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Identity and acculturation: the case of naturalised citizens in Britain

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Abstract

This paper advances a dialogical perspective on acculturation. Drawing on the theories of social representations and dialogical self, it conceptualises acculturation as a process of negotiation between different or conflicting social representations and identity positions. It is argued that in order to understand acculturation, we need to explore how migrants represent different cultures and how they position themselves towards them. Drawing on thirty-three interviews with new British citizens, the paper examines how participants made sense of their place in Britain by studying the meanings of acculturation for participants themselves. In the interviews British culture was represented in a polyphasic way incorporating both negative and positive values. Therefore, acculturation represented both an enrichment of identity and an identity threat for many of the participants. Participants negotiated their position within this representational field by engaging in a dialogical negotiation between identity positions. The paper concludes that a dialogical approach to knowledge construction (social representations theory) and identity (dialogical self theory) provides appropriate theoretical tools for understanding acculturation as an ongoing process, not a single static outcome.

Keywords: acculturation, identity, dialogical self, social representations, immigration, naturalisation, Britishness

Towards a dynamic approach to acculturation

Acculturation has traditionally been a topic of interest for social scientists (e.g. Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918/1996), however, growing levels of immigration in the past decades have given rise to increased academic interest on this topic. While acculturation was commonly seen as a one-dimensional process (moving from culture A to culture B), it has more recently been seen as a two-dimensional process involving both the country of origin and the country of settlement. According to Berry's (2001, 2005, 2008) well-known model, when encountering a new culture, migrants consider whether they wish to maintain their cultural heritage and/or establish relations with other cultural groups. Depending on how migrants respond to these issues, they can be categorised as employing one of four different acculturation strategies. The assimilation strategy is employed when migrants do not retain contacts with their heritage culture and only forge relations with the dominant culture of the country of settlement. Separation refers to retaining one's original culture without creating links with the dominant culture. Marginalisation occurs when individuals do not maintain their heritage cultures nor participate in the culture of their new environment. Integration refers to both retaining one's culture and participating in the culture of the country of settlement.

While this two-dimensional approach has opened fruitful avenues for researching acculturation, there are several important criticisms of mainstream acculturation research.

Firstly, acculturation has been predominantly studied as a series of stable outcomes and not as a dynamic process (Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Ward, 2008). For example, preferences for acculturation strategies are said to remain quite stable and mutually exclusive to the extent that people may be classified according to their acculturation profiles (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006). Others, however, have shown that there are various domains of acculturation which are associated with different acculturation strategies (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2003, 2004; Navas et al., 2005; Navas, et al., 2007; Taylor & Lambert, 1996). A second criticism of acculturation research is that it assumes that acculturation strategies are universal without considering the diversity of the migrant experience (Bhatia & Ram, 2009). As a result, acculturation studies (Berry's work in particular) have been criticised for providing a de-contextualised and a-cultural account of acculturation (Boski, 2008; Bowskill, Lyons & Coyle, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2010).

Alternative perspectives which are more sensitive to the context and complexities of this process have also been developed. For example, Bourhis and colleagues (Bourhis et al, 1997; Bourhis et al, 2010) have devised a model of acculturation that considers the broader context of acculturation (national policies, acculturation orientations adopted by host the community and by immigrants and interpersonal and intergroup relations). Birman, Persky and Chan (2010), on the other hand, have drawn attention to the fact that acculturation may involve more than two cultures and we thus need to consider the impact of multiple cultural affiliations on migrant acculturation.

In order to contribute to the study of the complexity of acculturation and highlight its dynamic nature, this paper argues that acculturation is a meaning-making process whereby migrants need to reconstruct their social representations and identities within a new context (Chrysochoou, 2004). Acculturation is seen here as a dialogical process that involves the dialogue between different social representations and identity positions. It is suggested that the theories of dialogical self and social representations can provide appropriate theoretical tools for the study of acculturation. This perspective is dynamic and sees acculturation as a process, not an outcome. The paper thus follows Hermans' (2001a, p. 272) suggestion to 'shift from a focus on developmental end-states (like 'integration' and 'competence') towards a more process-oriented notion of acculturation that can account for situated, negotiated and often contested developmental trajectories'.

