of a terrible depression and a horrible C2 reality in the home of her mother-in-law and in Lima, an unfamiliar and ravaged city ridden by uncertainty and rampant terrorism, she took great pride in the fact that although she was an L2 learner, she was competing successfully against L1 university students and getting spectacular grades. In a sea of disappointments at every turn, this was her one solace. She was a wonderful student and in the end she was going to get her B.A. degree.

The following passage from ASLB illustrates this sentiment:

The people of Lima in general and my family-in-law in particular were incomprehensible. My only threshold of sanity seemed to be the university. There

I was someone intelligent with a real identity who actually counted! My professors loved me and my peers were amazed at how good my Spanish was. They often said that were it not for my accent and the fact that I did not know any slang, they could never tell I was a foreigner. One student actually told me that she envied how well I wrote in Spanish! (Khedker, 1995, 10)

When the demands of her family life forced Noor to quit the university at least temporarily, it was the straw that finally broke her proverbial back and made her seek a world of denial. It was her only way to survive somehow and at some level as an individual who felt robbed of her very identity (syndrome of *deindividuation*).

The following passage illustrates this:

As things stood in January 1988, my relationship with Sergio was not exactly running on oiled wheels. Until two years ago our marriage had been an easy partnership where Sergio made the decisions and I had been content to follow. The crunch had come after Abril's birth in '85; Sergio's time as councillor in the embassy in India had been drawing to a close and in the face of actually leaving India my whole life had suddenly come into sharp perspective; and all I saw was a hollow mannequin smiling mechanically in meaningless parties night after night.

In utter confusion, I had decided to go back to school in Peru to mitigate the shock of settling down in a new country. But, that decision hadn't been welcomed by Sergio or his family. So, instead of helping me, it had alienated me even further from him. He paid for my education in tight lipped silence but neither he nor his mother ever let go of an opportunity to remind me that my place was at home. So, in reality, the time I spent at university became the wall that hid other graver grievances that neither Sergio nor I mentioned. Nothing seemed to be on my side: I was the foreigner in a foreign country; I had to look after the babies without a maid and, to add to it all, a year and a half since coming to Lima, we were living at my mother-in-law's indefinitely until our own house was completed because Sergio's salary as a "diplomat back home" was a joke. On some days I felt that the acid on the old lady's tongue would corrode and eat up my heart I hurt so much.

My only refuges in this awful world were the university and Claudio's mother, Isabel's apartment. Isabel always seemed to be there when I needed a shoulder to cry on or some food to eat. Sergio turned a blind eye on this whole sorry situation. His attitude said that everything was my fault for wanting to go to university instead of staying home like most of the other diplomat's wives.

In the midst of this scenario, I was summoned one day to the children's kindergarten school for an appointment with the school psychologist. In short it appeared that the children had developed a severe parent image problem: At the ages of three-and-a-half and two, when Gia and Abril were asked who their mother was, they couldn't make up their minds as to which of all the adults that surrounded them was really "mother".

Worried to death about this phenomenon, that night, at bedtime I asked Gia, "Baby, who is Mommy?" (Abril's thoughts and speech were too garbled for accuracy).

Gia looked at me hesitantly and kept quiet. So I asked her again, "Who am I my sweetheart?"

"Err, I'm not sure," she replied, reaching out a tiny chubby hand to touch my face with.

"Don't you know I'm Mommy, my darling?" I asked gently, burying my face in her little neck and hugging her.

"Grandma says you're not my Mommy, because you are never at home. She says it everyday."

I felt my throat constrict with pain as I heard this from my poor confused baby of three. Claspng her tightly to my chest I made an instinctive decision: I would "postpone" university for a year and stay at home because the children were hardly to blame for all my emotional dilemmas. In the diplomatic world I had already been introduced to enough disoriented children to be positive that I didn't want *my* children to be like them. Some of these children had been abroad for so long that they had trouble identifying themselves with their own countries. Others took drugs... yet others seemed to be traversing excruciating teenage problems as parents complained bitterly of rampant smoking and drinking. All in all, the number of stable diplomatic children I had met was so few that I had become adamant about my own children's stability. That factor would come above all others...

Under the circumstances, I informed the university administration of my decision and the "book" became my escape from reality. Physically I was available at home, but my mind was far, far away as I quietly switched one straw in my mind

for another. Sergio of course was delighted by the change, convinced that at twenty-five I had grown up at last.

I was willing to let him think whatever he wished, as long as I could carry on going to San Francisco and doing my research on its past. This posed a problem: I would either have to confess to him that I wanted to write a book on San Francisco or else... very soon there would be raised eyebrows as to why I wanted to go to the monastery at least three times a week.

Sergio took the book idea surprisingly well. He just spoilt it by adding in the end, "anything you want.....as long as it isn't the university!".  
(Khedker, 1995, 38)

Unknown to Noor, this last disappointment was the final blow to her already severely damaged acculturation process. After leaving college there was nowhere left for her in this unfamiliar C2 to be or feel successful no matter how good an L2 speaker she was. Although she did have some C2 friends, the larger part of her life was marked by disappointment after disappointment that forced her into a survival mode of denial.

The following passage illustrates how Noor began substituting her reality with a world of her own creation where she was the protagonist:

At long last, in May '88 the impossible finally occurred. We actually MOVED to our new house in a neighbourhood called Monterrico. My sole regret about leaving my mother-in-law's house in San Isidro was the distance that separated me now from the *Olivar* Park. After an interminable period of "unpacking" I was able to unearth my antique Victorian writing table that was placed in a study of my very own. From then onwards I was free to pour over the past during most nights without interrupting Sergio's sleep and incurring his disapproval.

On one such night, when I took my eyes off the books, darkness was lightening into the first hint of dawn. It seemed more logical to go for a breath of fresh air to the *Olivar* park than attempt sleep. I wriggled into an old pullover, tattered jeans, pulled on my tennis shoes and set off as I had done on so many early mornings.

I must have walked for quite a while before I began to wonder where I was. This place looked like a jungle...gigantic trees, matted bushes... had I lost my way? My mind flew to the terrorist activities in the countryside...and then I heard it.

Distinct footfalls; I swerved around nervously, more than ordinarily aware of my isolation. Suddenly I experienced an overwhelming desire to hide and looked around frantically for a likely spot. Just ahead was an enormous rock-broom bush, smothered in rich yellow flowers. I resolved to crawl into it, thorns and all, and hope for the best.

Just as I was about to congratulate myself upon the merits of my choice, the bush began to sink and I with it. Danger forgotten, I let out a startled gasp and belatedly tried to clutch at thorny branches that I had hitherto wished to avoid. No effort however, prevented me from landing in an unceremonious heap at the bottom of a natural pit that the exuberant bush had so cleverly hidden. The hollow was lined with years of fallen leaves which had turned into mushy humus. I began to sneeze violently, killing all hopes of stealth and obscurity.

"May I ask why you are bent on squashing this poor bush out of existence?" asked a voice.

My flailing came to an abrupt standstill. When I managed to turn over and look upwards, only sheer surprise could stem the bitter retort upon my lips. It was clearly my morning for gasps for I gasped once more.

"You!" we said simultaneously.

Relief, mingled with indignation made my head swim as I stared up at him, quite bereft of speech. He was the anonymous friar who had helped with my Spanish grammar exercise in the choir hall of San Francisco the other night. He recovered first.

"Here," he said, proffering a hand to help me out.

"How dare you go about scaring me out of my wits!" I retorted scathingly.

