# Chapter 2
# Enhancing Critical Cultural Awareness in Foreign Language Learning Contexts Through the Critical Use of Student-Made Documentary Films:
## Insights Obtained From a Multimodal Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to answer one research question: How are the cultural representations of Germany presented to adolescents learning German as a foreign language (GFL) in Malta similar and/or different from the cultural representations of Germany that adolescents living in Germany include in self-produced autobiographical documentary films? The student self-made documentary films were initially analyzed through Multimodal Discourse analysis (Kress, 2011; Cremona, 2017). The outcomes of this were later compared to the results collected from GFL classrooms in Malta. Results indicate that when compared together, the two sets of representations manifest a sense of lack of critical cultural awareness within the Maltese GFL learning context. As the main conclusion of the chapter, based on the insights obtained from the content of the student self-made films, the chapter suggests a three-step chronological model through which gradually critical cultural awareness can be enhanced and facilitated within the GFL learning context in Malta and elsewhere.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Looking retrospectively I can describe my first teacher of German as a Foreign Language [GFL] - a teacher I had for four years at the secondary level - as one who through words and deeds attempted to bridge the gap between the knowledge discussed in class and our (as students) 'capacity to participate in real world events' (Wilkins, 1976, p. 79). This teacher constantly tried to do this both by importing various sorts of texts, resources and teaching aids into class as well as by offering us students' various opportunities to meet teenage German native speakers. From time to time, he also organized trips to Germany for us students. In fact, as a student I participated in two of these trips. One trip was a student exchange with a school in Düsseldorf (1997) and the other one was a holiday trip to Munich (1999).

Five years after graduating as a teacher of German as a foreign language, a more recent visit to the German city of Duisburg (in 2008), where I was asked to deliver some lessons in a secondary school as part of an intercultural project, led to a personal dilemma about what in actual fact constitutes German identity. As soon as I arrived in Duisburg, I discovered that the school I had been invited to work in was in the midst of a German Turkish "ghetto" (Goldberg, Sauer, and Halm, 2003).

On this occasion, instead of living with a mainstream German family or in a neatly arranged youth hostel, I found out I was going to live with a family called Sayan[1]. The family consisted of a Turk (i.e., husband) married to a German wife. The couple had three children and the family had very strong links with Turkey. This time, instead of spending my days visiting museums and theme parks, I found myself roaming in the midst of a thriving Turkish-German community surrounded by shops with Turkish names, selling Turkish food and clothes. Similarly, instead of the usually expected German Lutheran cathedral, the closest place of worship to the school I was teaching in was the Merkez Mosque. The challenges to my expectations did not end there. In this school, most of the girls in my classes wore headscarves. Additionally, most students did not speak German at home or with their friends. Instead, they spoke predominantly Turkish or Arabic-sounding languages.

As soon as I encountered this rather 'different' situation for the first time, I began struggling with the question of what it means to be German in Germany today (Verdugo and Mueller, 2008). This new context I experienced was a totally different reality from the familiar mental 'reality' which I had been building in my mind since I had started learning German at school in Malta (Doyé, 1993). All this surprised me. I needed quite some time to accept, and in a way to understand, that these different realities were also part of Germany (i.e. happening within the German context). I could appreciate through this experience that the representations of Germany included in the texts, material and pictures my former Maltese German as a Foreign Language teacher used in class, presented another 'constructed' Germany which seems to fit well with Fairclough's description of ideological processes viewing ideology as "embedded in features of discourse which are taken for granted as a matter of common sense" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 64).

I had taught German as a Foreign Language in a Maltese secondary school for five years prior to going to Duisburg. What I found disconcerting was that the Duisburg experience made me realize that what I usually used to talk about when teaching and the representations of Germany and its people I used to present to my students were quite different from what I could experience in Duisburg. Furthermore, answering this pertinent question has taken on an added significance for me because after five years as a teacher, I was appointed as a teacher-educator at the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta directly responsible for the training of prospective teachers of German as a Foreign Language.