Through an analysis of interviews with naturalised British citizens, the paper examines how new citizens give meaning to the idea of acculturating and becoming British. The paper shows that acculturation is a process of negotiating the demands of different identities and illustrates some of the different types of dialogue that can be established between divergent identity positions, taking under consideration the context of acculturation and the meanings it takes for migrants themselves.

Conceptualising acculturation: Social representations and dialogical self

The theories of social representations and dialogical self provide suitable conceptual tools for explaining how knowledge systems and identities are negotiated during acculturation. The theory of social representations offers an understanding of how people in the everyday engage with their social world through communicative practices which lead to the construction of commonsense knowledge (Moscovici, 1961/1998). Social representations are localised systems of meaning which are linked to the identity of the communities which produce them (Jovchelovitch, 2007; Duveen, 2008; Wagner, 1994). Social representations theorists have defined identity as the process of appropriating social representations (Duveen, 2001; Howarth, 2002). Social identity therefore allows group members to position themselves within a 'common discursive space' (Wagner, 1994, p. 208). However, in times of globalisation, inter-cultural exchanges have proliferated leading to plurality and hybridisation of knowledge systems (e.g. Jovchelovitch, 2007; Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999; Wagner et al, 1999). The strength of the social representations theory is that it considers this diversity in people's ways of thinking stemming from their affiliation with multiple socio-cultural groups. The cognitive polyphasia hypothesis suggests that individuals and groups can employ a variety of social representations in their dealings with the social world (Moscovici, 1961/1998; Provencher, 2011). Each of these different representations, as appropriated by the individual, constitutes a voice or position within the self so that the self becomes a 'society of mind' (Hermans, 2002).

This approach on social representations theory conceptualises the human mind as polyphonic (Marková, 2003) and is consistent with the dialogical self theory. According to the dialogical self theory, the multiplicity of ways of thinking, that is, drawing on multiple social representations, creates polyphony within the self, so that the ‘enlarging complexity of society adds to the complexity of the self’ (Hermans, 2002, p. 148). In other words, the multiplicity of inter-cultural encounters can lead to the multiplicity of identity positions because people need to cope with a variety of different cultural systems of representation (Hermans, 1996, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Hermans & Kempen, 1998).

It can be argued that the theory of social representations allows us to explore what Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011) have called the ‘transpersonal dimension’ of identity dialogues. According to Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011) the transpersonal dimension consists of institutions, values and norms and provides stability to the otherwise dynamic dialogical self by anchoring it to more stable patterns of social relations and communal conventions. As Cresswell (2011, p. 480) notes, “one cannot construct just any self or identity, because one is caught up in language communities that already afford experiential worlds that are taken-for-granted”. Social representations, as collectively elaborated and shared systems of meaning, can be seen as part of this transpersonal dimension. Social representations shape how people think and regulate their behaviour and interactions within a particular cultural community. To put it differently, representations

'frame' the different situations that people find themselves in (Moore et al., 2011) by providing the lens through which to interpret the world and relate to others.

Each identity position is thus a 'tool' for engaging with the social world and is linked with a particular representation of the world. A dialogical approach illustrates how polyphasia on the societal level is translated to multivoicedness on the level of the self (Marková, 2003). This idea is particularly relevant to acculturation processes whereby people encounter new social representations and negotiate their position towards different cultures (Hale & Abreu, 2010). This can lead to multivoicedness and identity hybridity (Bell & Das, 2011), so that acculturation is not just a process of moving from one culture to another, but is rather a process of appropriating several cultural positions within one's sense of self (Bhatia & Ram, 2001, 2004).

However, knowledge encounters may also entail tensions and contradictions, suggesting that the dialogue between different representations is not always straightforward or even likely (Jovchelovitch, 2007; Sammut & Gaskell, 2010). Semantic barriers may inhibit the dialogue between different social representations (Gillespie, 2008). For instance, stigmatisation poses a barrier to engaging with alternative representations by otherising the groups that construct these representations. Since social representations "bring together the identity, culture and history of a group of people" (Jovchelovitch, 2007, p. 102), it can be argued that these barriers serve an identity protective function. They allow

individuals and groups to maintain their social representations 'intact' despite challenges by other social representations. The process of acculturation may entail such threats to one's identity. These can be understood as symbolic threats; that is, as challenges to a person's or group's morals, values, norms and worldviews (Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Velasco González et al., 2008). Inter-cultural encounters do not therefore always lead to the multiplicity of identity positions, but can lead to identity conflicts which can be dealt with in different ways. Moore et al. (2011) refer to such conflicts as 'being caught between frames' (p. 516), that is, different frameworks of thinking and acting which originate in different cultural expectations.

