

Coming out of Culture

Suggestions for the Semiotic Study of Acculturation in Migratory Contexts

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Abstract

Acculturation is a transcultural process that is usually described as the set of outcomes and transformations that immigrants experience following their contact with new cultures. It is not a process of losing the own culture, or achieving a new one, but rather of cultural readjustment and reorganization within particular contexts of interaction; is a sign of cultural diversity and dynamism. This paper proposes a different approach to migratory situations from the semiotic point of view, dealing with a diverse object that is latent and present in most of 21st century contemporary societies. In this way, I foreground and explain a theoretical need to keep delving into this research object. The essay also touches on one of the most fundamental issues for cultural semiotics such as the seeking and construction of the *self*, and its counterpart — The *other*. On the one hand, I suggest to delve into the manifold reasons and mechanisms that conduce people to leaving their native culture, and on the other hand I set forth that *self-understanding* implies copying with a triple relationship: auto-communication, self-description and self-identification.

Keywords: cultural semiotics, acculturation, migration, identity, self-construction

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Nowadays, most contemporary societies are culturally plural. In fact, there are no actual societies made up of people having just one culture, one religion, one identity, or one language. People have always been on the move and at present times we can appreciate continuous flows of migrants all around the world. Migration here is seen as a phenomenon involving complex relations of semiotic exchange. Thereby, it entails a cultural shock where two cultures exchange cultural traits. I state that migration is one of the manifold ways to meaning since it's a way into the self.

When individuals enter an acculturation situation they face concrete questions whose character is quite complex: Who am I? To which group do I belong? Hence, this paper doesn't try to set up a model for assessing migratory processes, but rather to suggest a particular point of view from the optics of cultural semiotics, and mainly focused on a particular process that follows migration, namely acculturation.

Cultures need or want to interact to each other; these interactions are mainly caused due to dissimilarities. Human beings have the need of approaching to what is understandable, recognized, and is already inserted in ideas and values that are known, but also want to approach what is incomprehensible, and unexplored. Acculturation is a phenomenon belonging to culture that produces a dialogue with the own and the other, a dialogue that must be carried out mandatorily.

What is acculturation?

Acculturation is a set of processes that not only deals with culture itself, but also with the transmission of cultural traits, the transformation of cultures, and with the gradual loss of a culture as well. Therefore, acculturation is a phenomenon that belongs to *culture*. For the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, *culture* is seen, as "the object of analysis for cultural semiotics, and culture is semiotic by its nature because it is information and communication" (Uspenskij et al., 1998, p. 1). Semiotics of culture, as developed by the Tartu-Moscow school departs from the presupposition that it is operatively possible to describe pure sign systems, although these can only function when they establish contact one another, developing mutual influences: that is "the functional correlations of different sign systems" (Uspenskij et al., 1998). Thus acculturation will be described in terms of the metalanguage of cultural semiotics as developed by the Tartu Moscow-School of semiotics.

Acculturation is a conflictive term that is present in contemporary research on cultural, sociological and psychological phenomena. It has been used with reference to groups or individuals identified as undergoing acculturation, such as: immigrants, refugees or sojourners. *Immigrants*— Are people who usually move in order to achieve a better life elsewhere; *refugees* — People who leave their homeland to escape significant human rights violations such as torture, imprisonment, threat of harm or otherwise dangerous environments *sojourners* — Individuals who travel abroad to attain a particular goal within a specified period of time: tourists, students, military personnel, expatriate workers (van Oudenhoven, 2006).

Formal research on acculturation originated within the Anglo-Saxon tradition of anthropology, and was further developed within sociology. In fact, Powell in 1883 was the first person to have used the term *acculturation*. For him, acculturation was concerned to psychological changes induced by cross-cultural imitation. On the other hand, Simons, in 1901 and from the sociological point of view, regarded acculturation as a two-way process of reciprocal accommodation. The classical concept of acculturation was also developed within the same anthropological tradition and refers to the processes of cultural contact, through which societies, or social groups, receive and assimilate elements from other cultures. This definition was coined by Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton and Melville Herskovits in 1936: "Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield *et al.*, 1936, p. 149). In 1967, Graves proposed the term *psychological acculturation*, which refers to the changes an individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures, or participating in the acculturation that one's cultural or ethnic group is undergoing. Unlike Redfield *et al.*'s definition, proposed as a group-level phenomenon, psychological research recognized acculturation as an individual-level phenomenon. Another example of what is meant by acculturation is given by Marcel Danesi (2000):