"Did I scare you?" he asked in astonishment.

"Yes, I thought you were a terrorist. I was on my way to the *Olivar*, but I think I'm lost," I added incoherently.

"If you were looking for the *Olivar* of San Isidro, you're in the right place at the wrong time because this is the sixteenth century. The olive trees will only be imported and planted here in the coming century," he clarified cryptically.

"I bb..beg your pardon?" I stuttered.

"I'm telling you. You *are* in the *Olivar*, but in the sixteenth century. That's why everything looks so unfamiliar to you," he repeated.

"What?!" I cried, forgetting all precepts of polite speech.

"This is the sixteenth century," he explained patiently, "and you'd better let me help you out of that hole quickly, or else I'll be late for the foundation ceremony of the City of the Kings this morning," he added.

"Isn't this Lima anymore either?!" I cried wildly.

"Of course it is," he said reprovingly. "City of the Kings" was how Pizarro, the Conquistador, christened Lima."

"Oh," I said, stupidly. "Oh my God, what am I to do? I'm not supposed to be here!" I wailed, clutching my head between my hands.

"You don't really have to feel lost. You can come and see the foundation ceremony with me if you like," he said kindly.

"Yes, but won't I be a nuisance?" I asked, miserably.

"Not at all, my dear: history has to be shared to exist! I'd be delighted to show you the foundation ceremony."

Only when I began to scramble out of the pit did I notice my change of apparel. Old jeans and tennis shoes had been replaced by a turquoise blue gown and matching satin slippers! Desperately in search of an echo, my eyes shot towards his clothes for a clue.

"Yes," he nodded. "My clothes belong to the sixteenth century as well." And indeed his habit was different. Although still a Franciscan brown the tone was noticeably darker, the material much more coarse and the cowl enormous.

"Oh," I gulped.

"Come on, let's be going! The ceremony will be held near the river Rimac and it's a ways," he urged.

"Whatever you say," I said, feeling completely out of my depth.

"Oh, but before we go, I'll have to go back into the pit and pick up your mantilla!" he exclaimed. "You'll have to get used to covering your head with it all the time because you're only half dressed without it in the sixteenth century!" he added, before jumping into the pit.

"And who *are* you? I mean what is your name? All I know about you is that you are a Franciscan monk, writing a book on San Francisco," I said, groping for normalcy.

"I'm Lopez Barron. Benjamin Lopez Barron. You can call me Benjamin," he replied easily.

"You mean you're the person who wrote, SAN FRANCISCO OF LIMA?" I exclaimed.

"Not wrote. Writing. I'm still writing it," he corrected.

"Oh quite," I said faintly.

"And you? What is your name? You never did introduce yourself properly that night!"

"My name is Noor," I said, feeling my cheeks grow hot for no reason at all. "I'm from India," I added hastily, trying to cover my inexplicable embarrassment.

"Oh, is that so! But how wonderful! I love Mogul architecture. You never stop seeing its influence on the architecture of Southern Spain due to the Moorish invasion."

"Oh, I absolutely adore Sevillian tiles!" I breathed, beginning to feel more at ease, "all those impossible creepers and flowers and animals and angels! They remind me of home although the Muslim monuments don't have any depictions of figure sculptures," I rambled. He was so soothing to talk to. (Khedker, 1995, 43)

*vi) Denial*

As mentioned in point v), the decision to quit college finally drove Noor into a state of denial. However, being as strong willed and as assertive as she was by nature, denial was not a regular part of her psychological make up. If anything, even in denial, instead of seeking self-destructive means common to the depression syndrome, she sought to be constructive. Rather than choose inactivity, she channeled her thwarted academic zeal into a research project on a beloved but extremely neglected monument, a Catholic Baroque monastery called San Francisco de Lima. This is illustrated in the following passage from ASLB:

1987 started on a strange note. Without the routine of college to go to and homework to worry about constantly, my mind was inexplicably drawn to San Francisco. There came a point when I could think of little else during my moments of silence. My obsession with the monument was intensified by the state of neglect and decay that enveloped San Francisco, which hit me anew every time I visited the place.

When I began to wake up during the small hours and find that even half awake, my mind was full of San Francisco, I decided that it was high time to start running again. My body was used to organized exercise and I hadn't had any of that in the last seven months.

But, I thought of San Francisco even as I ran: the church and monastery complex were an exquisite example of early colonial architecture in this highly seismic zone. How could Limenians be so *immune* to it? I knew all the objective answers to that question, but I guess I hadn't grown up in it, so I couldn't relate to it.

For me San Francisco, sad, pitiful and enveloped in a fog of forgotten glory was a symbol of the times in Lima; its people had a siege to survive, they didn't have time to dwell on concepts like "culture" and "history". Ironically enough, San Francisco had been declared a World Heritage Monument not long ago, but not even that honour could uplift its image in the eyes of its compatriots. And who could blame them when the US State Department had recently declared Peru as a "country dangerous for tourism"?

Just when I thought I had finally convinced myself that the fate of San Francisco, or any other monument in Lima, for that matter, was none of my concern, my careful castle of logic was shattered to pieces one unexpected morning; I had woken up particularly early in a state of high euphoria to celebrate the completion of a whole successful year of academic achievements. The July vacations had begun the day before and I had twenty precious days to while away before college recommenced. So there I was happily jogging around the Golf Course when lightning struck my brain, (probably due to a severe lack of oxygenation). In a split second I had it all solved, as I sped around a corner: San Francisco didn't need money it needed ATTENTION. This attention could easily be procured through a bestseller written about the church. It was as simple as that! One good, coherent book and all Lima would sit up and take notice, young and old alike!

I ran out of euphoria as my run came to an end. I felt reality return with each rapid heartbeat as I bent over, head touching my knees, to recover my breath. Who was going to write this book? I didn't know any authors. And, even if I did, the chances were they wouldn't see the place through my eyes. Only the other day I had been informed that San Francisco had had a third cloister that had been ruthlessly torn down to accommodate the Abancay Avenue, a high symbol of progress in the 'Fifties. It had never apparently occurred to them to build a



bridge over it rather than bulldoze *through* it... but then why would they...? The cloister in question had been in ruins anyway... San Francisco was destined to die. If it didn't fall prey to some subsequent earthquake, the Limenians themselves would certainly do the needful to destroy it. The circle was viciously complete: the people of Lima neglected monuments till they were in an advanced state of ruin and then they pulled them down because the deterioration was too far-gone to restore the place. The original Catch Twenty-Two.

For the next two months the "book" idea kept plaguing me, exploding within the silence of my mind - urging me, compelling me to DO something about it and reproaching me for not. This is silly Indian sentimentality, I told myself sternly as my feet took me inexorably toward San Francisco one morning. I had the first three periods free that day so I decided that I could afford a quick visit to the monastery after all.

Adjacent to the main cloister, there was a small courtyard. This courtyard had several rooms and a small independent apartment of sorts. One of the rooms had been converted into a cafeteria where I usually ordered a coffee before I visited the rest of the monastery. The coffee was absolutely hideous and extremely expensive but I would hoard spending money to indulge in this one extravagance as it symbolized a very precious, stolen moment of peace in a world that I clearly didn't understand. As Fate would have it, that day, one of the austere white walls of the tiny independent apartment bore the freshly painted testimony of the love of "**Rocky and Janet**", rather appropriately enclosed within a dripping black heart. The sight of this vandalism produced such a moment of blind rage within me that coffee forgotten, I marched out of the place toward the reception in the anteroom of the monastery. Here I asked the ticket-seller the name of the person responsible for the management of the monument.