The dynamics of identity during acculturation involve not only the communities of origin but also the communities of residence (Kadianaki, 2010). Expectations about how migrants should acculturate and state policies have an impact on acculturation processes (Bourhis et al, 1997; Bourhis et al, 2010). For example, policies that distinguish between skilled and unskilled migrants have an impact on how new citizens make sense of their naturalisation experiences and their place in Britain (Andreouli & Howarth, 2012). Moreover, dominant social representations of immigrants as 'others' (Deaux, 2006) can restrict the range of positions that migrants can take on (see Duveen, 1993). 2007). Bhatia and Ram (2009), for example, have shown that while adopting a hybrid American-Indian identity was acceptable for Indian migrants, after 9/11 they were not recognised as American. Thus, a change in the social representations of what it means to be American delegitimised

hybridity and had an impact on the relationship between these two identity positions. Ali and Sonn (2010) also showed how dominant representations of Australian identity create a distinction between 'real Australians' and 'ethnic Australians' which in turn has an impact on how the Cypriot Turkish and Australian identities can be hyphenated. Power asymmetries have therefore an impact on the relations that are established between positions within the dialogical self (Hermans, 1996).

It follows that acculturation is a dynamic process, shaped by various systems of meanings. In order to understand identity negotiations during acculturation, we need to consider how different cultures are represented by migrants as well as how migrants themselves are positioned by dominant social representations. It is these systems of knowledge that enable us to explain the meanings of identity dialogues.

Research context

The paper presents findings from an interview study with naturalised citizens¹ of the United Kingdom. Naturalisation is a border-crossing practice and as such is of particular interest for the study of acculturation and identity dynamics in immigration contexts. Moreover, while naturalised citizens are in principle recognised by the state, they may not be recognised as British in terms of lay representations; this adds another layer of complexity to the identity processes of naturalised citizens (Andreouli & Howarth, 2012).

The focus of this paper is on the negotiations between being British and being affiliated with one's country of origin. The paper addresses the following questions: How do participants give meaning to the process of becoming British citizens? How do they assign meaning to the process of acculturation? How do they negotiate different or conflicting representations and identity positions?

Thirty-three naturalised citizens from London² took part in this study. Participants originated in Europe, Africa, America, Australia and Asia and migrated to the UK for various reasons: family re-unification, asylum, study, work and travelling.

The interviews were semi-structured and focused on exploring three main topics: 1) the participants' migration trajectory (how and why they migrated to the UK), 2) the naturalisation process (reasons for naturalisation and views regarding the naturalisation process), and 3) what it means to 'be British'³.

A thematic analysis (Attride-Strirling, 2001; Braun & Clark, 2006) of the interviews showed that representations of Britishness and British culture were a significant theme regarding the ways that participants made sense of their acculturation. The paper will show that British culture is represented in multiple and sometimes conflicting ways so that participants had reasons to both embrace and resist it. Consequently, acculturation requires the negotiation of divergent social representations. The following section

discusses firstly, the benefits of acculturation, secondly, the challenges of acculturation for naturalised citizens and thirdly, the different types of dialogue that can be established between divergent representations and identity positions⁴.

Findings

Benefits of acculturation

You do what the Romans do when you go to Rome. It's good for you to know a few basic, ground rules. ... a few things for you to know to be part of it and I think it breaks this whole notion of ghettoism where a particular community stays within themselves. You need to break those barriers. (29, Ghana)

Like the participant above, many other participants also criticised the tendency of some communities to isolate themselves. Ideas about the integration of ethnic minorities are prominent in social and political discussions in the UK. The interview context, which was directly associated with naturalisation (a 'rite of passage' for the integration of migrants; see Kostakopoulou, 2003), invited participants to consider these ideas in reflecting on their position within British society. Because of that, it may be that this 'otherising' of other migrants was somewhat exacerbated by the very context of the interview. Overall,

however, being integrated was seen as empowering in that it enables migrants to acquire cultural competence which allow them to participate in British society.