A process by which continuous contact between two or more distinct societies causes cultural change" [...] "It unfolds in one or two ways: 1. The beliefs, conventions, customs and codes of the societies in contact may merge, producing a single culture; 2. One society may completely absorb the cultural patterns of another, transforming them radically. (p. 4)

A more actual definition was provided in 2004 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM): "Acculturation is the progressive adoption of elements of a foreign culture (ideas, words, values, norms, behavior, institutions) by persons, groups or classes of a given culture" (IOM, 2007, 23). For the purposes of this paper I will use the understanding of *acculturation* provided by John W. Berry within the interdisciplinary field of *cross-cultural psychology* where acculturation is seen as "the process of cultural and psychological change that results following meeting between cultures" (Berry, 2006; Berry & Sam, 2010). From this point of view, groups and individuals experience different degrees of acculturation, and their conceptualization, identification and definition are completely distinct in spite of having the same cultural background and having lived in the same environment.

Explosive migration

Immigrants abandon their native *semiosphere* (Lotman, 1996) — The space of possibility for all semiotic codes; without a plurality of codes, there can be no new information and no language with which to communicate, due to several motifs, ranging from concrete socio-economical reasons up to aspirations for having intercultural exchanges with other societies, for instance: a) the simplest desire to improve their living conditions; b) the urge to obtain a residence permit, get a job in order to earn money and send it back to their relatives in their home country; c) political factors; d) the absence of opportunities for human development: the lack of jobs, the low incomes people perceive, the poor quality of education centers and so on; d) the ambition to

pursue a dream and fulfill it in other culture. All these motifs are translated into the immanent need of searching for self-definition and identity-construction. However, they are also merged with the natural trend of cultures to open up opportunities for semiotic-crossing boundaries and the generation of new meanings. Whichever the reason people have to leave their home culture, migration portrays personal quests for meaning and belonging.

I recall the notion of *cultural hero* (Lotman, 2001), tore-establishing an analogy with the individuals who overlap their own cultural codes with the other codes that belong to the host culture. In spite of the romanticism that this notion might imply, I agree with both Lotman and Portis-Winner (2002) when I also consider immigrants as a type of *cultural heroes* who dare to go outside of their native cultures, crossing boundaries with a view to establish themselves in alien cultures, full of new texts, languages and sign systems that must master to survive. In such a way, I would like to stress one of the most powerful reasons that people have for leaving their home culture. They migrate pursuing an idea that most of the time is not real, going to other countries in order *to fulfill their dreams*. In other words, people leave behind their culture due to the urgent need to make their lives meaningful by means of satisfying certain material, or symbolic, expectations. *Dream* is considered by Lotman as "the father of semiotic process" (Lotman, 2009, p. 145) due to its capacity to host uncertainty and provoke subsequent changes. The dreams are personal and they can neither be penetrated by other people, nor interfere in someone else's dream, therefore they are seen as a *personal language* (Lotman, 2009). Every immigrant has his/her own reasons to depart, to get out of the home culture. It's a process that hosts semiotic expectations and prepares people for cultural shock, for the uncertainty of entering another culture, discover it and discover themselves.

Thus Lotman (1998) borrowing from Illya Prigogine's ideas, pointed out the existence of 2 types of dynamic processes in culture: on the one hand, there are processes that occur in equilibrium, and on the other hand there are processes that take place in imbalanced situations. The former ones function as "replies" to the laws of linear causality (reversible and symmetrical, as well as totally predictable). The latter are asymmetrical, imbalanced, appearing at bifurcation points; these spots are defined as *explosive moments*. In such a way, explosion presupposes a sudden, unpredictable and irreversible change in the event's direction that deals with several explicit issues within the dynamics of culture. Cultural explosions are produced thanks to the introduction of texts, persons, or a small number of people, and only them can unleash a general change within the system. I propose to consider migratory processes as cultural explosions since they are produced by means of the introduction of people within new cultural systems.

