SOC 339: Cultural Anthropology

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Outlander Culture and Kids

Within the diverse community of Saint Louis University Madrid Campus (SLU), an American university located in the capital city of Spain, Madrid, there is a microcosm of intermingling cultures. This locality draws together persons from disparate countries of origin and puts them in contact with one another. Members of SLU’s diverse community are typically rather transient, some staying only one semester, others many years. However, one of the more stable communities that forms a subset of the SLU community is what I will call the “outlander community”. These are the permanent residents of Spain who were born in another country. As a student of SLU, I encountered this community at the university, but the bounds of this community stretch beyond SLU; many foreigners in Spain (or any country) can fit my definition without having contact with SLU. In order to understand the outlanders’ cultural identity, I interviewed eight English-speaking outlanders about their self-described cultural identity, perceptions of culture, and their experiences raising children in Spain within a bicultural household, i.e. a half-outlander, half-Spanish household. This project represents a step toward understanding an understudied population of foreigners. First, the proper terminology will be identified. Then cultural identity, and the individuals’ motivation for choosing this self-identification, will be explored. Finally, I’ll discuss culture and its generational impact. In all, a greater understanding of this cultural identity will be laid out.
Methods and Terminology

In my exploration of the outlander community, I seek to understand their own cultural self-identification, process of acculturation, and experiences raising multicultural children.

To collect data about this group, I conducted interviews with individuals who currently are permanent residents of Spain, were born in another country, and currently work for SLU as either faculty or staff (as of November 2014). Participants were comprised of 8 non-Spanish professionals and professors (2 men, 6 women; age range= 31-62 years old). In all, 7 participants were born in the USA; 1 participant was born in the UK. For each participant born outside of Spain, the mean duration of residence in Spain was 14.5 years (range= 7-35 years). The majority of participants were permanent residents of Spain, while two had gained Spanish citizenship. Only one of the 8 participants was not in a romantic relationship with a Spaniard. 75% were parents. During interviews, participants were asked open-ended questions related to the reasons they moved to Spain, cultural identity, Spanish and their native cultures, cross-cultural relationships, and child rearing. Each interview was audio recorded and participants have been anonymized. The outlanders’ comments, are laid out below with accompanying published data that affirms their observations.

What is meant by the term “outlander” and why use this word instead of another? When asked to describe their cultural identity, the American-born participants stated they were still “American”, though often a qualified (i.e. modified, altered, revised)
version of “American”. One stated that when visiting America, they perceive that they are “a little bit of an outsider”, while another noted that Americans “cannot conceive of my life here.” Given these statements and others, it is apparent that while the interviewees still retain their natal cultural identity (the culture identity they were born into), they are, at the same time, distinct from the average member of their natal culture. Some identified themselves as an “American Abroad”, an “American who likes the European lifestyle”, an “American guest in Spain”. No single participant claimed to have become Spanish. Five existing terms are possible monikers for this group (refugee, immigrant, outsider, expatriate, and “third culture” persons), but none fit this group with precision. “Refugee” denotes an individual fleeing sociopolitical unrest or conflict. None of the interviewees named these motivations for coming to Spain. “Immigrant” carries the connotation that the individual is coming for economic reason, looking for a better life. Three participants specifically mentioned that they left behind “secure job offers” in their natal country when moving to Spain; the motivation for their transition to Spain was not to increase quality of life. The term “outsider” implies a certain distance from the new culture, but the interviewees actually live and participate in the new culture. “Expatriate”, or expat, though technically an accurate term (according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, an expatriate is a person who has withdrawn himself from residence in or allegiance to his native country), was not favored by several interviewees. “I don’t think of myself as an expat, and I don’t like that term because expats only hang out around other expats,” explained an interviewee.

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1 Emphasis added.
2 Taken from the entry for “expat” and “expatriate”.
Another noted that their view of “expats” are people “on tour through a country, not permanent in that country,” describing the image of a “corporate guy bringing his wife along” for a “superficial, short term contact with the country.” “I’ve never used the word expatriate [to describe myself]. I don’t think I know what it means, it sounds kind of british-y to me,” responded one American. A fourth remarked that the word “doesn’t mean a lot to [her]” and that she runs across the word in internet ads for expatriate gatherings which she does not feel she would be interested in attending. Finally, though no interviewee mentioned the concept of a “Third Culture Kid” or in this instance, a “Third Culture Person”, the term does not fit:

“A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her development years outside the parents’ culture.\(^3\) The TCK frequently builds relationships to all the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p 13).

Though some aspects of this definition are applicable, the term as a whole is not fitting. Consequently, none of the existing terminology to describe foreigners completely encapsulates my desired meaning. Therefore, I have chosen to employ the term “outlander” to describe these persons as, to my knowledge, it does not contain particular connotations -- positive or negative -- in this context. An outlander shall be

\(^3\) Emphasis added.
defined as a person who has left their “natal country” and resides in a “new country” of their own free will on a permanent basis. For clarity, the term “natal country” will be used to replace words such as homeland; as participants were given opportunity to express their current conception of “home,” I do not want to use word “homeland” and obfuscate this meaning.

Outlander self-identified Culture

The outlanders’ cultural self-identification varied from a “chameleonic” identity and “professional foreigner” (i.e. able to adapt to cultures and transform oneself) to “neither fully American nor fully Spanish”, to “American absolutely, definitely.” This spectrum of responses may be attributed to each outlander’s different intercultural strategies. There are two main aspects (or “issues” - see Fig. 1) that affect acculturation, the process that takes place when two cultures come into contact and which brings cultural changes to both groups (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936, pp. 145-146; Berry, 2001, p 616): “(1) the degree of actual contact and the resultant participation of each group with the other, and (2) the degree of cultural maintenance manifested by each group” (Berry, 2001, pp. 616-617). That is to say, how much the outlander and the new culture mingle and how much the outlander maintains their natal culture. Together, these two aspects form an individual’s “intercultural strategy.” In life, differing strategies result in differing internal cultural identities (Berry, 2011, p. 616). So, although outlanders’ individual factors such as total time in Spain, language proficiency, and social circles each affect their perceived cultural identity, Berry (2001) argues that is because each factor affects either
issue (1) or issue (2), the factors are simply byproducts of the individual’s intercultural strategy.