In that instant I knew who was going to write that "best-seller" on San Francisco.

I was. So help me God. (Khedker, 1995, 15)

She could not go to university, she could not finish her college career but at least she could get books from libraries and do research at home. This was an activity that no one could deny her or complain about. Thus, in time, as her life became unhappier and unhappier, she sank more and more into this world of research, creating her own alternate reality where she could be a successful protagonist and find all the emotions denied to her in her real life such as happiness, love, attention and a sense of academic accomplishment.

The following passage from ASLB illustrated this:

“Are we going to see the third Franciscan land now?” I asked.

“In a way.”

“What d’you mean, in a way?”

“From what I have read, the third and last land that we were assigned by Pizarro has a rather turbulent history of inheritance.”

“Tell me about it.”

“Now you’ll see how difficult and irksome writing or compiling history can be. Our very first, and, in a sense, “official” chronicler is Cordoba y Salinas, who based his information on the testimony of San Gil...right?”

I nodded vigorously.

“According to him the Franciscans were given a third piece of land, by the river, and just behind the vice-regal palace. But, as the monks considered the amount insufficient, during the time of Viceroy Antonio Hurtado de Mendoza,...we’re talking about the late 1540s, the Franciscans, being popular with the viceroy, just “roped” off another square and lived happily ever after. When I read that I couldn’t believe my eyes so I dug around until I found some other manuscripts that tell a different story. John Locke wrote that man makes discoveries by steadily intending his mind in a given direction. Every researcher should remember that,” said Ben briskly.

“And what is wrong with the first story?” I asked, perplexed.

“My dear girl, Spanish colonization wasn’t just one big romantic venture. There was a method to it right from the start, and bureaucracy topped the list of that method. The one and only period during which the Metropolis allowed the free allotment of land, was from 1535 to ’39...after the foundation, when you saw the Spaniards roping of blocks of land. Ever since 1540 each plot has had a fixed price.”

“And what year is it now?”

“Now we’re in 1552 and believe me, the vice-regal legal system is too firmly established to permit such fantastic disregard for the law, such as “taking” land, even by a Mendicant Order like ours!”

“So what does the other story say?”

“That is what we are here to check. Can you see that house in the middle of that property?” said Ben, pointing to a wicker gate that enclosed a property full of trees. Indeed it had a sprawling construction in the heart of the wilderness.

“Is *that* San Francisco? That doesn’t look much like a church,” I said doubtfully.

“No, but according to the source I am trying to corroborate, that *is* our land. As the story goes, this was the property that Pizarro finally assigned to the Franciscans. But, as the Franciscans weren’t really present in Lima, and neither was Pizarro...”

“Where did *he* go?” I interrupted.

“He kept going back and forth to Cuzco because of the civil wars that ensued soon after the foundation...also due to his mismanagement and lack of foresight. Then, on one occasion, when he was up in Cuzco, two of his lieutenants were pestering him for property and Pizarro assigned them both this piece of land, forgetting that he had already assigned it to the Franciscans. When the town council heard of this, they reminded him of his former commitment and guess what Pizarro did...he told these fellows, Godoy and Picado, that they could use the property until the Franciscans showed up sometime in the future!”

“But that’s daft! I wouldn’t want a property under those terms,” I declared.

“That was exactly what these two felt. Incidentally, just as an academic question, what would *you* do under the circumstances?”

“Return the land and ask for another of course!”

“Well, I’m sorry to report that these two didn’t share your upright sentiments...and besides, in all fairness, they couldn’t, because soon after the incident Pizarro was assassinated in a civil war intrigue.”

“So what *did* they do?” I asked, highly intrigued.

“They played smart and sold the land to two unsuspecting new arrivals from Spain called Merlo and Burgos.”

“And...?”

“And if the manuscript is right, then a Franciscan called Friar Francisco de Santa Ana should arrive from Ecuador and then the fun will start.”

“Ben, why are the Franciscans in Ecuador responsible for the Franciscan land in Peru?”

“Because in the sixteenth century, the bishopric of “Peru” includes what you know as Ecuador, Bolivia and parts of Chile and the first functioning Franciscan establishment was based in Ecuador. And now I want to take you further up the street, to a special place that used to be Pizarro’s private tropical garden. It’s been opened to the public since his death. You can amuse yourself there while I come back and wait to see if this Franciscan does indeed arrive.”

The entrance to the garden was framed by a rustic arch overhung by an imported rambler full of crimson roses flanked on either side by a tall hedge. It was amazing how well Spanish plants thrived in this climate. Ben plucked off a bloom and gave it to me with a gallant bow as he ushered me in. I stepped into the park, quite unprepared for the surprise that was awaiting my eyes. I dimly noted that the park was hexagonal in shape as my eyes flew from colourful tropical birds to fruit laden orange trees to gigantic native trees and here and there, circular beds of roses until my eyes came to rest on a quaint little brick pond in the middle. I turned to look at Ben with a thousand questions in my eyes.

“Yes, it’s spectacular,” he said softly. “The birds come from the Amazon jungles and most of them are semi-tame and always return here for food. They love the figs and apricots from Spain even though they’re not familiar with them.”

“What did they eat in the jungle?” I asked.

“Bananas, papayas...you have those here as well but they produce fruit in summer. Do you think you’ll stand it here while I go do my research?” he asked mockingly.

I gave him a push and sent him on his way. About an hour later Ben returned to find me sitting under a huge tree, eating an assortment of fruit.

“Busy robbing the birds of their fare. I might have known it!” he greeted me.

“Not at all!” I said indignantly. “I picked this fruit from the ground. Birds don’t like fallen fruit,” I added.

“Well, things are finally beginning to move,” reported Ben, biting into one of my apricots.

“Did the Franciscan arrive?” I inquired.

“...And went into the Merlo Burgos property too,” he reported, trying hard to conceal his excitement. (Khedker, 1995, 64)

Different victims of a poor acculturation process will find different outlets to survive the experience. In the case of Noor this outlet led to her research and through it, an academic and cultural growth regarding the C2 because, despite her depression and denial, she was by nature a constructive and assertive personality.

*vii) Comparisons and cross cultural differences*

The only way a newcomer has to understand the host country reality is to compare it to some known commodity or factor from the C1. In the beginning he/she is doing this constantly to try and assimilate the new reality through the establishment of differentiations.

In ASLB, as a newcomer to Lima, Noor is no exception:

This, I had been gloomily informed, was the weather in Lima from May to September. Umbrellas were not in fashion here because it never "rained" per se... but the interminable feathery drizzle seemed to soak through everything, given a bit of time. When I had embarked upon my journey from New Delhi a mere fortnight earlier, it had been registering 45 on the centigrade scale there. (Khedker, 1995, 5)

Another passage that illustrates comprehension through comparison:

Life tottered on in this fashion amidst rapid political changes that made my head swim in confusion. Nothing in Peru seemed to last a single week: the prices of everything, from bread and vegetables upwards rose every three days. People were panic stricken until the exuberant, young President, Mr.

Alan Garcia, who flirted with the IMF about Peru's astronomical foreign debt at all levels, decided to defy it altogether and bring the inflation under control through novel if artificial means. On the other hand, the Shining Path Maoist Terrorists of Peru were avidly adding to their growing fame by regularly flinging around other people's dynamite, bombing electric towers and killing hapless peasants around the countryside. If to this scenario one added a large smattering of lawlessness in the form of car thefts, bag snatching, burglaries and generous heaps of garbage along with the enthusiastic and unchecked circulation of street vendors in all quarters of the city, this would be the Lima of 1986.