Explosions present 2 moments: 1) the moment of explosion, where unpredictability appears, the moment of open possibilities, and 2) the moment after explosion, where communicative and autocommunication processes reach complementarity, producing cultural self-descriptions and inherent self-understanding. However, there is a preliminary moment that has place when immigrants decide to migrate, either looking for a better future, or just to open the window of their dreams. This moment is *explicit*, the moment of both the open possibilities and decision-making. It comes out when people choose to hide beneath load trucks, or into caravans that would take them, by

ferry, to the Iberian Peninsula waiting to find their own way to the European coasts. In this moment, both consciousness and perception are separated. The migration event is seen as an unpredictable situation that will provoke "a retrospective reflection" (in the lotmanian terminology) in the second moment of the explosion. The exchange of information that has place between people with different cultural backgrounds (autochthonous and immigrants) produce new meanings; the latter start to assimilate new texts by means of subsequent acts of translation. The second moment, concerning to the new duplication of the event in the structure of memory, takes place with the "passage of time", and according to Peeter Torop (2009) by means of the self-descriptions: "[...] through the suppression of the explosion, after which the post-explosive moment, that is the moment for describing the explosion, will be actualized. The chaos and diversity of communicative processes will become ordered in auto-communicative self-description" (p. 37). I will delve into this moment below when I will discuss the processes of autocommunication and self-descriptions.

Bidimensional approaches: the own and the other

People can experience acculturation only in a new foreign environment and under certain specific conditions. Concrete groups who carry out certain activities in new host societies usually experience it. Acculturation is carried out in a bidimensional way i.e., both the host culture and the group of immigrants experience acculturation in multiple and different ways.

An alternative to start with this issue is to take a glance at every group by portraying their particular context. This task might be achieved through particular narratives clarified in light of an *ethnographic choice*. Along the years there has been a long debate within the anthropological paradigm, since several researchers have warned us about some basic requirements that ethnography must fulfill (see Geertz, 2000; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Portis-Winner, 1990; Agar, 2006). For instance ethnography might be: *reflexive*ⁱ (Herzfeld, 1983; Goddall, 2000), but also has to clarify the type of subjectivity described in the general theory. Regardless the type of ethnography chosen we have to focus on the general methodology applied in our particular context.

This matter takes us to the field of cultural anthropology, which will help us to generate a *transdisciplinary* language of description for our object of study. Hence, I consider unnecessary to mention the manifold contributions that cultural anthropology has provided to cultural semioticsⁱⁱ, and will also not discuss the crucial role it has played in culture studies towards the analysis of sign systems as "cognitive social systems" (Randviir, 2004). Nonetheless I would like to assert that the interaction of cultural anthropology with cultural semiotics is a must if we have to cope with acculturation. In this research, anthropology and cultural semiotics converge as two culture-studying sciences that complement each other.

Acculturative traits: Issues of identity generation

Acculturation affects people in manifold and several ways. Despite, there is a chance to know more about how does acculturation work, and to which cultural layers affects the most. This happens through the scrutiny of identity-generation processes. As we already know, the question of identification is a very complex topic inasmuch identities

are features that respond to certain degrees of subjectivity and self-definition, although there can't be a self without a self-image, or a self-concept. According to Irene Portis-Winner, *self* is a "semiotic, sociocultural construct that provides meaning to experience, making communication possible" (Portis-Winner, 1983b, p. 263). The identity-construction processes are given either in the same culture, or within different cultures. From this point of view, we have to delve into identity issues from two points of view: the host culture and the immigrant population. Both groups have different criteria for selecting texts that express their identity.

Identity does not only depend on a motionless set of cultural traits, but is consolidated in many signifying practices. I state that identities are not only multidimensional, but are continuously moving and changing, thereby they might be: post-figurative/co-figurative (Mead, 1970), collective (Lotman, 2001), variable (Cohen, 1994), enacted in cultural practices (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007); bicultural (Agar, 1991), lying on discourse (Van Leeuwen, 2009) and so on.

