

# THINKING AND RETHINKING ABOUT MIGRATIONS: SOME CROSS-CULTURAL ASPECTS

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**ABSTRACT:** This study makes a critical analysis of migration and immigration, especially regarding the behavior of people who intend to study abroad. Researchers like Kim (2003), Bennett (2008) and Hall (1977), among others, have observed the processes of migration and immigration, most notably, of people who go abroad in an attempt to learn languages or specialize in their respective areas. For this investigation, we introduce some topics such as cultural issues that will guide the theme addressed. The formulation of the problem discusses what should be the attitude of those who deal with intercultural conflicts in Brazil or abroad. Methodologically, we started from the material analysis and interviews of migrants and immigrants. As theoretical tools we used the *U- Curve* and *W -Curve Models*, and others to analyze the communication on the challenges of life to study and/or work abroad. Initial results showed that the models explain the behavioral movement investigated, although there is recognition that more accuracy is required for the improvement of such theories. We also consider that for a peaceful relationship among nations, we need an Education that values respect concerning diversity.

**Key words:** Migration and immigration; Intercultural aspects of communication; Theoretical models of analysis; Education; Diversity.

## PENSANDO E REPENSANDO ACERCA DAS MIGRAÇÕES: ALGUNS ASPECTOS INTERCULTURAIS

**RESUMO:** O presente estudo faz uma análise crítica acerca das migrações e imigrações, especialmente, no tocante ao comportamento de pessoas que se propõem a estudar no exterior. Pesquisadores como Kim (2003), Bennet (2008) e Hall (1977), dentre outros, têm observado os processos de migrações e imigrações, mais notadamente, de pessoas que vão para o exterior na intenção de aprender línguas ou especializar-se em suas respectivas áreas. Para esta investigação, apresentamos alguns tópicos como as questões culturais que nortearão o tema abordado. A formulação do problema discute qual deve ser a postura de quem lida com os conflitos interculturais no exterior ou no Brasil. Metodologicamente, partiu-se da análise de material como

as entrevistas de migrantes e imigrantes e do instrumental teórico como os modelos conhecidos como *U-Curve* e *W-Curve*, além de outros empregados para analisar a comunicação nos desafios de viver para estudar e/ou trabalhar no exterior. Os resultados iniciais apontaram que os modelos explicam o movimento comportamental dos investigados, embora haja o reconhecimento de que mais acuidade seja necessária para o aprimoramento das teorias. Considera-se, ainda, que para um relacionamento pacífico entre os povos, exige-se uma educação que valorize o respeito na conduta frente as diversidades.

**Palavras-chave:** Migrações e imigrações; Aspectos interculturais na comunicação; Modelos teóricos de análise; Educação; Diversidade.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays people travel for very many different reasons. In the past, adventurers from countries that had technology enough to build means of transportations traveled around (what they considered) the world. They looked for other lands to find natural and material resources to dominate those places in all senses possible. However, in the twentieth century the world has seen the people from the conquered continents like Africa, Asia and Latin America going to North America or Europe to search for better conditions of survival. They try to conquer part of what was taken from them in the past.

According to Judith N. Martin & Thomas K. Nakayama (2010, p. 308) we can understand International Migration today as the following:

- 1) International migration is the exception, not the rule. Most people do not want to move away from family and friends and most governments try to regulate border crossings.
- 2) International immigration is at an all-time high and likely to increase due to persistent demographic and economic inequalities—191 million migrants in 2005.
- 3) Migration generally flows from developing countries—about equally to other developing countries and more industrialized countries.
- 4) There are increasing numbers of women who migrate; partly due to entry of women into the labor force; also women are preferred by the host countries as house workers, concubines, or prostitutes.

- 5) Migration is increasingly politicized. Migrants can pose sensitive political issues (jobs, language, legality) and lead to the rise of anti-immigrant feelings.
- 6) Migration is increasingly commodified, reminiscent of the colonial period when large numbers of slaves or immigrants were brought by the colonists to provide labor for their plantations. Today, agencies bring women and children from abroad to serve their new masters as servants and concubines; also sweatshops in New York and Los Angeles employ illegal immigrants with few human rights.