In view of things as they stood, it was easy to comprehend the apprehension of the average citizen to even venture forth on the streets, let alone breathe freely. After a totally placid life in India, it was mind boggling for me to relate to all this popular paranoia. I *had* however paid heed to Sergio's strict instructions about not wearing any jewelry and leaving identity documents at home, lest they got stolen. (Khedker, 1995, 7)

Yet another passage in ASLB that illustrates this manner of understanding a new reality through the old one:

After this Mr. Bustamante said that I was free to roam the monastery as I pleased as I was now a Very Important Person. Never again was I going to be grouped along with the hordes, I thought gleefully... the monastery was all mine to rediscover at my own pace and all alone! I couldn't wait to tell Claudio all about it. He thought I was crazy anyway, but he couldn't stop me. Sergio was a different story because he *could* stop me, so I simply wasn't going to tell him what I was up to. Feeling more at peace than I had in a long time, I wandered down to the main cloister and gazed at the central fountain from within the grills, standing in the midst of the hodgepodge, but charming garden. Instead of water, the fountain held a slumbering Siamese cat within its upper basin. But what envy! The cat probably lived in here, I mused with a smile. As if to mock me, the cat readjusted its position and hung a languid chocolate brown tail over the edge of the basin and continued to dream sweet feline dreams. The resonant sound of the church bells announcing one o'clock jerked me out of my reverie and I knew it was high time I went "home"... but I ignored the feeling and decided to visit the catacombs instead. The catacombs of San Francisco were where the very most elite of vice-regal Lima had buried its dead, four centuries ago. In spite of all my visits to the monastery, I still felt

disoriented outside the main cloister. It took me some time to find this basement area to begin my tour.

My only previous experience of such subterranean burial grounds had been in Humayun's tomb in New Delhi. Humayun had been the second Mogul ruler of India and his majestic mausoleum had long been one of my favourite haunts back home. My mother took me to see the mausoleum as often as I wanted because it was the one place where we could chat with each other without erupting and fighting. She was fascinated by Mogul history and her stories about the role of this monument during the last phase of the Mogul Raj in India before it fell inexorably to the British left me totally mesmerized as she pointed out landmarks and told me yet another tale.

As it so happens, the Muslims interpret the "from dust to dust" concept literally. Their dead are buried without the help of an intermediary coffin, as in the case of the Christians. Furthermore, the immediate surface of the grave is left as plain and unadorned as possible, in keeping with their belief of simplicity. In the sixteenth century their love for art, architecture and ostentation however, was in direct conflict with this belief, so they devised an effective method to marry the two. They built elaborate mausoleums over a platform above the actual, unadorned graveyard.

In Humayun's tomb the ornamental mausoleum at ground level only contains the exquisitely carved tombstones of the emperor and his immediate family. In the real gravesite underneath, the enormous space had been put to good use to bury his close relatives as well as concubines, illegitimate children and even trusted servants. Humayun's tomb lay somewhere in the middle of this dark maze of rooms full of plain tombs. During one of our visits to this favourite haunt my mother had suggested that we see the real tomb of Humayun for a change and my curiosity had been aroused.

We left broad daylight behind and invaded the tenebrous area to the light of a solitary candle. The rag-tag guide in whose grip this candlestick wavered and trembled, assured us of his knowledge of the location of Humayun's actual tomb with nonchalant calm. There is really nothing to be scared of, I told myself, in growing panic as I clutched my mother's wrist tightly.

All at once we were surrounded by rooms. But the rooms were cold and smelt of bat droppings, must and shrouded death. Soon there were nothing but rooms everywhere, airless and pitch dark... some in exceptional disrepair, showing a hint of a skeleton...and still we advanced in a silent trio. That was, until a misguided bat flew into my midriff. That ended the tour because I believe I crumpled at my mother's feet in a dead

faint. Grave unseen, I was carried back to comforting daylight between the two.

On my first visit to San Francisco, when I had been informed about the existence of the catacombs, the vivid recollection of my past encounter had made me desist from that part of the tour. Then, when I had returned with Claudio, he had insisted upon my accompanying him and I had reluctantly acquiesced... and made a startling discovery. The catacombs of San Francisco were the antithesis of Humayun's tomb. In stark contrast to the latter, this place was choked full of bones displayed in clinical and antiseptic order. Tibias of viceroys, butchers, bakers and candlestick-makers lay together like matchsticks in neat horizontal niches in the ground. Fibulas, sternums and other skeletal parts had suffered the same mathematical fate. Within huge circular, well-like holes, skulls lay in concentric circles, looking rather like cake decoration for Dracula's birthday party. Confronted by this ridiculous sight, Claudio burst out laughing and had wanted to know what exactly I was scared of. Later on, I described Humayun's tomb to him.

I think I returned alone in the vague hope of feeling something other than pity at the sight of such irreverence to the dead of so long ago. The area outside the catacombs was in darkness so I spent sometime feeling the outer walls for a light switch before I found it. The light revealed the little alcove that had been turned into a shrine of sorts, dedicated to the celebrated Mexican film star, Jose de Guadalupe Mojica, who had renounced the world to become a Franciscan monk after his visit to this monastery. I could well relate to his sentiments.

The catacombs today looked no more eerie than before, even though I was on my own. Their only claim to terror lay in a tatty skeleton, dressed up in Franciscan habit, who sat apologetically in a sorry huddle in one corner of the entrance. Much more intriguing was the dark unlit maze of rooms, declared out of bounds by prosaic wooden signboards. I sorely missed Claudio who would have willingly accepted the challenge to explore the unknown, had he been present. Instead, I strolled out of the monastery with my head in the clouds. (Khedker, 1995, 18)

Another common factor that afflicts newcomers to a C2 context is the ambiguity of meanings that a given situation may have. The newcomer is often confronted by a situation that is somewhat familiar and one that he/she thinks he/she understands and that demands an immediate response. However, the significance and/or the consequence of



that situation turn out to be totally different from the usual interpretation known to the newcomer as an “appropriate” one from his/her C1 context.

The newcomer learns that he/she has to develop a *tolerance for ambiguity* in the face of any situation no matter how “familiar” it appears to be. The chances are that the interpretation that he/she is attributing and the interpretation that the hosts are attributing to that same situation are poles apart. The ability to cultivate an open mind and think dispassionately before coming to any conclusions is one of the newcomer’s biggest challenges. In ASLB a good example has already been given in point iv) of this chapter where Noor is apprehended by the police for studying in the Olivar park: what for her is a completely “normal” behavior of studying in a public park seems like a potential terrorist’s activities to the strife ridden neighbors of San Isidro, Lima.

Another big hurdle a newcomer faces is to avoid developing feelings of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism refers to making judgments based on one’s own standards and applying those standards in judging others who may be from very different cultural backgrounds. This type of thinking can set in when the newcomer is under a lot of pressure, leading to prejudice. In a prejudicial state of mind the newcomer begins to make judgments that are harsh, unkind and frankly discriminatory compounded by feelings of anger, disgust, rejection, mild paranoia and a desire to avoid all contact with the hosts or vice versa. Needless to say, the newcomer may just as well be the victim of such factors within the host culture instead of the being the perpetrator. In the end however, no matter where these feelings originate from, the result is a situation of total alienation between both

parties and, of course, this severely hinders the newcomer's acculturation process under either circumstance.