Fig. 1. Varieties of intercultural strategies in immigrant groups and in the receiving society. “Fig. 1”, taken from Berry (2001) page 618, shows the intercultural strategies of both the “immigrant groups” (in this paper, outlanders) and the larger society (Spain). By extrapolation, we could state that outlanders who maintain that their Natal Identity has not changed would fall into the stronger “Maintenance of Heritage Culture (Natal Culture) and Identity” side of the spectrum. When coupled with strong relationships and Spanish social circles (as was described by each interviewee), these respondents could be said to have an “integration” intercultural strategy. The individual who stated they have a chameleonic identity would land closer to “assimilation”. Outlanders’ intercultural strategies impact their cultural identity.
The respondents who stated that they are an “American who likes the European lifestyle. I don’t consider myself European; I’m very culturally American. But, the way I choose to live my life is on a more European influence. I take parts of each, but at the core, I am American,” may have discovered or unconsciously identified the fact that it is possible to “increase their identification with the new culture without necessarily losing their [Natal Cultural Identity]” (Berry, 1980, 1995; LaFromboise et al., 1993; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000 as cited in Stroink & Lalonde, 2009, p.47). These outlanders are adding cultural aspects from Spain or the “European lifestyle” without losing any of their American cultural identity, and they reflect that in how they express their cultural identity.

Identity statements such as “I know I’m not American in a lot of ways, and I know I’m not Spanish. I see myself as a kind of hybrid,” and other analogous sentiments of not being fully American or Spanish encapsulate the key aspect of acculturation; that acculturation by very nature brings cultural changes to both the Natal Culture and the New Culture. Through contact, each culture is changed -- though predominantly and most visibly, the non-dominant culture (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936, pp. 145-146; Berry, 2001, p 616). This gradual cultural morphing was summed up by one American, “With each passing year, [America] feels less and less like [home].” Outlanders undergo cultural change.

Family and Culture
“I think family is a really important part of identity; it is hard to separate out family from culture,” an outlander commented. Indeed, we originally learn our Natal Culture from family through enculturation and pass culture on to the next generation through the same process. Children learn culture through enculturation, a conscious and subconscious gleaning of culture from their environment. Parents impart culture as they “indirectly model and reinforce ethnic [cultural] behaviors in addition to directly teaching their children about the traditions, beliefs, and values associated with their cultural background” (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002, p. 339).

Each outlander I interviewed comprised part of a bicultural household where the partners (or housemates in one case) were Spanish. When the six parents were asked about how they expressly introduced their language and culture to their children, they brought up such methods as singing songs in English, introducing the Natal Culture’s foods and holidays, sending the children to bilingual schools and visiting the Natal Country frequently. One mother said, “of course I spoke English with my children; my emotions are rooted in that language. It was natural.” Two mentioned their parenting advice was from American sources (family, own childhood experience, and guide books). The outlander parents, both intentionally and through interaction, imbue their children with the outlander culture. However, the children are growing up in a bicultural, bilingual home in Spain; the second-generation kids “are enculturated not only by their families but also by … the dominant cultural group” (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002, p. 345). In fact, the children will enculturate in Spanish society much
more quickly than the outlander parent themself (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002, p.340).

The outlanders expressed a common feeling that their children do indeed display a mix of cultures. One mother reported that her daughter once remarked, “Asking which language or culture I prefer is like asking a parent which child they prefer,” expressing the centrality of each to her identity and being. Stroink & Lalonde (2009) affirm that children of foreigners are often “enculturated within two cultural frameworks simultaneously” (p. 45). This simultaneous synchronization leads to the inextricable, entwined nature of culture described in the interview. One mother described with admiration this unique dual-cultured situation her children experience; “I cannot do what they do. I would love to be able to see the world as my kids do; they have known two cultures from the beginning- I grew up in one and am now experiencing another.” The enculturation of a unique mix of cultures that living in a dual-culture house leads to is a unique heritage passed from the outlander parents to their children.

Having moved to Madrid 15 months ago, I, as an American, can see how my own culture has been modified, and I was curious how those who have lived here much longer than I (and with the intention of permanence) view their own culture. The range of responses was slightly surprising, but given my new understanding of intercultural strategies as described above, I can better grasp the likely causes of this disparity of cultural labels. Pushing this concept of self-conceived cultural identity further, I was curious how the parents’ cultures were transferred to the next generation. Clearly, further areas of study could include repeating the same lines of inquiry with a larger
sample group to better define individuals fitting the “outlander” label, interviewing the second-generation directly (and at different ages) to learn first-hand what their experiences have been and how that has shaped their identity, and exploring the characteristics of the non-outlander spouses to discern how their cultural identity changes. The data I collected through interviews has many additional themes to be explored that were as such untouched in this paper.

Through the process of Ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, I was able to gain insight into the range of cultural sentiments and self-identification in the outlander community, and understand how they impart this culture to their children. No previously coined term adequately described this community, primarily due to a lack of precision, so the word “outlander” was utilized. The reader will, ideally, have a new and deeper understanding of foreigners living permanently outside of their native land. Definition, depiction, and delineation of this group will hopefully aid others in describing their own cultural identity and in identifying others who inhabit this cultural definition: outlanders.
References