Source: Adapted from M. Tehranian, "Cultural Security and Global Governance: International Migration and Negotiations of Identity." In J. Friedman and S. Randeria (Eds.), *Worlds on the Move: Globalization, Migration and Cultural Security* (pp. 3–22). (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004) and P. Martin and G. Zürcher (2008) "Managing Migration: The Global Challenge," *Population Bulletin*, 63(1): 1–18.

Adjustment in another country is a long process, especially linguistically, culturally speaking. Besides gaining better conditions of living, the newcomers look for physical and psychological health. Some comfort to live integrally in the new culture is another point. However, for Ward Bochner & Furnham (2001), the acquisition of skills is more important than psychological well-being, like acquiring culture competence, for instance.

In order to understand the transitions that happen when a person or a group moves from one place to another is necessary to examine the context where the studied people lived. As a teacher, I need to learn more about other people from different cultures to develop skills to build a peaceful bridge between their culture and ours in Brazil.

I agree with Ladson-Billings's essay (1995, p. 478) when it states that a culturally responsible teacher must believe in certain criteria for effective teaching:

- i) Believe all the students are capable of academic success;
- ii) See their pedagogy as art: unpredicable, always in the process of becoming;
- iii) See themselves as a member of the community;
- iv) See teaching as a way to give back to the community;
- v) Pull knowledge out.

Our intention is to reflect critically about some aspects of cross-cultural transitions through migrations, especially about people who migrate to study abroad. Thus, in this article the following topics are discussed: a) The problem formulation; b) The methodology; c) the U-Curve Model and The W-Curve Model; d) Culture Shock; e) Culture Shock and Adaptation; f) Cultural Competences; g) Some characteristics of people from Low and High Contexts; h) Beyond Geography; i) Results; j) References.

## 1.2 PROBLEM FORMULATION

According to the communication scholar Kim (2003), communication in the adaptation process results from stress, adjustment and growth because adaptation happens through communication. Kim (2003) has designed models to study the situation of the migrants in their experiences of moving from one culture to another. Some of the models are: i) the Integrative Model; ii) The *U-Curve* Model; iii) The *W-Curve* Model; iv) *The Phenomenological* Model; v) *Anxiety and Uncertainty Management* Model. Professor Stephen Holland-Wempe, ESL specialist at the University of Missouri – Kansas City in 2013, introduced me to these models.

Since then I have investigated some of my co-workers', students', friends' reactions and my own in cross-cultural interactions. By using two of the models mentioned above, I formulated the following question: how have we dealt with conflicts alongside one another when abroad or here in Brazil?

## 2 METHODOLOGY

Methodologically I relied on the analysis of some material published by scholars versed on Cross-cultural and Intercultural Communication. The classes conducted by the ESL specialist Stephen Holland-Wempe were the first step of this research. Interviews with Brazilian short-term visitors from the UTFPR-AP to other countries have also been studied. The researches about short-term-migrants are new at UTFPR-AP (Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná-

Câmpus Apucarana). In 2012 our University received the first exchange students from Angola (Africa) to study and do research. In the year 2013, we held an event to discuss and research about Intercontinental Education. We received one teacher from Angola to give a lecture about the system of Education in High School in Angola. A teacher from the University of Missouri also came to talk about Education in the United States. She taught how to hold a Science Fair. In 2014, the event grew up and we had six different professors to talk about Intercontinental Education. Now, in 2015 we have a student from Gana (Africa) studying and researching in the Engineering area.