In most cases, depending on the situation and the numbers involved, hosts from the C2 tend to think of themselves as the *ingroup* and the newcomers as members of an *outgroup*. In psychology this attitude is known as an ego-defensive function that protects people's views of themselves (self-image). Members from both groups have set opinions regarding their knowledge of matters such as categorization, differentiation and learning styles, and any other way of thought is viewed as ignorant or uneducated. Feelings of prejudice work at random among both groups, depending on the circumstances.

Protection lies in numbers: i.e. a dozen newcomers in a situation of domination such as company executives from the parent company versus the host members is very different from the situation of a lone settler in a new country. In either case, the group that dominates the situation psychologically is the one most likely to impose its opinions.

In the context of this IPP however, as we are focusing on the acculturation of the newcomer as a L2 learner in a new country, we will assume that he/she is outnumbered by the hosts and thus has to adjust to their ways no matter what his/her personal feelings. For the sake of argument, even if he/she does suffer from violent feelings of prejudice and ethnocentrism, such feelings will not contribute positively towards his/her acculturation process or his/her task effectiveness in the C2.

An example of this in ASLB is reflected in the following passage:

The next day I woke up depressed, which was hardly the exception: I woke up depressed on most days. Today however there was a special additional reason to be depressed. It was Mother's Day.

I hated Mother's Day for a variety of reasons. First of all, in the India of my childhood there was no such nonsensical concept. "Mother" was venerated every single day of the year for one's whole life.....not on one silly day. Secondly, when we had come to Lima in 1986, it had been just before the famous Mother's Day, loaded with presents for all the "mothered females" of Sergio's family. But, on the fateful day itself we had finally ended up spending it all by ourselves, the children, Sergio and I because all the women from Sergio's family, including his dear mother, had had somewhere else to spend it that didn't include us in the festivities. Even back in those early days I could feel that they didn't like me...but at the time I had attributed it to my being a foreigner and simply too "different" for them to swallow too soon. As time went by and I made Peruvian friends I realised that my differences were with Sergio's family alone. We were simply incompatible and it wasn't a case of my being a "foreigner".

Mother's Day 1987, if possible, had been worse. This one had been spent "altogether" at a colonial style restaurant, hosted by Sergio.

"How can he bear to do this after the Olympic rejection of last year?" I asked myself silently as I sat through the farce.

So here we were, in 1988, and I wondered how this one was going to be. I had not been interested enough to ask what the plans were, dreading the day anyway. When Sergio woke up I asked him tentatively if he'd mind my visiting Isabel first thing in the morning. He said I could do anything I liked. This answer didn't stop me from feeling even more depressed.

Isabel greeted me with a delighted hug, presuming I had come to wish her a "Happy Mother's Day."

"Would you mind if I spent the day with you?" I asked, my eyes brimming with tears.

"Of course not, you don't have to ask silly questions! But where are the children?" she asked, peering behind me.

"They'll be fine with Sergio," I choked.

"My darling, come on in, " she said, holding me close. "Come on, let's go to the kitchen and make you some hot, sweet coffee, with lots and lots of

condensed milk, just the way you like it. You'll simply love a piece of the cake I baked yesterday."

"Where's Claudio?" I gulped, looking around.

"He went out earlier. I think he's gone to buy me a present!"

"I'm sorry I haven't brought you a present," I said, feeling inadequate.

"You yourself are a present my dear," smiled Isabel.

"You don't have to say things to make me feel better...!"

"Oh but my dear, you are! Because you...your presence or perhaps your friendship has changed Claudio to a point I would never have believed possible," she said quietly.

"Well he's a little spoilt but he's a wonderful person!" I said loyally.

"No my dear, I will concede that Claudio is highly intelligent and a good boy at heart but he was terribly self-centred until you came along. For some reason you bring out the best in him. I have never seen him so considerate or so sensitive to anyone before."

"It isn't his fault he lost his father so young! That's why he's spoilt," I said.

"Oh Claudio's problem is bigger than just losing his father at four. He is the product of an age of total uncertainty in Lima. My older children are all different and stable because they have good memories of Peru during the 'Fifties and the mid-'Sixties. Claudio, on the contrary, was but a baby when we came under the regime of Velazco Alvarado and his military coup. Both my family and Claudio's father's family lost all their farming property to that government and life was never the same again. Claudio and all his peers have grown up hating the times and despising Lima. It has done him a whole lot of good to meet someone his own age who admires Lima and sees it for what it is really worth. He won't admit it but he's terribly proud of the research you are doing on the church of San Francisco."

"I couldn't do it without him," I said simply. "He does half my research for me."

"You are the best thing that ever happened to my son, Noor. You have made him grow up. I will always be grateful to you for that."

"It is strange to hear you speak of me and relate to what Sergio's family thinks of me. You adore me and they treat me as if I am an animal from some other planet! And yet...you are their friend."

"My relationship with Sergio's mother goes back many, many years my dear. Over the years I have learnt to overlook her shortcomings because none of us are perfect. Sergio should never have lumped you two together under the same roof for two years. He was old enough to know better. A friend of mine once told me that the Chinese ideograph for trouble was two women under one roof...!"

"I have never met anyone as mean spirited as the old lady," I said, bitterly.

"You have to go beyond that dear. The "old lady" as you call her, got the shock of her life when Sergio announced his forthcoming marriage to a nineteen year old Indian girl. Until you came along, she was the sun and the moon in Sergio's life, but you changed all that and she'll never forgive you for it. You are younger so you'll have to learn to forgive her."

"I hate Mother's Day!" I said, pouring out my story.

"Place yourself above such stupid considerations invented for commercial reasons to delude an ignorant public. You have two marvelous children and you are a wonderful mother. Do you feel any less of a mother for the rest of the three hundred and sixty-four days of the year?" asked Isabel, echoing my sentiments. "Mother" isn't concept to be reduced to a day so stop torturing yourself with something so inconsequential."

"Hi Noor, what are you doing here today?!" burst in Claudio literally as he came into the apartment with a bunch of roses in one arm and a package dangling from the other.

"She's come to see me," replied Isabel in a voice that was calculated to stem any further un-diplomatic remarks from him. "She'll be going with us to Carolina's." Carolina was Isabel's only daughter among four children.

"What?! Aren't they all coming here??" I cried.

"Nope. We're all getting together at Carolina's this time," explained Claudio.

"Then I've had it! I can't come with you!"

"Why ever not?" he demanded.

"Because I left the house without really discussing any plans with Sergio and because I presumed they'd all be getting together at my mother-in-law's... I thought I'd stay with you all for a while and then go there."

"So can't you call him? We can drop you back home afterwards!"

Brightening visibly, I decided to call home and ask Sergio's permission to stay with Isabel but the phone kept ringing and ringing. Sergio had obviously left with the children.

"I'd better go to my mother-in-law's right away," I said dispiritedly. "They must be on their way there. I've got enough problems as it is, I shouldn't be aggravating them!"

"I don't think that's a bad idea," intervened Isabel unexpectedly.

"How can you say that! You know how they treat her!" interposed Claudio angrily.

"She's got two children, Claudio. They are too young to understand much but they'll notice she isn't there and that's not good," said Isabel quietly.

"She's right," I said in a small voice.

"You're both crazy!" interjected Claudio, stomping away after dumping the flowers and the package on the dining table.

"Go talk to him, or else he'll be in a bad mood all day... *you* know him!" said Isabel, pushing me in the direction of his retreating back.

"Claudio, stop playing the idiot!" I said, walking into his room. He lay sprawled on his bed. "You know and I know your mother's right, so why make this difficult?"

