


5-2018

## Different Tongues

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### Recommended Citation

Moncada, Skyler (2018) "Different Tongues," *New and Dangerous Ideas*: Vol. 1 , Article 15.  
Available at: <https://docs.rwu.edu/nadi/vol1/iss1/15>

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I wanted to share my experience as an individual who often intervenes in challenging or dangerous situations who was transformed into a bystander by a familiar situation that occurred in an unfamiliar setting. While my study abroad experience was undoubtedly one of the best moments in my life, it brought a lot of discomfort in the forms of different cultures, settings, peoples, and expectations.

## **Different Tongues**

Skyler Moncada

I saw abuse today,  
And I didn't do anything.  
It's not that I wouldn't have if I had another shot but I just didn't know the language.

It was an open palm to dimpled cheek turned mistuned piano, a somehow familiar range of betrayal animated her vocal chords and she fought only to catch herself – but the notes had already passed her lips.

And her body conceded to his grip on her wrist, he pulled her closer, face to face, glare to frightened stare in the opposite direction, half a second and he'd drilled right through her head and grabbed her eyes with his overbearing presence.

Lamp lights wavered as tear drops burrowed deeper within her tear ducts, afraid to rain and orchestrate another catastrophe that he might interpret as an invitation for further pain. They were in public after all, so

He brought her head to his shoulder and whispered into her ear so low it felt like he had stooped down to his own level for just long enough to be assured that she was there cowering below him.

And like the prose of cruelty he kissed her on the cheek and said "I didn't mean it," or "I'm sorry I lose control," or "Don't you dare do that again", or "This is your fault that I'm like this." I don't know which it was.

And I remember myself across the street. The store owner was asking if I wanted a bag while I was still grappling with the fact that my legs did not work, that the only words I could muster were "grazie," thank you.

and then the people kept walking, and that girl kept walking, and I stayed still, feet firmly planted fighting to find some words. I couldn't let them go knowing that,

She would be the latest walking advertisement for women's makeup. For girls to sit quietly as boys pull their hair because that means they like you. For every unwelcome advance and "boys will be boys,"

Every night spent afraid, long sleeve shirts for the cuts, Longer pants for the bruises,  
For every refusal to call that abusive.

I may not know much Italian, but it doesn't take spoken word to know that that is not okay.

Maybe it just felt harder to retaliate because our tongues were born in different shapes, his was clearly folded in hate but hers was simply swollen and she couldn't say anything.

And it's troubling to know that when her back was against the wall that my tongue was free,

But I was silent.