This was more evident when the object of discussion was economic opportunities and work prospects. Being able to take full advantage of the opportunities that Britain offers was seen as a key benefit of acculturation.

How was life in Sierra Leone?

It's a tropic country and it's lovely but in terms of opportunities, I think Britain is one of the best that anyone can reach for. Since I came over here, my life has changed so much; whilst back home I was struggling so much to get things done for myself. Since I moved here I've been able to do things for myself and I'm married now, got my family and two kids. (23, Sierra Leone)

This type of thinking was very common among interviewees – Britain compared to participants' countries of origin was seen as a place where they could make a better future for themselves and for their families. This makes sense as most of the participants migrated to Britain for better educational or professional opportunities. A related issue was safety and democracy, mainly for the participants who had been persecuted in the countries of origin.

The country I came from is an unstable country. Africa is unstable. You can be there, and something can just kick off today. So I don't really want to go and live my life there. I want to live my life here. (23, Sierra Leone)

Seeing Britain through an imagery of progress and opportunity, some participants saw British as a valued and even superior identity.

I think there are more opportunities to develop for one. And also, you are free from the things that keep you restricted in your country, the mentality of your country and the traditions. I feel very free here. And no one will say 'you should do this or that'. Of course you have commitments, but it's not like there's something stupid about the mentality that doesn't make you do the things you want. (27, Russia)

This participant argues that she fits more in Britain than in her home country, Russia. In her interview she juxtaposed Britain with Russia and compared them on the basis of open-mindedness and the opportunities they offer. While Britain was represented as a place of prosperity and development, Russia was represented as a conservative society that restricts a person's freedom.

Challenges of acculturation

While the benefits of acculturation were mainly discussed in the context of the broader socio-economic system and the opportunities it offers, the challenges of acculturation were more evident in the sphere of personal and family life, demonstrating that acculturation takes different forms in different contexts (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2003, 2004).

I want my kids to grow up in the Indian culture rather than the British culture. The moral values are high there. [...] I'm not comfortable with the teenagers walking around on the streets and drinking. [...] they're not putting enough stress inside the families; they're born animals. Even when they are so small they are flirting, they're using drugs, they're mixing with drugs and boys... (30, India)

I think unfortunately in Britain there is a certain sort of group in society that don't have the skills to raise children with strong sense of right and wrong and motivation. [...] I would be a bit anxious about raising my daughter as a teenager here. (33, Australia)

As these extracts show, the British way of life was represented in terms of drinking, promiscuity and a general lack of moral values. As such, it posed an identity threat for some respondents, a threat to their value system and moral integrity. These issues were predominantly exemplified in Britain's youth culture and in the participants' concerns about raising children in the UK.

Other interviewees experienced identity tensions and conflicts that emerged from conflicting cultural demands, stemming from the divergence between representations of the culture of their country of origin and of the British way of life.

Do you feel at home in Britain?

This is very hard inside me. I need to choose one life, Lebanon or here.

So it's either Britain or Lebanon?

I don't know yet. I haven't reached the answer, to decide which one. Can you go out, can you do the things? In Lebanon you can't because it's haram, it's not good. Here, it's easy. It's like fighting inside you... (25, Lebanon)

This participant experiences a conflict between his Lebanese and Muslim self and his British self. The clash between the two identities is based on the opposing normative expectations associated with the two identities. Whereas for this participant Islam condemns some behaviours as sinful, in Britain these behaviours are acceptable. Underlying this positioning process is the representation of British culture and Lebanese culture as conflicting. There are two cultural voices in this extract. One represents the British culture and the other represents the Lebanese culture and Islamic religion (which are conflated here). The two voices create an identity dilemma that feels like 'fighting inside you'.

Accommodating divergent identity positions

The previous sections showed that representations of British culture can be both positive and negative so that acculturation can be both identity enriching and an identity threat. This section will discuss how participants negotiated such tensions between conflicting identity positions.