"OK, OK, I give in. You're right and my mother's right. It's just that I hate to see you unhappy."

"I know, but that's life and at least I have two beautiful kids. They are worth this and much more so get off that bed and wish me "Happy Mother's Day you slothful beast!" I said, poking a finger into his stomach.

I left their apartment feeling a lot better than when I had entered it two hours earlier. Sergio's mother's house was not far from Isabel's apartment so I headed in that direction on reluctant feet. Round the corner on my mother-in-law's street however my "feeling better" came to an abrupt end when I saw that Sergio's car wasn't parked in front of the

house. Could they have gone elsewhere? I rang the doorbell with a thumping heart. No answer. I rang it again, for longer this time; still no answer. So they had definitely left. The problem was I didn't really know where. I couldn't go home either because our maid, Elsa's day off and Sergio had the keys to the house.

Inevitably, I decided to take a bus to San Francisco.

I really had nowhere else to go. (Khedker, 1995, 91)

### *viii) Development of self and host country awareness*

The point at which the newcomer begins to realize that the differences that exist between his/her and the host people's thinking process is neither right nor wrong, he/she has begun to internalize the concept of *cultural relativity*. The customs of others cannot be judged from a preconceived set of ideas learned elsewhere. Rather, cultural relativity refers to an understanding of how various customs have developed to contribute to the smooth functioning of a particular society. This realization leads to a very detailed and perhaps hitherto unrecognized awareness of the C1 as opposed to the C2. Research indicates that at this juncture there is a positive change in the newcomer which reflects a decline in authoritarianism and an increase in world-mindedness. The following passage from ASLB illustrates this thought:

It took about a month for the regulars at the park to start smiling at me with varying degrees of familiarity. Among them were two adorable, middle-aged ladies called Ana, a psychiatrist, and her sister-in-law Patricia. We became friends when I laughed till my sides ached at their frankly obese Basset hounds respectively clad in a frilly pink panty and a child's T-shirt, one winter afternoon. Back in New Delhi, the few dogs that did have and wear winter clothing wore

specially made garments just for them, not cast off human clothing. These Peruvian dogs looked almost cartoonish in their human guise! (Khedker, 1995, 9)

*ix) A sense of uneasy acceptance*

During the early stages of acculturation an immediate frustration is a major component of the new comer's emotional reaction to disconfirmed expectations regarding what they expect and what the reality is; the two are always totally different things. Gradually however, there comes a point when the newcomer begins to feel a lot more adjusted to the new environment when he/she learns to accept that there will perhaps always be a contrast between what they instinctively expect versus the reality of the C2.

The newcomer comes to understand that it is not his/her personal fault that he/she has no intimate, personal relationships such as the ones he/she had in the C1; those relationships (taken so much for granted) were the result of a lifetime of similar experiences and similar attributions. That luxury is not available or present in the C2 context and perhaps it will never come to happen. It is not right or wrong, it is just a fact of life.

The newcomer comes to accept that in the C2 context there will always be moments of loneliness, feelings of alienation and at times, a sense of disorientation, but, that such feelings are completely normal and they will pass. In ASLB Noor, who is totally unfamiliar with the concept



of acculturation and how hard it is on the newcomer, feels this way on numerous occasions but does not realize that this is common to all newcomers; typically, she feels like she is the only one:

We walked toward the bridge in companionable silence until the river Rimac came into view. Even in the dim light of a faded dusk, what I perceived made my eyes widen in astonishment.

"But what happened to the Rimac?!" I cried, turning to Ben, seeking to clutch his arm for reassurance but he wasn't there.

I found I was standing there alone in the darkness on the grimy old stone bridge.

Alone in the world. Alone in Lima...and alone amidst the din of passing traffic. A smattering of silent passers-by were hurrying past, clutching their belongings, well aware of the folly of dilly-dallying in this part of town so late in the evening. Lima and its inhabitants were totally immune to the river Rimac smothered in garbage and refuse that even this light could not hide.

And still I stood there, knowing I should be going, unable to move, tears coursing down my cheeks.

Lost in time. Lost in place. And nowhere to go. (Khedker, 1995, 90)

Noor faces desolation and a complete sense of aloneness yet again in the following passage from ASLB:

I tried to sit down and play with the children. We did fine for the first half hour while the children chattered incessantly. Then, out of the blue, little Abril said, "If I can't see Daddy...can I talk to him on the phone? I just want to say 'I love you'!"

Those three simple words, so innocently spoken, broke a dam inside me. Without warning, I began to cry with nerve-racking sobs that shook my body and wouldn't stop. Seeing me thus, the children burst into tears but I had no words to console them with. Instead, I clamped wet palms over my ears and ran out of the house...I needed some air and some space.

Tears streaming down my face I began to walk: I walked mechanically where familiar streets turned into unfamiliar ones ...and still I walked for hours. Aimless. Mindless.

I could not cope with the fact that today Sergio belonged to the past. How in the name of God was I going to manage alone in a world without Sergio? What was I supposed to do? Where was I supposed to go?

And Ben? Where, in all this, did Ben belong to...? The past? The present? The future?...Or the moment? That was all we had ever had...the timeless moment. And the place was all I had left, an empty shell of a place. I closed my eyes and remembered his face...the face that was going to haunt me for a lifetime...for it seemed quite beyond the bounds of possibility that I would ever see him again either. But what was a lifetime...? According to Ben... I pulled myself together with an effort and turned around to start retracing my steps.

The house was in pitch darkness when I returned home. My tentative knock, however, brought Elsa running to open the door. She had been crying and worrying herself sick at my absence. I flew upstairs to see the children, feeling terrible about having abandoned them. But there they were, cherubic in innocent slumber. My legs trembled as I groped my way in the dark to my bedroom and fell into bed. The bell of the Jesuit school near my house rang out three times...it was a quarter to something...and then I slept. (Khedker, 1995, 178)

x) *There is no final “correct” answer in the sphere of acculturation.*

A very great part of a newcomer’s acculturation process is accomplished when he/she begins to understand host customs and to see how they make sense in the context of the C2.

Suddenly the newcomer realizes that “they are neither right nor wrong...they are just themselves...just like I am myself”. Similarly, “they will not “change” their thinking for me just as I will not change my thinking for them. There are some things about them that I absolutely love and others that I absolutely hate. The point is that I have learned to deal with it and with them.” This sense of acceptance and “dealing with it” although not liking it is reflected in the following passage from ASLB:

Looking back objectively, 1989 was a bad year, in every sense. The Shining Path terrorists were still going strong on all cylinders, wreaking havoc all over the country with customary black outs that seemed to have become an integral part of our lives. There always seemed to be a shortage of something or the other... at times it was sugar, at other times it was gasoline...the list was endless. Lima felt like a war zone as car bombs became more and more frequent in the city. The situation was so bad, that one had been reduced to thanking God that the massacres at least, were still limited to the provinces. I still tried to go and visit San Francisco occasionally but going on my own to downtown Lima was a clear hazard that I had begun to avoid. The popular Peruvian panic and paranoia syndrome had finally got to me too.

Meanwhile, or rather alongside, Peru was heading towards an economic catastrophe at an alarming pace, thanks to President Alan Garcia’s insistence on following his bold and innovative heterodox economic plan, instead of the orthodox one, recommended by the IMF. Matters were not likely to improve either, because Garcia had since declared that Peru would not comply with any further international debt payments. In retaliation, the IMF had suspended all loans to the country. Peru seemed to be doomed to disaster, no matter which way one chose to look at it... and here I was, worried about the Fate of San Francisco.