For the purposes of this paper I will ascribe myself to the notion coined by Thomas A. Shaw, who has seen identity as a "signifying practice and [that] refers to people's use of a range of sign vehicles in an ongoing process of communication that is both intrapersonal and interpersonal and that simultaneously serves both psychological and social functions" (Shaw, 1994, p. 84). In these terms, and broadly speaking, identification has to do with the manifold ways people choose to interact and to belong to certain groups, seeking to share certain signs and sign systems in order to make their environments meaningful.

A second trait that I would like to stress is *ethnicity*. The concept of ethnic identity, as a layer of identity, is quite complex as well. As a matter of fact, there is no agreement upon definition for the term. Usually it is seen as covering several aspects, such as self-identification, feelings of memberships and commitment to a group, senses of shared values and different attitudes towards one's own ethnic group (Phinney, 1990). Nevertheless, membership in ethnic groups is changeable and not fixed. How ethnic consciousness is acquired depends on the everyday interaction different ethnic groups keep, especially on how they exchange texts. For the sake of this work, I have chosen the understanding of ethnicity developed by Anthony Cohen, who has "melted" the concepts of identity and culture with ethnicity, which according to him "is the space where culture, identity and symbol meet [...] Ethnicity has become a mode of action and of representation: it makes reference to a decision people make to depict themselves or others symbolically as the bearers of a certain cultural identity" (Cohen, 1994, p. 50-51). In accordance with the previous statement, ethnicity is grounded on two main levels: the *symbolic level* and that of *self-consciousness*. The former entails a certain *plurality*, i.e., every individual has her/ his own perception of ethnic identity; the latter is related to the fact that although ethnicity has several meanings, it is always expressed by means of consistent signifiers. Cohen adds to this particular treatment of ethnicity the notion of *boundary*, which is seen by him as a matter of liminality and consciousness instead of "institutional dictation" (Cohen 1994, p. 56). By means of the boundary, individuals from different ethnic groups realize they are in contact with one another in meaningful environmentsⁱⁱⁱ. Therefore, they can become aware of their ethnic identity, either generating a sense of membership and commitment to a group, or excluding themselves from these groups. In addition, the post-modern understanding of ethnicity (Fischer,

1986) have shifted to the negotiation of multiple subjects over a group of boundaries and identities, trying to point out the dialectics of the objective and the subjective in the process of ethnic identity formation and maintenance.

One of the ways in which several immigrants around the world make their acculturation experience meaningful is by means of recreating communities of immigrants in their cities/towns of residence (the largest and most successful examples of this communities have been developed by Chinese or Indian immigrants in several countries through the creation of "Chinese neighborhoods" or "little Indias"), and whose main basis is ethnic. I insist, choosing a treatment of ethnicity is up to the group of immigrants we are working with. One more time, the ethnographic choice will bring forth the sets of regular signifiers by means of people decide to express their ethnic identity, as well as their commitment to one or another ethnic community. In such a way, I suggest to explore the generation of identity traits by establishing an opposition between the identity-generation mechanisms of both ethnic groups, the host culture and the immigrant population.

Unraveling the self: self-construction

Autocommunication

The internalization of identity and self-construction in immigrant communities takes place at the hand of pre-existing cultural categories. Inasmuch as they start to interact with their peers in their own culture they learn about their prevailing values, cultural codes, ways of life and so on. Through interpersonal communication in the native culture they unconsciously start to learn what does it mean to be a member of that culture. This process enhances the identity up to the moment in which one has to choose one or another type of identity.

By way of delving into the process of identity-generation on the individual level, I will illustrate that immigrants might identify themselves in the settling culture context through a complex processes that copes with 3 aspects of self-understanding: auto-communication, self-description and self-identification. The first process that is on the pathway to the self is called *autocommunication*. Consequently, I appeal to Roman Jakobson's notions of two types of communication, the processes of dialoguing with the other, and dialoguing with the self. Jakobson (1956) considers communication as a transferring of information from one source to another, resulting an increase in the amount of information the addresser has. Lotman (1998) on the other hand, distinguished another type of communication in culture defining it as *autocommunication*, which is seen as the communicative situation where one person addresses to himself/herself: an "I-I" (in opposition to the typical communicative situation "I-You"). In this model the information carrier remains the same, but in the process of communication the message is reformulated acquiring new meaning by means of introducing an additional, second code. Thus, the original message starts to be recoded into traits of its structure, obtaining features of a new message (p. 44). This system of communication produces a reformulating in the person, although it doesn't entirely cover the self since it is detonated by external codes that alter the context of the communicative situation, producing an increase in information, as well as its inherent transformation and reformulation. Classical autocommunication examples are in poetry

