



# ***THE IMPACT OF FULBRIGHT'S EXPERIENCE ON PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND PERSONAL LIFE***

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**I**<sup>1</sup> was given the extraordinary opportunity as SUSI (*The Study of the U.S. Institutes for Scholars SUSIs*) on U.S. Culture and Society 2014 Fulbright grantee to spend six weeks as a visiting scholar at New York University - Multinational Institute of American Studies.

The SUSI included intensive post-graduate level academic programs with integrated study tours, whose purpose was to provide foreign university faculty (in

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<sup>1</sup> **BIO NOTE** - Margarida Pocinho, Professor at the University of Madeira, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts and Humanities; attended international advanced courses in music therapy at Université Paris V and U.S. culture and society as Fulbright Fellow at New York University, USA. She is a collaborator researcher at the Institute of Cognitive Psychology at the University of Coimbra (Portugal), evaluator of project fellowships – FCT and H2020; 4 books and many papers in psychology and education; has supervised 57 M.A. and 15 Ph.D. dissertations. She is member of General Council of the University of Madeira. She was Visiting Professor at University of Zielona Góra, Poland, and member of its Research Centre, the Connectivity Centre. Currently, she is conducting research in Psychology of Tourism with a Project funding by ARDITI "Madeira tourist wellbeing" with the partnership of CIEO (Research Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics) of University of Algarve, where she is an integrated researcher. She is also conducting research in the field of Multiculturalism, Positive Psychology and Creativity.



my case the University of Madeira, Portugal) and other scholars the opportunity to deepen our understanding of U.S. society, culture, values, and institutions. The Institute on U.S. Culture and Society provided me with a deeper understanding of U.S.

This Fulbright experience had a great impact on my professional career and personal life. I can say that this was the most important and significant experience in all my life. I really advise all readers to apply for a Fulbright scholarship. Since 2014, I always share the advantages of being a Fulbrighter, not only with my Portuguese colleagues but also with my research partners abroad.

In fact, my Fulbright experience had an institutional impact because it was extremely stimulated both by the relevance of how my university might approach the study of U.S., as well as to enhance my *curriculum*, research and publications about the U.S.; and the opportunity to engage in an intensive collaboration with an outstanding group of colleagues.

The intellectual and personal atmosphere was excellent, mainly because of the great diversity in terms of nationalities, academic backgrounds, and research interests. I really strengthen my curricula and enhanced the quality of teaching about the United States, not only in my Faculty (Arts and Humanities) but in all University of Madeira.

Professionally speaking, I motivated my colleagues to introduce aspects of U.S. studies into their *curricula*. I develop new courses in Culture and Society subject. I motivated all staff (professors and students) to learn about American educational philosophies, explore new teaching methods and research. It is a frequent topic in my workplace: the mobility of professors and students U.S./Portugal.

I am engaged to get collaboration from U.S. Universities to share courses and research. In the psychology field, I developed courses and educational



materials with U.S. studies focus to provide my students with the opportunity to deepen their understanding of U.S. society, culture, values, and institutions. I made efforts to strengthen my *curricula* and to enhance the quality of teaching about the ethnic, racial, social, economic, political, and religious contexts in which various cultures have manifested themselves in U.S. society, while focusing on the ways in which these cultures have influenced social movements and American identity throughout U.S. history. A critical European comparison was a frequent topic in my classes.

I organized an Open Lecture at my University, with a great keynote speaker – Philip. M. Hosay, Professor and Director of International Education and Director of the Multinational Institute of American Studies from NYU. He was my Fulbright coordinator.

The Lecture, held at Rectory Auditorium of University of Madeira in 18th April 2018, titled "Two Faces of America and Tragic Encounters: The Future of International Education, Academic Freedom, and Public Diplomacy" addressed the values that inform the American vision of modernization and its impact on both government and private sponsored international educational and cultural exchanges. Philip Hosay referred to how these exchanges might be affected by the Trump Administration's recent policies concerning immigration and visas, funding for higher education, and public diplomacy. Not only students and professors attended but also the local government and community in general. It was really a success. Because of that, I wrote a newspaper article in *Jornal da Madeira* (1st May 2017) titled "United States: An open society in danger".

Since I arrived in New York City, Manhattan, on June 7th, 2014, I met very interesting people that shared their culture, thoughts, and knowledge on the themes of the lectures. I had the great opportunity to participate in sessions with different speakers and panellists drawn from leading universities, political organizations, the media, labor unions, business and the arts to present the main



theme: the reconciliation of American diversity with national unity. Of course, this multidisciplinary way of thinking changed my mind in a way that my actual research interests are directed to multiculturalism and, in fact, I belong to an interdisciplinary research center since 2017.

I deeply understood the local autonomy and pluralism in America, with the great opportunity to study a Community in New England, with tours and lectures led by Donald Johnson, Professor Emeritus of International Education, NYU. The real contact with local America communities showed me the importance to be with people, touch their souls and valorized their feelings. Not only read scientific papers or listen to news about the USA is enough. To understand people and countries you need to be in touch with them.

I also learned that individual liberty is the American creed in a country with a huge cultural and social heterogeneity. To illustrate this topic, I had the opportunity to deeply understand the role of the ethnicity and assimilation on the American Frontier through the tour of New Mexico and Colorado.

And of course, the great experience of studying and living in the most fabulous city in the world: New York City. It had so many things to study that it could be downright overwhelming trying to figure out how to fit everything in that you wanted to do.

The culture and the history I learned about NYC, from the Broadway Theatre to the food I tasted (e.g. Harlem, Queens, China Town)!... I think I became a real New Yorker!

All these experiences provide me making so many new friends from all around the world and gained new perspectives through the sharing of different values, ideologies, religions, and traditions that enlarged my respect and understanding the cultural differences around the entire world.



The interaction with such a formidable group was one of the aspects that made participating in the Fulbright program a tremendous experience. All the activities were coordinated by Professor Philip Hosay and his Staff (Ali, Chris, Lindsey, Anna, Adam, and Lydia). All have done a great job in coordinating the 18 members of the group, with an excellent balance between steering and autonomy. The warmth and friendliness of the American professionals made the whole program a very pleasant time. I am glad to say that I am making very good friends and effective professional networks. We are still in touch...

I feel very privileged because this experience has been so valuable not only professionally and socially through an enlarged network, but most of all on a personal basis: I feel I have developed a lot as a human being and that has really exceeded my most optimistic expectations about this program. After the Fulbright program, I am working with Poland and Romania, thanks to the relationships between our Fulbright group.

I really know that the fond memories of the intellectual and personal interactions of this experience will last for long and will continue to nurture my academic work and personal life for many years to come.

Extroversion, diversity, multiculturalism, creativity, positive emotions, less fear of the world, optimism and positive psychology are now my way of life. And because of the Fulbright experience, I'm now researching multiculturalism from the positive psychology perspective, a new field of psychology whose pioneer was an American great psychologist: Peter Seligman from the University of Pennsylvania.

I want to finish this essay with a quotation from J. William Fulbright that resumes the impact of Fulbright experience on my professional career and personal life:



**"The Fulbright Program aims to bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason, and a little more compassion into world affairs and thereby to increase the chance that nations will learn at last to live in peace and friendship."**