My main goal in this study is to analyze how much of the theoretical models cited above could support the behavior of the people who traveled abroad as exchange students as well as the dynamics of their intercultural experiences. One of the highlights of this study was the culture shock. According to Church (1982, p. 540-541) *the majority of studies of educational exchange make little or no reference to the culture shock concept.*

### 3 THE U-CURVE AND W-CURVE MODEL

The *U-Curve and W-Curve*, theoretical models developed by Kim (2003) based on the studies of Sverre Lysgaar describes the manner several people feel while trying to adapt to a new environment. The studies about cross-cultural adjustment conducted by Lysgaard (1955) observed how the immigrants, especially students, behaved in a strange culture for them. In the *U-Curve Model* the feelings can be described as the letter U. Excitement, anticipation and even happiness at first on the top of the curve, the *honeymoon* of the moment, followed by shock, insecurity and fear as if it were the line of the letter U going down. After the period of adaptation, the immigrant would lead his/her feelings to the top again to complete the letter U.

Although this model has been criticized because it still needs more accurate, empirical investigation, many researchers have used this tool. Who uses this instrument knows that every migrant does not feel exactly the way described in the model. The feeling of excitement comes to most people who move looking for a dream come true. A sense of disorientation also shakes a migrant a moment or another.

I decided to use this model because as a short-time migrant it applies to me. I experienced the steps mentioned above. In 2013, I learned I had been approved to take part on a program for ESL instructors of English in the United States of America. The selection had been strict. I had done well in all the phases. The contest would select the Brazilian teachers of Public Schools to take a course of 8 weeks in an American University. My sensation was of victory because my score on the tests to prove my proficiency in English had been high. The project I sent to the Ministry of Education in Brasilia (capital city of Brazil) had also been accepted. I received the support of the University where I work to study abroad. Packing was the easiest and most exciting part of the cross-cultural transition.

### 3.1 CULTURE SHOCK

Shock is very common to almost all the people who experience a discomfort in cross-cultural boundaries. Apprehension invades the person who has to face an unfamiliar environment. If someone tries to learn and understand what the new culture has to offer, some involvement is necessary. Although becoming involved has a price to pay, avoiding contact can mean a significant loss in the learning-growing process. If it is hard to assimilate most aspects of a different culture, some of them are vital for a healthy survival.

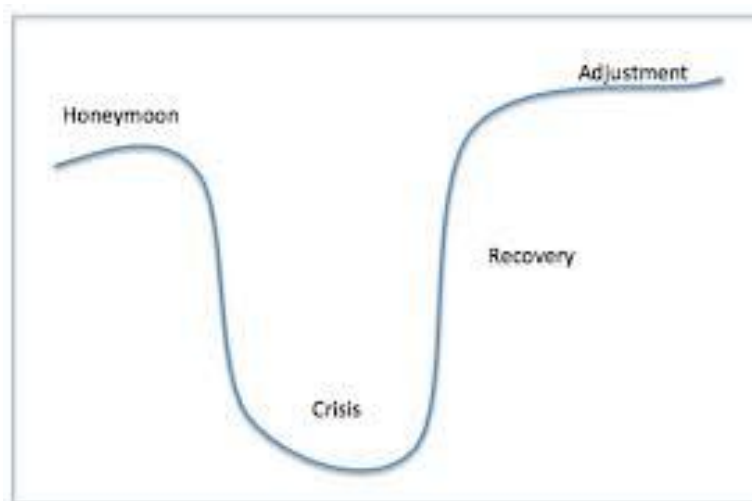
For me the shock started as soon as I arrived at the airport in Dallas, Texas- USA. I had forgotten the officers had that hostile look. I forgot they did not share my feelings of excitement and victory. The gloomy sky made my arrival uncomfortable. Outside, flurries were falling down. That meant it would snow in a few days. When I left São Paulo, the temperature was 30 degrees Celsius. The shock was also thermal.

I felt very tired on the first day at the University because I had not slept well. Time zone difference had been ruthless. Finding myself on Campus, making documents to circulate in the whole area of the UMKC made me feel dizzy. At the end of the week, I was at the bottom of my *U-Curve* or the phase of *crisis*.