To add insult to injury Claudio, my one and only bosom pal, was leaving the country. His eldest brother, who lived in the United States, had found him a job with one of the leading computer software companies and nothing I could say would deter him.

"But you have a great job with the Comercio here!" I protested heatedly, referring to the leading newspaper company that he worked for.

"Its not my *job* I'm worried about. It's the *country*! Look where it's going!"

"Maybe Vargas Llosa will get elected as president next year and things will improve...", I said feebly. The centre-right coalition group had chosen the author as their presidential candidate for the 1990 elections.

"Oh give me a break! Lima feels like the backyard of Hell! It's easy for *you* to talk! *You'll* only be here for one year more and then, when Sergio gets a new posting, you'll be gone...but me? I'm stuck here in this hellhole without a future! Can't you see that and give me some moral support for a change?" cried Claudio bitterly. I had never seen him so disillusioned or so serious.

"You really *do* mean to leave, don't you," I said tiredly. "I don't really blame you. Lima is a lost cause."

"Honey, you know you've always got my home and my mother to go to. We'll keep in touch by mail."

"I'm going to miss you like hell," I said, throwing my arms around him and hugging him tightly.

Furthermore, I had not visited San Francisco for ages. Then one day, when I was being driven to a tea party at the Foreign Ministry, upon Sergio's behest and against my will, I asked the chauffeur to drive past the church...and received the shock of my life. San Francisco had been painted a pale pink, in place of the customary yellow ochre. I blinked and shook my head, and looked again. It was definitely pink.

San Francisco was too virile, and somehow, too masculine a monument to be pink! White or rust, perhaps, if one wanted a change, but pink! It made the whole complex look like a brothel... *How could they do this?* I asked myself in silent agony... But then, after the cheap maroon carpet that the provincial had himself requested, what could one expect... So much for the World Heritage Monument, I thought bitterly, averting my face.

Perhaps all these details, added to the new low that my marital relations had hit since Sergio had thrown a surprise party on his birthday in February, without my knowledge or consent prevented me from noticing his steady loss of weight during the next few months. As impossible as it may sound in retrospect, Sergio

had lost ten kilos before I tentatively suggested that he consult a doctor.

In our marriage, given the difference in our ages, Sergio had always played the tune. He decided when the children had to visit the doctor he judged when I needed new clothes and even what we ate everyday. As for me, I had already rebelled in my own quiet way...so unconsciously, I tried to be as compliant as possible to maintain a peaceful, if remote relationship. In fact, we hardly saw each other at all.

So the illness, when it came, came stealthily...deceptively casual. It was as if Fate had tiptoed in, first unnoticed then unheeded, until it finally struck the sword. Sergio was discovered to be suffering from advanced intestinal cancer. Dr. Luis Alberto Rivero, the oncologist, assured me that there was nothing anyone could have done for Sergio...even if we had gone to him a few months earlier. The loss of weight, right from the first kilogram was the last stage of the disease. Sergio was admitted to hospital on June 30, 1989.

From that day onwards, I divided my time as best as I could between the hospital and the children. Sergio was being given intensive chemotherapy, but to little use, as he continued to lose weight and lost all his hair within two short weeks. Talking to him became an ordeal because he was apt to become querulous at the slightest provocation. He hated the nurses and doctors for pinching and poking him with tubes and injections, while he wept silent tears of pain and helpless frustration. And me...I watched him with the wretchedness of a dumb animal as he developed bed sores and shrivelled up into an old man, in less than three months, completely convinced that I and I alone was responsible for all his misfortunes. If I had been a better wife, none of this might ever have happened I told myself endlessly.

No matter what Dr. Rivero said to assure me to the contrary, I was consumed by guilt and self-condemnation. And, during the precious little time we spent alone (he was always surrounded by a flock of relatives and colleagues) we spoke of anything but the main thing. It was difficult to ask a dying man if he knew that he was dying.

"I don't regret anything, my love. Marriage is destiny," I whispered one day,

holding his hands to my tear splotted cheek, when Sergio asked me if I regretted having married him. Then he told me to go home and see to the children as I had spent the night at the hospital. It was always a wrench to leave his side and he usually had to insist a good deal before I left him.

Troubled, tormented and guilty.

Home wasn't any solace, but at least it had the advantage of privacy and a quiet cup of coffee. Mercifully the children were at kindergarten school because I just wasn't feeling up to facing their buoyancy that day. I left before their return. It wasn't the time. It wasn't the moment, but suddenly, half way to the hospital I felt I just *had* to go to San Francisco. I wanted to go and sit in the belfry to try and bring my life back into some perspective...any perspective. It was crumbling all too fast...too soon...as if my whole marriage had been but a mirage, instead of something living and tangible. I left the car in the Foreign Ministry car park and began to walk in the direction of the church. I wasn't as tired, as numb.

On an impulse, I changed direction and walked to the main plaza first... I hadn't stretched my legs for days. The main plaza looked like a dirty marketplace full of people and street vendors, but then, that was normal in downtown Lima. Slowly I turned the corner at Milagros street to go toward San Francisco. The hands of the old clock on the facade of the *Desamparados* Railway Station faithfully pointed to 3 o'clock of some other day, some other age. The hour, congealed forevermore.

Down the road, stood San Francisco, timeless and yellow...yellow? Some latent attack of intelligence must have persuaded the provincial that an edifice like it couldn't possibly be pink. One had to thank God for small mercies.

In the belfry, I lay down tiredly on the dusty, termite-ridden floorboards and observed the cobwebs, the decay and the gaping hole in the little domed ceiling. My tiny bubble of happiness at seeing San Francisco restored to yellow, burst into a thousand invisible fragments of pain. Pink or yellow, San Francisco was still falling to pieces. It was three years since I had set eyes upon it, and two, since I had decided to write that "best-seller" with such innocent zest. But the years had trickled past and I was no closer to helping San Francisco, even though it still stood upright...oblivious of my presence, ignorant of my concern. Until some day, the citizens of Peru considered it far past repair and pulled it down...that is, if a stray terrorist's bomb or an exceptionally violent earthquake didn't finish the job first.

Three years ago, paradoxically enough, Sergio had been my anchor in a deteriorating marriage. Without consciously realising the change of role, from husband, he had gone on to being the father I had almost never had. And today, he was on his deathbed. True, Dr. Rivero hadn't specifically said so, but then he didn't have to. Sergio looked worse by the hour. My secret dread was that he

would die while I was not there. I stood up hurriedly and zigzagged down the ladder, no closer to any solutions for my shattered life.

When I arrived at the hospital, Sergio was alone and asleep. The visitors usually came in the morning and in the evening. I sank down in the armchair beside his bed and closed my eyes. A doctor accompanied by a nurse walked in an instant later and took his pulse. They cast a quick furtive look at me but left without a word. I heard them having a whispered conference outside. A little later, the nurse came back in and motioned me to join them. They greeted my arrival with frozen silence...and I instinctively knew something was wrong. They told me that Sergio had died in his sleep. They thought it had happened sometime during the past thirty minutes because the chart showed a pulse recording before that. Sergio had slipped away from life quietly and with dignity. In control as always up to the very end.