for Lotman — Where a secondary poetical code is introduced into the text. By means of this code the message becomes a tool for reconstructing oneself. To cite an instance, Kati Lindström (2010) has provided a new approach to autocommunication, arguing that people, when inserting and contemplating landscapes, develop attachments to them through an autocommunicative process that is done by means of using perceptual markers, i.e., sensorial information, bodily movements, or rhythms. Thus, immigrants could also use a gamut of perceptual markers of landscape, as secondary codes in order to autocommunicate, because the difference of both native and new “host” landscapes might be salient in several aspects.

Self-descriptions

Lotman pointed out that in the core of the semiospheres, some sections aspiring to the self-description are prone to become rigid, to lose flexibility and to self-regulate. For him, the self-description stage is "a necessary response to the threat of too much diversity within the semiosphere" (Lotman 2001, p. 128). Self-descriptions are not only the most complex manifestation of culture's organization, but are also based on autocommunication and the seeking for self-understanding. Human beings are also related with the same mechanisms, for determining their identities they need to describe themselves. The languages of description are closely related to the essence of culture. When we speak about self-descriptions, we can talk about *cultural self-models*. Then, we can choose among 3 types of self-models: 1) cultural self-models whose main aim is maximum similarity to the existing culture; 2) the creation of cultural self-models that differ from current cultural practices, and may even have been conceived for changing those practices. Here, both the culture's unity and its models acquire an ideal status; 3) self-models that exist and function as an ideal cultural self-consciousness, but separately from culture itself and without being oriented towards it (Lotman 1998, p. 91). Lotman does not separate conflicts between culture and its self-models. Furthermore, the creation of one of another self-model represents the creativity of culture.

Self-identification

Self-identification is one of the most powerful semiotic resources throughout immigrant generate, and convey certain identities. These are grounded on commitment and feelings of belonging to a concrete ethnic group, but also on some other feelings whose main aim is distinguish himself/herself from the other members of the group. Self-identifying with one category or with another, with one ethnic group or with another, implies another instance of self-description and autocommunicative process. I deem self-identification as a continuous engagement with the self whose main consequence is the generation of multiple, personal and ethnic identities, as well as an intrinsic acknowledgement of the own. Individuals are inclined to perform several degrees of self-identification and concerning this issue. J. Berry has related the *acculturation strategies* (see below) with *degrees of ethnic self-identification*, claiming that when individuals show strong identification with both groups, there is integration, or even *biculturalism*^{iv}.

Case Study: Moroccan Immigrant Youth in the Basque Country

In the upcoming sections I will expose the results obtained in a larger research, where I have explored the ways in which the transcultural process of acculturation happens. This research has been made through a case study with a group of 20 immigrant teenagers in the province of Gipuzkoa, in the northern Spanish region of the Basque Country. This region was chosen because I wanted to implement the study in a region within Spain, where migratory phenomena have recently taken place. The fact that the Basque Country is culturally and linguistically different from other Spanish autonomous communities was also taken into account and, in fact, is one of the main contrasts. I chose to work with young members from the Moroccan community mainly for 3 reasons: firstly, adolescence is a period when developmental issues raised by migration are of particular salience. Their experiences during and after migration involve changes that influence their transition from childhood to adulthood; making important decisions about who they are and who they hope to be in the future i.e., they are *acquiring* their identities. Secondly, all of my informants were over 18, but they were *unaccompanied immigrant minors* as defined by Bravo Rodríguez (2005) following his arrival to Spain/the Basque Country. This group stands out among other immigrants groups due to their special social status of being minors, having no supportive social structures (namely, families), and being Muslims. Thirdly, I as an immigrant in the Basque Country was looking at a very different ethnic culture than my own. This choice allows for much homogeneous results that permit to test the theoretical concepts better.