In the second week, the University staff helped in everything to make my stay the nicest possible. What Slavin & Kriegman (1992) stated applied to me because to adapt to a given cultural environment realm a person has to go through communication. Thus, the talking time

with my hosts, the effort my American professors and the administrative personnel made to provide a very productive work and studies were a powerful instrument to the adaptation I needed. After all, I had only eight weeks to do my research and one had already gone by.

The adjustment period enlarged my mind so I reacted more positively towards the challenges I faced. It is what the theory defines as the *recovery* moment. For the *U-Curve* model, the culture shock I experienced was not only a part of the process of learning new methods of teaching, but especially new methods of living. It was when I felt *adjusted* to the situation.



**Figure 1 - The U- Curve**

Onediscoveryproject.wordpress.com

Fonte: [https://www.google.com.br/search?q=Images+of+the+U+Curve+model+and+W+curve+model&biw=1920&bih=935&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0CDcQ7AlqFQoTCMOJ\\_qnUlsYCFQvUgAod\\_u4AjQ&dpr=1](https://www.google.com.br/search?q=Images+of+the+U+Curve+model+and+W+curve+model&biw=1920&bih=935&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0CDcQ7AlqFQoTCMOJ_qnUlsYCFQvUgAod_u4AjQ&dpr=1)

### 3.2 THE W- CURVE MODEL

This model describes the feelings as follows: excitement, apprehension, a sense of victory in the beginning, a feeling of strangeness or even rejection later on. After that, the sensation of adjustment comes, then the period of adaptation brings some hardships and accommodation comes along with some comfort. Two of my students who went to US American Universities for their undergraduate studies reported they had behaved as described in the W-CURVE model. They told me they were afraid of not passing in the TOEFL exam, which is hard for Brazilian students.

Nevertheless, they kept their fingers crossed to get the necessary score to be accepted at the Universities they had dreamed. They succeeded in all the phases. Leaving for the USA was a dream come true. They hugged everyone goodbye with tears of happiness.

The arrival in US American land was a shock for them because there was no one at the airport to wait for them. They felt lonely and lost. Looking for a taxi to go to the host house was their first learning. Snow was as beautiful as they had seen in movies, but it was colder than they had ever imagined. In Brazil, their mother or father used to drive them to school. In the USA, they were supposed to find their way around.

Fixing breakfast by themselves was another shock. At home their mother would place their first meal on the table every morning. Taking buses to arrive on time for the first class was a challenge. They also realized the score in the TOEFL test did not mean they would understand everything the professors taught in the University subjects.

### 3.3 CULTURE SHOCK AND ADAPTATION

Both students counted on the housing coordinator and the psychologist of the Campus to help them deal with the feelings they considered to be of defeat. In the third month at the University, they felt more adapted to what seemed to be an impediment to survival. With time, the days went on more comfortably. As Kim (2005) defends, cultural adaptation is the long-term process of adjusting to and finally feeling comfortable in a new environment. At first, the host culture seemed to be hostile for the two students. With a mature approach provided by the assistance of the school staff, they thought the environment became friendly.

After this period, the young migrants did not call home in Brazil so very often. They took advantage of the cultural programs offered by the Institutions linked to the University. Movies, plays of theater, live concerts and other kinds of fun were helpful tools in their daily life in the United States. They overcame the stage of functional fitness in the host country. When they hardly ever called home, they stated they were having the time of their lives.

A year and a half later, it was the end of their stay abroad. They confessed they felt miserable with the idea of coming back to their home country. It had been better than they



expected. Paking, saying goodbye to all the people they met and lived with in the US, many coming from different cultures, brought sadness again. Then the reentry in Brazil was another going to the bottom of the second curve of the W.

The two students arrived in Brazil in the month of May. The family and many friends at the airport welcomed cheerfully. The weather was warm. No police officers with unfriendly look all over. The baggage came full of experiences to share, stories to tell and pictures to show. How nice the feeling of being at home sweet home. The curve of the W was going up again.