I wasn't fitting in there and I knew that this is more where I'm going to feel comfortable... I think in any Western country I would adapt a lot quicker than I ever adapted in Syria. When I first arrived here, I was more confident, I could say what I wanted to say; not like there [where] you'd be in trouble if you say things like the gay thing. [...] So when I arrived here I was home. I didn't have any fear, I could be myself and that was such a liberating feeling. It was like you're born again. I'm always saying 'I'm seven years old.' Syria page is over for me. I don't have a life there. Because my life is here. Because I'm a completely different person than I was seven years ago. [...] The way you live in Syria is forced on you... Here I had choice. This country gave me the right as a gay man. (35, Syria)

This participant can be said to have adopted an assimilation strategy because he has severed his links with Syria and claims to fit much better in Britain and the West. However,

in order to appreciate the processes at work, we need to understand how each socio-cultural context is represented and the implications of these representations for identity.

The extract is structured around the bipolar 'Britain/tolerance versus Syria/intolerance': Britain's freedom is represented as the opposite of Syrian narrow-mindedness. Being Syrian is incompatible with being British. Being Syrian means that he does not have the right to be gay (both formally, as homosexuality is illegal, and culturally, as homosexuality is a taboo in Syria); on the other hand, Britain recognises his sexuality. As Gillespie et al. (2008) argue, recognition is a key factor in explaining which positions are privileged in different contexts. In this extract the participant's identity as a gay man and his British (and Western) identity are privileged and brought together against a Syrian self (see Bhatia & Ram, 2004, for a similar case with a lesbian interviewee).

The participant creates a distinction between a past and a present/future self, so that the two identity positions are kept distinct ('I'm seven years old'). While his past self is associated with Syria, his future and present self are associated with Britain where he feels empowered and can reclaim his agency to define his sexuality.

The case of this participant also highlights the need to take under consideration the socio-political context that shapes migrants' trajectories. When in Syria, this participant's identity was constrained by misrecognition: being Syrian was represented as incompatible with his

position as a gay man. This type of non-recognition can be experienced as a form of oppression (Taylor, 1992). Therefore, by rejecting Syria and embracing Britain, this participant is in fact asserting his right to have multiple identities. Categorising him as assimilated (which assumes that he adopts a singular identity) does not do justice to his desire to have a choice over his identity. Moreover, it would mask the fact that the voice of Syria remains significant in how he constructs his identity. This voice is still present, even if only to be rejected.

That assimilation can mean different things to different people is also evident in the following quotations extracted from a 20-year old participant who migrated from China when she was 13 years old.

E: Was it an easy transition for you to come from China to Britain?

I: Very. 'Cause I knew I didn't have a choice. It's either you do it or you're out of society, against the norms and values. When I came here, I didn't know the language. I literally forced myself to read books every night, made sure I talk to friends, I observed how people behave...Just look what they do and then copy and paste it.

I've changed my name as well. And the only reason is to prevent discrimination. [...] My old name is a lovely name in Chinese, but it doesn't

work in English. It's not feminine, it's not elegant, it's different from others.

(20, China)⁵

This participant found it hard to be accepted in Britain because she was represented as different and bullied by her classmates. Such otherising representations, being harmful and derogating, can incite different forms of resistance (Howarth, 2002, 2004, 2007). This participant resisted being represented as 'other' by assimilating, that is, by 'copying and pasting' the behaviours of others. She tried to let go of the things that defined her as Chinese including her Chinese name. It is evident that being British and being Chinese are seen as conflicting identities, since Britishness is constructed on the basis of ethnicity. This ethnic representation positions (non-White) migrants as different 'forcing' this participant to choose one identity over the other as the two positions are represented as incompatible. Here assimilation is a defence against mis-recognition from the receiving society. Being British is dominant over her Chinese identity. Such asymmetrical relations among voices in the self illustrate how social inequalities can be reflected on the dialogical self (Hermans, 1996). Thus, ethnic representations of Britishness affect the type of dialogue that can be developed between identity positions. However, assimilation was not the only acculturation strategy that this participant employed. Later in the interview she adopted an integration strategy.

E: Is there a difference between the two cultures?

I: Yeah, a lot.