For our purposes I departed from a holistic logic, so I considered the semiosphere behavior, as well as the connection of its parts, as a reflection of the interaction of both levels: *diachronic* (intertwined semiospheres of different times) and *synchronic* (different levels). Herein, I depart from a holistic conception of an *ethnic semiotic space*, which is crossed by multiple boundaries on several layers, languages and texts. The same applied for both ethnic spaces (Basque and Moroccan).

This set of Moroccan teenagers crossed the boundaries from their native semiosphere towards the Basque larger semiosphere in order to establish relations of convergence with the Basques. Immigrants — semiotic monads, as I pointed out above, require a minimum of 2 codes in order to establish a dialogue with other semiotic monads. Nevertheless, there is another condition for establishing this relationship, and its called *dialogue*. A dialogic situation has to be pinpointed before: "the semiotic situation precedes the instruments of semiosis" (Lotman 2001, p. 143-144). The dialogic situation that we found in the case of Basques is the need for multicultural conditions in the Basque Country; with this I mean the need of manpower in the Basque Country before the economical growth that it has experienced since the nineties: a quick industrialization, the lack of qualified manpower and the decrease in the birthrate, combined with the immanent need of a modern European multicultural society, established the conditions for dialogue with immigrants from several countries. On the other hand, from the point of view of Moroccans, we observe the need of improving their living conditions, their economical situation and the dreams fulfillment. All these matters are also mixed up with the natural trend of cultures to open up opportunities for semiotic-crossing boundaries and the generation of new meanings. When this immigrant youth crosses the boundary, there is an exchange of information with the host semiosphere whose outcome is a transformation of the dialoguing texts. Dialogue also presupposes *asymmetry* and it can found in 2 ways: First in the difference between the languages that participants in dialogue use, secondly, in the changing directions of

the flowing and ebb of information, where participants alternate positions from addressers to addressees producing discrete dialogic situations (Lotman 2001, p. 143). Since these information exchanges will be assimilated, subsequent acts of translation will occur. *Translation* was conceived as mechanisms that form the ground for thinking activity: "the elementary act of thinking is translation" and "the elementary mechanism of translation is dialogue" (Lotman, 2001). Translations contribute to gradual or explosives re-shapings in the self-descriptions of Moroccan youth.

When our informants are inserted in new environments, where they are forced to grapple with *intercultural communication*,^{vi} they must negotiate their sense of identity in order to face the everyday life, which is imposed on them. This not only implies dealing with new people, spaces or languages, but also confronting new discourses and cultural practices that include ideological, economical, legal and political issues. Additionally, there is another important issue, which is related with the question of identification by an other in the larger society (in this case, the Other may be personified by Spaniards/ Basques/ another immigrants from the same ethnic group or from different ethnic groups, namely Latin-Americans, Romanians, Gypsies or Africans). Clear outcomes of these processes are the constraints of ethnic categories, and the inherent exposition to discrimination or racism by other people. In this manner our Moroccan youth, as any other set of immigrants, has to readjust not only their identities but also the ways in which they express them. How they show their identities is up to the contexts in which they are coping with. Among other categories, they are: *teenagers*, *immigrants*, *Moroccans* and *Muslims*, and must balance their performance in both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. Concerning this issue, Hala Mahmoud (2009) argues that people tend to dissent in what they manifest intrapersonally and interpersonally because the manifold identities people have, as well as how do they perceive them. She stresses the role that feelings play in the processes of internalization and externalization, including the transition from one level to another (Mahmoud 2009, p. 287). I agree with her in the role feelings have in the performance of identities, however, my point here is that in order to show how Moroccan immigrants distinguish the development of their feelings for re-ordering their identities, we must turn to *autocommunication*.