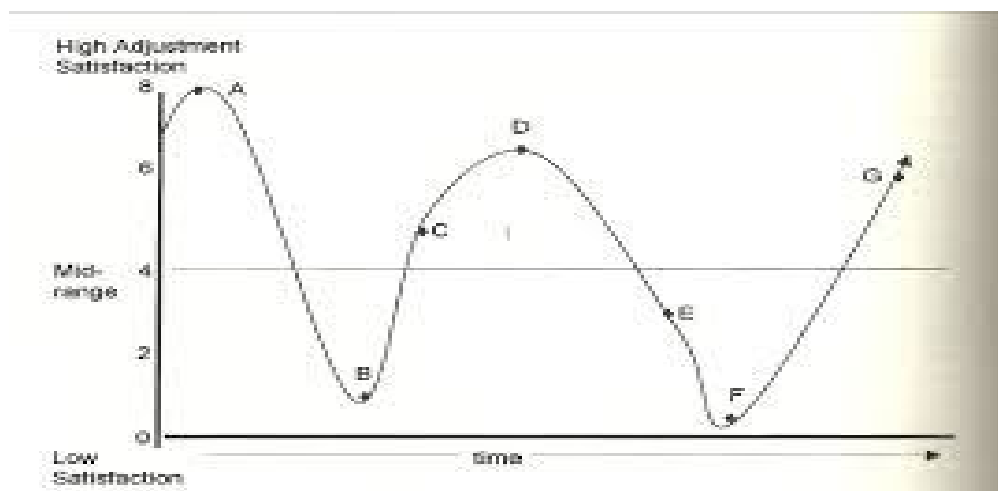


Figure 2 - The W-Curve

Soujorningelts.wordpress.com

Fonte: [https://www.google.com.br/search?q=Images+of+the+U+Curve+model+and+W+curve+model&biw=1920&bih=935&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0CDcQ7AlqFQoTCMOJ\\_qnUlsYCFQvUgAod\\_u4AjQ&dpr=1](https://www.google.com.br/search?q=Images+of+the+U+Curve+model+and+W+curve+model&biw=1920&bih=935&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0CDcQ7AlqFQoTCMOJ_qnUlsYCFQvUgAod_u4AjQ&dpr=1)

#### 4 CULTURAL COMPETENCES

Along the timeline, the word culture has been perceived in many different ways. The etymonline dictionary brings the following information: mid-15c. the tilling of land, from Middle French culture and directly from Latin culture a cultivating, agriculture, figuratively: care, culture, an honoring, from past participle stem of colere, tend, guard, cultivate, till. The figurative

sense of cultivation through education is first attested c. 1500. Meaning the intellectual side of civilization is from 1805; that of collective customs and achievements of a people is from 1867.

Wen Shu Lee (2002, p. 229-230) describes six different uses of the term culture:

1. Culture= unique human efforts (as different from nature and biology). For example, *Culture is the bulwark against the ravages of nature.*

2. Culture= refinement, mannerism (as different from things that are crude, vulgar, and unrefined). For example, *look at the way in which he chows down his food. He has no culture at all.*

3. Culture= civilization (as different from backward barbaric people). For example, *in countries where darkness reigns and people are wanting in culture, it is our mandate to civilize and Christianize those poor souls.*

4. Culture= shared language, beliefs, values (as different from language beliefs and values that are not shared; dissenting voices; and voices of the “other”). For example, *we come from the same culture, we speak the same language, and we share the same tradition.*

5. Culture= dominant or hegemonic culture (as different from marginal cultures). For example, *it is the culture of the ruling class that determines what is moral and what is deviant.* [This definition is a more charged version of definitions 2, 3, and 4 through the addition of power consciousness.]

6. Culture= the shifting tensions between the shared and the unshared (as different from shared or unshared things). For example, *American culture has changed from master/slave, to white only/black only, to antiwar and black power, to affirmative action/multiculturalism and political correctness, to transnational capital and anti-sweatshop campaigns.*

Source: From Collier, Hegde, Lee, Nakayama, and Yep, “Dialogue on the Edges: Ferment in Communication and Culture.” In M. J. Collier et al. (Eds.), *Transforming Communication about Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), pp. 229–230.