I: How do you reconcile this difference?

I: I tend to share both. Don't lose the one; don't lose the other [...]

E: Is it important for you to keep up with the Chinese traditions?

I: Most of the times I'm doing my mum a favour. But in a way, you know, that's where I'm originally from. I can't forget. That's my birth country. All my childhood friends are there. (20, China)

While in some contexts this participant fore-grounded her Britishness, in other contexts she expressed both identities. When discussing her experiences of discrimination, it was important for her to stress her Britishness as a means of resisting dominant ethnic representations of Britishness. However, when the conversation moved to her family relationships, she re-claimed her Chineseness. Although she still acknowledged that there are conflicts between the two identities, she did not reject one over the other but maintained both in order to satisfy family expectations but also because China represents her roots. Acculturation strategies are therefore not fixed but change according to changes in the context. Below is another example that shows more clearly the mediation of social relations in identity dialogues.

Sometimes my mum comes home and I'm speaking to my sisters in English. Because you spend all day at school with your friends speaking

English, then you come home speaking your language at home, so sometimes you kind of mix it up. And my mum's not happy because sometimes I speak English. My mum doesn't want that. [...] My blood is Afghan, I can speak the language, there's an effect to that, but growing up in this country I feel more like as if I was born in this country. [...] I love my mum and I'm trying to keep the culture 'cause my mum loves the culture.

(18, Afghanistan)

In this extract the participant occupies two positions, being British and being Afghan. While his position as British is a result of having spent his formative years in Britain, his Afghan position stems from his biological connection to this country and is mediated by his family. However, the fact that he is ethnically Afghan does not mean that he 'feels' Afghan (Verkyuten & de Wolf, 2002). Rather, he feels British but this position is constrained by the voice of his mother who is implicitly here the audience of his utterance (Barreto et al., 2003; Wiley & Deaux, 2011). In other words, the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee was mediated by a 'third party' (Marková, 2006), his mother, who represents the family and community expectations associated with the participant's Afghan position (see also Kwak, 2010; Hedegaard, 2005, for discussions of inter-generational conflicts). For this participant being Afghan is linked to his position as a son (much like in the previous extract) and as such, is more associated to his family and home space. On the other hand, his English self becomes salient in his school and social life. This is a way

of compartmentalising one's identity in different domains of life. This strategy of accommodating different cultural demands has also been labelled 'biculturalism' (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Roccas & Brewer, 2002) and was most common among participants who had spent their formative years in Britain.

The following quotation is extracted from an interview with a young girl who was born in Iraq but has spent most of her life in Britain. Previously in the interview she had mentioned that her family had plans of relocating to Iraq. The interviewer came back to this point and asked her to talk more about these plans.

I: I'm sure I would have been different if I was still in Iraq. I would have been different in certain ways. And I've changed since I've come here and for me to go back at the same environment, it will be a bit difficult.

E: Would you prefer to stay here then?

I: You see, I would. The reason I'd like to stay here is because there are some advantages like freedom [...] There are a lot of good sides to the way Eastern people behave morally, but at the same time they're very rigid. And for someone who's lived here and they're kind of free... [they] will expect things from you. Because I'm Iraqi and I'm supposed to be like them and I'm sure I wouldn't satisfy their expectations. [...] I know I have become very Western here... but, I'm trying to control it. Recently, I have tried to put

more limits, trying to become more religious. Because the Western way of life can really make you think outside your religion. Hence, all these problems with Muslims and stuff they're having. The Western way of life, the freedom and the ideas they give you can really affect you. So, I can say to a certain extent, yeah, I'm a Westerner but...what I'm trying to understand, like explain to myself [is], does it make a difference? I'm trying to be myself, I don't want to identify, say I'm an Easterner or a Westerner, I'm just trying to be myself, I'm trying to, God help me, just be a better Muslim... (21, Iraq)

There is a range of overlapping and conflicting social representations at play in this extract: representations of Britishness, East, West, Iraq and Islam. To acculturate within the British culture, the participant needs to negotiate her position within this complex representational field.