Dialoguing with the self

Prayer is an example of autocommunication and Muslim cultures are more oriented towards this mechanism —*Ramadan*^{vii}, for instance, may be seen as one of the most significant cultural practices of autocommunication; it is expressed in the form of fast with inherent symbolic endowment with meanings of purification and release. Nonetheless, it affronts several changes when is inserted in non-Muslim environments. This device works with the introduction of secondary codes to the information contents. For getting acquainted with the new host environment, our teenagers introduce a series of codes for adapting the native Basque codes to their own codes. The first codes throughout they start to remodel themselves are the new natural languages — *primary modeling systems* (Lotman & Uspensky, 1979, p. 68), which must master for translating the everyday reality. Based on the interviews realized we can say that most of them stressed the importance of learning Spanish. This linguistic commitment did not function in the same way with Basque, though. Besides the linguistic codes, there are some others that function as secondary ones to the information content i.e., religious

code, culinary code, dress code and so on. I consider *style* as one of the most important codes that our interviewees use to autocommunicate. With regard to this matter, Dick Hebdidge (1979) sees style, and its immanent generation process, as a complex question that is not only related with the organization of intentional, meaningful behavioral patterns, but also with distinctive behavioral practices; people express several meanings that are related with identification and playing specific roles in society, among others "who they are" in terms of belonging either to a group, or a class, but also in terms of gender, age and so on. Thereby, individuals (particularly during the adolescence) seek to convey information about themselves by means of what they say, or what they dress, but also by virtue of the people whom they spend time and hang out with. These processes: negating, ignoring, stressing, or re-interpreting received meanings, are style-generation processes that are developed both in terms of content (as a self-image), and in terms of portable symbolic objects. I argue that this is an autocommunicative process because it helps to organize their individuality. Strictly speaking, through autocommunication the "me" is transformed, readjusting his individuality" (Lotman 1998, p. 28). Therefore, we can see style as a *sign-vehicle* that acts as a secondary code combining the development of other semiotic resources like attitudes, feelings, or the intentions of marking differences with other individuals. This is closely related with Theo van Leeuwen's distinction between two functions of style: *social* and *individual*. In the first place, style is *social* because not only permits people to express self-interpretations of the everyday life, but their own values and attitudes, as well as sharing them with other peers. On the other hand, the *individual* function of style lies on the fact that it introduces the very important resource of *choice*; by means of it people decide how to talk, to dress, to behave and to act according to certain patterns of age, gender, class, occupation, or faith. They are subjectively internalized and expressed as individual choices (Van Leeuwen, 2009, p. 212). Therefore style, as the result of this autocommunication process, enhances the self of the people and starts to be "spoken" through the multiple ways in which they want to express two main issues: first, their feeling of membership and commitment to a certain group; secondly the need to differ from their same-age peers within the same group, or among other groups. The former is carried out by means of self-description and self-identification, choosing one identity or another. The latter is expressed through the construction of a personal style that is deployed as a set of unordered culturally meaningful signifiers: the way in which clothes are worn, the readjustment of traditional Muslim dress code, the hairstyle, the color of this or that jacket, or even in how certain physical artifacts and symbols are deployed on the body: tattoos, the amount of earrings they use, the material of the necklaces they wear, and so on.

A further particular signifier that is salient in individual style refers to choosing one type of *speech* or another; I mean the use of *slangs* (specific languages). By way of slangs we can realize and measure different beliefs of the speaker. In addition, it is possible to contrast certain facts that are interpreted individually. Our informants can choose among the languages of streets, or certain conversational style that connotes the way in which they speak with a set of peers, or with their acquaintances.

Summing up, we have seen how Moroccan immigrant youth carries out some autocommunicative processes that will unleash in the generation of individual styles. Autocommunication provides a transformation of the self-image, translating the existing information into new signifiers that flow with the forms of codes, instead of

messages. What occurs is not the creation of objects and meanings from nowhere, but a transformation and readjustment of what is already given within the Basque society, into new patterns that are new meaning-carriers, and a subsequent adaptation into the new context. By introducing the code of style we can see how people is stimulated and enhanced on their selves, creating attachment and awareness of membership to certain groups. Style also remarks the action of *choosing*, inserting sentiments of self-modeling and change. I argue that through the construction of an own style, Moroccan youth is walking on the first pathways to self-description and the seeking of identity. In the next section I will delve in the issue of self-description.