Cultural competence means to adopt different and adequate behaviors, analyzing the environment with common sense to produce a better outcome. Therefore, fluent communication is not the same as culture competence.

For Robert Moore (1998), an integral part of any culture is its language. A student of the English Language may know a great deal of vocabulary, grammar, structure, even some aspects of the U S American and English Literature, but these skills do not provide an easier period of adjustment in a new culture. Bennett (2008, p. 17) postulates that *a fluent foreign language speaker without intercultural competence may be a fluent fool who knows how to unknowingly insult host nationals using perfect vocabulary and grammar.*

I witnessed a situation in which Bennett (2008) statement fits well. One of my fellow workers, an English instructor in Brazil, stayed in an US American house where the couple who hosted him had three children. All of them lived in different cities in the United States. In his third week in the house, the youngest daughter of the couple came to visit them to meet the short-term migrant from Brazil. When the doorbell rang, my fellow worker rushed to open the door to show he was glad to help with the housework. Before the young woman came in to shake his hand, he embraced her warmly as if he was hugging his biological sister.

Besides hugging, he kissed her on both cheeks. It was an inappropriate behavior. People from Low Context Culture, according to Hall (1977), do not touch one another so warmly the first time they meet. It is considered invasive and unpleasant.

Another situation that shows lack of Cultural Competence was one lived by an instructor in Brazil who went to the United States to take a course in English as well as in his specific area.

He told me he felt all those feelings we have analyzed before, but he mentioned one that the other people interviewed did not comment about: marginalization. He said the sensation of being set aside hurt him. As a grown up he told he did not imagine he would feel like that. In his home country he belongs to the so-called privileged social class. White skinned, economically and emotionally stable, healthy, always surrounded by friends, but in the United States, he felt miserable.

Judith N. Martin & Thomas K. Nakayama (2010) point that marginalization happens when the host country does not show interest in the migrant's culture or the migrant does not feel tied with the new culture. For the instructor who was feeling marginalized, the sensation came when he told funny jokes in English but his classmates or teachers did not laugh at all. In his mother language, that is Portuguese, he is very good at puns. However, for a person or a group to

understand a joke or a pun it is necessary more than a good translation. Everyone needs to have some understanding of that particular culture to perceive the fun of playing upon words.

In Bergson's (2002, p. 2) view *you would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt isolated from others. Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo [...] our laughter is always the laughter of a group.* So, humor and wit can be negatively seen if they are not properly used.

Judith N. Martin & Thomas K. Nakayama (2010, p. 318) assert that people who feel marginalized *cannot find a local community of people with whom to share their native culture and language, nor can they participate in U.S. culture as a result of linguistic, cultural, and sometimes prejudicial barriers.* At the end of our conversation, he said the teachers made an effort to laugh and make him feel more integrated in the group. However, he was isolating himself since he did not take enough time to apprehend more elements of the new culture. Without the proper guidance before leaving Brazil, he did not succeed at his jokes. Good & Jones (2004) defined a way to describe cultural competences for a peaceful coexistence among people from different cultures:

The capacity of an organization and its personnel to communicate effectively, and convey information in a manner that is easily understood by diverse audiences including persons of limited English proficiency, those who have low literacy skills or are not literate, and individuals with disabilities.

Developed by Tawara D. Goode and Wendy Jones, 8/00, Revised 8/03, 6/06.

Culture competences demand from the speakers of the target language what to expect from their hosts. The students of the English Language must develop a perception that enables them to predict how to behave in a form to reduce embarrassment. Thus, learning cultural variations is very helpful.

#### 4.1 SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE FROM LOW AND HIGH CONTEXT

Hall (1977) affirms that people from Low-context cultures generally come from North America, Western Europe. They tend to be more individualistic, more logic and react more

practically. They prefer directness. They are action oriented. Towards speaking, they go straight to the point. Linguistically they are precise and concise. They perceive the world by using facts, not intuition. That is why the American young woman found my co-worker's warm reception strange and inappropriate. It was an invasion for her.