In discussing her family's plans to move back to Iraq, she acknowledged that it would be hard for her to go back because the freedoms of Britain have changed her. At the same time, she criticised Iraq for its rigidity. However, shortly afterwards the voice of the Eastern community became fore-grounded and she expressed concern that she would not satisfy people's expectations in Iraq because freedom in the West and the Western way of life

have made her 'think outside her religion'. She felt a need, therefore, to account for 'her Britishness'.

Freedom in Britain is represented in an ambivalent way for this participant. On the one hand, it is positive compared to the 'rigidity' of Eastern countries. On the other hand, it is coupled with lack of religiosity. The participant engaged in an internal dialogue (Billig, 1987; Marková, 2006) between two conflicting themes: freedom and religious discipline. While the former is associated with social representations of the West, the latter is associated with social representations of the East. The participant struggled to negotiate her position towards these dialogical themes. She seemed to draw on a dichotomising representation that constructs a clear-cut boundary between the 'East' and the 'West'. Gillespie (2008) has described this mechanism of constructing rigid oppositions as a 'semantic barrier' that inhibits the dialogue between different representations. Deriving their meanings from these conflicting representations, the two identity positions are seen as incompatible here. Whereas her position as 'Eastern' demands that she be religious and disciplined, her position as 'Western' demands that she set very few limits on her individual freedom.

The extract illustrates both the participant's multivoicedness and her efforts to accommodate identity and representational conflicts. This participant can be described as integrated as she maintains contact both with her home country and with the dominant

British culture. However, biculturalism or integration is not just the endpoint of the acculturation process, but can be the starting point for further identity tensions. Such tensions may have in fact become more salient in this context where the participant is asked to answer questions and 'account for' her identity. This participant indeed finds it difficult to categorise herself in a single, static category. Trying to negotiate her identity in relation to this representational conflict, she challenges the validity of categorisation itself. She is resisting the dualist categorisation of East vs. West by advancing a different representation of what it means to be Muslim. While earlier in the extract she fused to an extent the Muslim and Eastern identity categories (against the Western category), she later asserted a Muslim identity that supersedes the East-West binary. In other words, by asserting first an individuated identity position (trying to be herself) and then an overarching Muslim identity, she is advanced an alternative representation of these categories as compatible, overcoming the semantic barrier that had previously constrained her positioning.

Discussion

Acculturation studies seek to explain phenomena of migrant repositioning within a new environment. Within this field, a typology of acculturation strategies has been developed. Depending on migrants' attitudes towards maintaining their heritage culture and interacting with other cultural groups, they can be categorised as integrated, assimilated,

marginalised or separated (Berry, 2011). However, as Rudmin (2003, p. 29) observes, typologies 'tend to reify traits and to view them inherent in the individual or group'. Indeed, the idea that acculturation strategies are universal and distinct has been heavily criticised (e.g. Bhatia & Ram, 2009). Furthermore, what these terms actually mean remains unclear (Collie, Kindon, Liu & Podsiadlowski, 2010). For example, the broad term 'integration' does not account for the different relations that people develop with their countries of origin and the countries of settlement, but assumes that integration has a universal meaning (for a comprehensive critique of the operationalisation of acculturation strategies, see Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001).

Against this background, this paper has suggested that we need to conceptualise acculturation as a meaning making process whereby migrants negotiate their social representations and identities within a new environment. This paper has argued that a dynamic dialogical approach to knowledge and identity construction is most suited for this purpose.

The dialogical self theory conceives of the self as polyphonic, meaning that different cultural voices play a part in the construction of the self (Hermans, 2001a). This theory is appropriate for studying acculturation as it is concerned with how different or conflicting identity positions can be negotiated in times of globalisation and increased human mobility (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). Indeed, this theory has been extensively used by Bhatia and

Ram (2001, 2004, 2009; Bhatia, 2002) to discuss acculturation as an ongoing process of negotiation between identity positions. This paper suggests that in order to shed further light to processes of acculturation, we need to consider the broader societal or 'transpersonal' dimension (Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011) which frames identity dialogues and provides stability to the self by linking the self to particular communities. Social representations are part of this 'transpersonal dimension' because they are collectively constructed systems of meaning that link community members together. It is these systems of knowledge that inform identity dialogues. The theory of social representations is also a useful framework for understanding how different systems of meaning can relate to or conflict each other during inter-cultural encounters (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Taken together, these two theories enable us to view acculturation as a dialogical process of negotiation between different identities and diverse, or even opposing, systems of meaning.