For a moment the world turned black and then I felt nothing...just slightly chilled. I went back in and kissed his forehead, and then, with infinite care, so as not to hurt him, I sat down beside him and my mind began to wander. Images began to float before my eyes. I saw the night we had become engaged. After living outside India for so long, it seemed a little quaint to think that as a young woman of nineteen, it had taken an engagement ring before my mother had allowed me to stay out till midnight. That night Sergio had driven me to Rajpath Avenue and stopped the car in front of the majestic *Rashtrapati Bhavan*. He had kissed me and said that nothing and no one would ever separate us again.

Then I saw us on a horse drawn *tonga* carriage in Chandni-Chawk. I was eight months pregnant and laughing as Sergio held on to my swollen belly for dear life, convinced that I would roll off the precarious vehicle otherwise. I do not know how long I sat there, holding his hand, completely lost. I just remember that Nina, Sergio's brother's wife, came into the hospital room and took me out of there by the hand. I followed her unresistingly.

"Tell Alfredo that I want him to be cremated. He wanted it that way," I said in a normal voice.

"He will have to have a *velorio* first," she replied, referring to the Latin equivalent of a wake where the dead body is displayed in a funeral parlour...for the near and dear to come and pay their last respects, they said. In reality the people came for a last morbid glimpse at the departed and an inquisitive inspection of the bereaved.

"No," I said quietly. "No *velorio*." Tell him to take Sergio straight to the crematorium. Now."

"Today?!"

"Today," I replied, recalling the swiftness of my grandmother's funeral in New Delhi, a long, long time ago.

"I don't think that'll be possible, Noor. I think in Peru they have a standard rule

about autopsies. Why don't I take you home instead: let me handle the family my way," she said.

"Anything you say," I said, suddenly feeling weak. My legs didn't seem to want to carry my weight anymore.

"Just trust me," she said gently, giving me a kiss. In Sergio's family, she was the only one who had ever shown me any kindness in all these years, even though she never dared to do it too openly. One felt these things in one's bones.

At home, the children had already returned from their school and little Gia and Abril rushed up to ask, "Is it time to go to see Papa?" I usually took them to see Sergio on alternate afternoons.

"No my darlings, Papa sends you both lots of kisses and he asked me to stay home with you this afternoon, as he wanted to sleep." How easy it was to explain things to children.

I have no memory of how I spent the rest of the day. All I recall is that I told Elsa, our maid, not to pass me any phone calls. That night, Nina came over with a piece of cake. She said she would pick me up at nine sharp the next morning, to go to the crematorium. I refused the cake as widows in India fasted for twenty-four hours after the death of a husband. She pointed out that we were in Peru and Sergio had been a Peruvian and insisted that I ate it.

The next morning, at 9 am sharp, she came to pick me up.

"What about the children...?" I asked hesitantly.

"Have you told them...?"

I shook my head. "I didn't know how."

"Where are they?"

"I sent them to nursery school as usual... I didn't know what to say. How do you explain death to children of four and five?"

"It's probably the best thing you could have done. I'll tell your maid to take them to my house for the day when they return. We'll think of how best to break the news to them tomorrow."

We drove in silence to the funeral parlour of the *Fatima* Church where Sergio was to have a last memorial service before being taken to the crematorium. My mind simply felt empty and bereft of all thought. I didn't feel sad, I didn't feel pain... I just felt empty.

"Where is Sergio?" I asked, looking around vaguely as we entered the funeral parlour.

"Inside the coffin...", she replied.

From numbness I rushed to pain as tears welled up in my eyes and I felt my heart would burst right there. The last thing I had expected was to find Sergio shut up in a coffin. I felt he would suffocate in there.

"Open the coffin! He can't breathe in there!" I said in panic.



"Shh sweetheart. His soul isn't *in* that coffin anymore," she said softly, drawing my head to her bosom.

"I want to see him," I said in a strangled voice, my tears choking me.

"I don't think you should, honey. Remember him the way you knew him. Not as a body," she whispered, drawing me firmly towards a chair.

The place was packed with faces familiar and unfamiliar, all of who stared surreptitiously, when they thought I wouldn't notice. Suddenly, I felt overwhelmed with so many faces as I almost collapsed on the chair. Nina must have sensed my nervousness because she sat down beside me and held my hand tightly. And thus I sat there amidst all the faces, rendered speechless from the shock of knowing that Sergio was inside a coffin, my head covered with an old cream coloured Spanish mantilla...my wedding mantilla from the Catholic wedding ceremony... so very long ago.

Afterwards, I couldn't recall the journey to the crematorium. I didn't know how long we had stayed there. All I remember was asking to be taken back home in the end.

As I entered the house, dead tired, I somehow expected Sergio to be there, to say something to acknowledge my presence, but the house was in pin-drop silence. I sat down in the garden with a mixture of pain, relief and exhaustion. It was good to have escaped from all those voices...tearful voices, hypocritical voices, well meaning voices,...and more voices, all feigning the concern they didn't really feel. The whole ceremony had been a waste of time...dragging interminably on...when Sergio was irremediably gone. If only I could have burnt him on a decent funeral pyre and floated his ashes in the Ganges. They had promised me his ashes. I would keep them until I returned to India. Someday. It had been one of Sergio's most fervent wishes.

(Khedker, 1995, 173)

No matter what or how long or short the various stages of acculturation may be in every individual case, when the newcomer has reached the state of mind where he/she accepts that the idiosyncrasy and the customs in the C2 are indeed not good or bad but simply different, he/she has been successfully acculturated.

## CONCLUSION

Despite all the challenges of the cross-cultural experience for the L2 learner there is a lot to be said for the individual personality of each newcomer. Humans are inherently social beings and the desire to experience union with others, to belong, is rooted in the conditions that characterize the social and biological evolution of our species. We belong to various social groups, some involuntary such as family, race, or social class, and others voluntary to varying degrees such as political, religious, community, or interest groups. Adjusting to a new culture falls into this latter category as the newcomer gradually fulfills his natural need for self-confirmation through an affiliative behavior pattern, carving a new identity within the C2 social fabric.

Even with all the typical difficulties that many times and at many stages produce feelings of loneliness, alienation, loss of self-esteem and a decreased sense of direction or purpose in life within the C2 , the newcomer will eventually look back upon his/her cross-cultural experience as an enriching and challenging part of his/her life.

Many people make career changes as a result of extensive inter-cultural interaction and become more interested in international affairs. One of the reasons of such ultimately positive developments is that most people successfully overcome the barriers to adjustment and consequently develop a self-image of themselves as competent individuals who can understand the viewpoints of people from various parts of the world.

The point at which each newcomer begins to overcome difficulties so as to obtain the benefits of cross-cultural interaction differs from individual to individual. Nevertheless, ultimately, all newcomers want to do well: they are able to do so to their own personal level of satisfaction once they come to understand that in a C2 situation, when they encounter a difficulty, it is not the difficulty itself to which they are reacting but rather, to the contrast between their expectation and the problem which prevents the achievement of that expectation.

In my own personal challenge of acculturation as an L2 learner in Peru, in spite of all my tribulations and disappointments, being inherently a positive, pragmatic and strong-willed person by nature, I gathered the material for a novel as I struggled to adjust to and understand my hosts.

I was twenty-four years old at the time of my arrival to Lima, Peru and, in all honesty, I cannot say that after five years spent in that country I totally liked or understood my hosts or their culture. I can however affirm that given the cross-cultural input, I learned their patterns of thought and appropriate speech and was able to operate successfully among them at all levels. I can even say I really got to like some of them!!

Today, twelve years later, when I look back at that experience, on a subjective level I have all but forgotten the pain and the frustration. After all is said and done, on an objective level, I celebrate the fact that this experience led me to write a novel and discover the writer within me.

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