People who come from High context cultures like Asia, Africa and Latin America are collectivist, like to live in groups. Linguistically, they do not go straight to the point. They base many aspects of their lives on feelings. They use gestures, value facial expressions and the tone of voice. They show affection in their relationships. I endorse this viewpoint. For my co-worker, invading the bubble the American woman built around her was natural. In his opinion, at the time he lived in her parents's house they were like siblings.

## 6 BEYOND GEOGRAPHY

Cultural communication is a tool to build links among speakers, so all discourses are social events. Matoré (1968) affirms that *a language reflects a society*. The co-cultural communication theory (Orbe, 1998) corroborates this idea when states that the language is the instrument the groups of people use to impose their power. To exemplify I will register an interaction I had when I was already adapted to my host city – Kansas City- MO. Having breakfast on my hosts' favorite café, he introduced me to a white, heterosexual, well-off man. When he learned that I belonged to a group of Brazilian instructors of English who had come to the United States to study new methodologies of teaching and new technologies in the classroom, he showed approval on our struggle.

He told me he had a Brazilian friend who played the drums in the same church he used to attend the services. I asked whether he had been born and raised in KC. He answered he was born in a very small, historically marginal town of Texas. He and his eleven siblings grew up in poverty. He confessed to live revolted because his parents could not afford to pay for a good school for their children. Going through the pathways of anger to self-pity to awareness of the oppression that he and his family suffered, they eventually moved to Austin - Texas. In the new,

bigger city, they found jobs whose salaries allowed them to climb up the steps of a better lifestyle.

He was euphoric at the sight of the new land. Warm friends and pretty girlfriends would be around. The daydreams of the big city filled his heart with hope and joy. Yet deception came sooner than expected. After years of hard work, he noticed he did not know poverty was so negatively seen by society. People laughed at the way he dressed and spoke. The new group he lived with mocked at the accent and the vocabulary of the rural areas. Only the new financial conditions did not bring the kind of *status* he was expecting. His blue eyes, blond man traits and US American citizenship were not enough to integrate him into the new society. Geographic changes did not transform his framed identity, the labels that the circumstances had tagged. As a migrant, he said he experienced a long period in the bottom of the *U-Curve*.

With time, he stopped blaming whom he considered the most privileged ones and started to learn more cultural communication, independently on his language accent.

The perception of the cultural components in the histories of the places the migrants choose to go is essential to apprehend the ideas shaped by individuals or by wider groups. Understanding, writing and speaking a language go beyond geographic lines, beyond dominating skills.

## 7 RESULTS

It is not possible to have results for this study that has just begun and which it is still under examination. However, reiterating Kim (2003), I point that her theoretical models were supported by this investigation. As noted previously, several researchers have questioned the accuracy of the models used as parameter for this study, but they did play an important role in the analysis of the behavior of the people who told us their stories. They illustrate why the adjustments reported exhibit the U and W-Curve pattern although there is not a perfect model yet. I am aware that systematic tests will improve and enrich the theoretical models in the near future. Other results may answer the prior question: how to deal with conflicts in foreign environments? Collaborative

and cooperative attitudes towards migrants create a productive environment that can lead to a respectful relationship concerning diversity.

## CONCLUSION

Education should be a right for everyone independently on his or her origin. The positive results of an effective Education will be achieved with mind opening experiences. This study showed that dealing with conflicts in social interactions, chiefly among migrants who face unpredictable problems in a foreign territory, is a challenging battle. Soon, there will be studies about the immigrants who have come from the East looking for survival in Europe. The European countries are not willing to receive them. Brazil's government has allowed Haitians to come, but because of economic, cultural issues, some Brazilian people have discriminated against the immigrants from Haity. I definitely understand that cultural differences are important topics the world has to discuss if we all intend to interact peacefully.

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