Drawing on interviews with naturalised British citizens, this paper has shown that depending on one's immigration trajectory one can attach different meanings to acculturation. Safety, open-mindedness, democracy and lack of moral values are, among others, ideas contained within social representations of British culture for migrants who naturalise in the UK. Thus, as other social representations, Britishness is polyphasic and ambivalent, a finding that has also been reported by others (e.g. Condor, 2000; Condor & Abell, 2006). As such, acculturation can be construed by migrants both as enriching and

as an identity threat because it threatens a person's morals, values and representations (Stephan & Stephan, 1996). At the same time, participating in British society and culture can also be associated with ideas of acceptance, tolerance and safety. Acculturation becomes then a complex negotiation between push-and-pull forces of maintaining and changing one's identity.

Acculturation processes are further complicated by the fact that dominant social representations can pose constraints on which identity positions can be taken on and how they can be accommodated. These representations construct degrees of similarity and difference and delineate a range of identity positions that can be taken on (Duveen, 1993). In this data set, dominant representations of what it means to be British or Western were shown to have an impact on the types of dialogue that are established between identity positions. For example, keeping two cultural identities distinct and claiming an assimilated British identity can be a response towards misrecognition by the mainstream British society. It has indeed been argued that (representations of) cultural difference determines 'how much' acculturation is needed in order to adapt (Rudmin, 2003); there are in other words different acculturation expectations towards different types of migrants depending on how these groups are represented (Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001, 2004). In this regard, identity clashes can also entail power asymmetries. For instance, originating in a non-Western country and being seen as 'different' can be the cause of perceived incompatibility between identity positions, disallowing identity hybridisation. However, as

much as people are constrained by such representations, there is a degree of agency in appropriating these representations (Duveen, 2001). Participants responded to identity challenges by showing agency and creativity, by privileging some positions in some domains or periods of their lives, by creating new identity positions and by resisting the very process of categorisation into distinct identity categories.

While this paper has focused on two identity positions (being British and being affiliated with the country of origin), the data presented here also show that acculturation is not just a matter of accommodating two cultures. It may involve other aspects of identity which are not always seen as part of culture in acculturation research. In particular, sexuality and religion became prominent identities for some participants and played a central role in how they negotiated their acculturation in Britain. This further highlights the fact that acculturation is a complex process that involves various 'significant others' (e.g. family, peers etc.) and representations of various social objects (e.g. homosexuality, religion, culture, tradition, democracy etc.). Positioning oneself within this representational field becomes then a multifaceted process, taking place in various domains of life that cannot be simply reduced to a state of assimilation, marginalisation, separation or integration.

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¹It should be noted that since the sample consists of people eligible and willing to naturalise in the UK, the present analysis does not encompass all of Berry's acculturation strategies, but only assimilation and integration.

² The fact that this study was conducted in London may have had an impact on the responses of interviewees. For instance, discussions of crime by interviewees are more relevant to large urban settings (such as London). In rural settings, other issues and conflicts may become more relevant – for example, in less diverse rural contexts, representations of race and ethnicity may become more significant and raise a different set of challenges to acculturation.

³ This topic guide and the research context overall (that invites participants to reflect upon their identities) may have had an impact on the responses of the interviewees, since, in line with the theoretical framework of this paper, it can be argued that different contexts would make different identity positions more salient than others. Examples of the impact of the interview context will be discussed in relevant interview extracts.

⁴ The aim therefore is not to present themes and individuals who are typical of each theme, but rather to illustrate some of the tensions and challenges that are associated with acculturation processes. In this respect, the paper does not offer a representative set of the different kinds of identity tensions (or of acculturating individuals), but shows how divergent social representations and identity positions can be negotiated during acculturation.

⁵ A longer version of this interview extract has also been used in another paper by the author to make a different but related argument. That paper made no mention of acculturation and identity dialogues. The extract was used to argue that ethnic representations of Britishness position this participant as an outsider and that by shifting the comparison context (comparing herself to other migrants, not native British people) she was able to position herself as an insider in relation to Britishness.