Self-description(s) and acculturation strategies

Moroccan youth, as meaning-generators subjects, have to self-describe for dealing with their acculturation process. My stance is the following: in order to generate cultural self-models they must choose one of the *acculturation strategies* proposed by J. Berry: *Assimilation* is chosen when individuals do not want to maintain their identity and start seeking close interaction with either the host culture, or some other cultures. *Separation* is the strategy chosen when individuals place a high value on keeping their own culture and avoid interactions with members of the host culture. *Integration* is the strategy elected when individuals have an interest in maintaining their own culture, but also having interactions with the native group, or with some other groups. *Marginalization* is defined when there is a lack of interest in cultural maintenance (due to reasons of enforced cultural loss) and little interest in interweaving relationships with others (often is due to reasons of discrimination or exclusion). The four strategies are constantly changing rather than static (Berry, 2011, p. 2.6). Writing further on the matter of identification, I evoke the notion of *disidentification*, which has to do with the active rejection and distancing of a particular group. It's an issue that is closely related when the content of one (Muslim) identity is seen as contradictory to that of the other (Basque in this case) (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007, p. 1450). A last issue that I want to mention is related with the relationship between acculturation strategies and the perception of discrimination; what I mean is that those individuals who have experienced high discrimination are more likely to prefer separation, whereas those others who have experienced less discrimination prefer integration.

In this research I measured the selection of the acculturation strategies on the basis of the answers that teenagers gave to particular questions concerning the following issues: d) social relations, e) individual construction, f) social constructions and, g) future perspectives. Besides of these questions I considered the length of residence either in Spain, or in the Basque Country. The informants were predisposed to prefer integration rather than the other strategies. Whereas all of them agreed upon the fact that there are traces of discrimination in both the Spanish and the Basque societies, 15 of them showed clear preferences towards integration and better adaptation, while 3 were more oriented towards separation. I must say that neither of them opted for assimilation, but one was swinging between separation and marginalization. Finally, one more fluctuated between separation and disidentification. The 5 informants that were inclined towards some sort of separation have experienced higher levels of discrimination and, even insults and injuries from natives and the police.

On the *individual* level, acculturation implies that human beings undergo new situations and changes that range from shifts in ways of speaking, dressing, and eating, but also to experience stress, anxiety or depression. Persons who overcome these issues tend to adapt better, therefore to integrate. Individuals who integrate better are prone to balance their maintenance of cultural heritage and identity, as well as the relationships with the host culture. The same happens on the *group level*, groups who overcome the acculturation process, tend to incorporate better in the host culture, to develop healthy social relationships with other ethnic groups and to exchange cultural texts; therefore they integrate in the host culture (Berry et al., 2006, p. 230).

Additionally, culture shock is a phenomenon that happens during the acculturation process and is experienced by people who spend certain amount of time in a foreign culture, and is caused by confrontations with a different culture. Feichtinger and Fink (1998) have stated that culture shock might be *individual* or *collective*. The former taking place on the level of individuals who experience certain feelings such as: uneasiness, psychological and physical problems (depression, stress, helplessness, powerlessness among others). The latter is explained when an abrupt change on the existing social and cultural system takes place. In this manner, this collective cultural shock is not caused by geographical movements abroad, but rather due to internal processes in societies (Feichtinger & Fink, 1998, p. 305). Our informants, as any other immigrant with more than a few months in the host society, experience degrees of individual and collective culture shock.

Rather than consider this process as different, I see culture shock as a *necessary* phase of acculturation. After the immigration and during acculturation, informants are in constant dialogic processes, having to cope with the amount of information that is constantly received within the intercultural communication with Basques and Spaniards. Consequently, they have to select the information and depurate it to create certain self-models that will transport them to the self-understanding.

My following statement is that immigrant youth generates self-models by means of *choosing* certain texts from the whole gamut of semiotic resources that have at their disposition. With this I mean certain amount of ethnic choices that help to readjust their identity. One of the most important self-descriptions is to keep performing *cultural practices* and *rituals* like *Ramadan* or *Eid-al-Adha*^{viii} whose development is transformed since it is carried out within an alien semiotic space that is rather secular, instead of traditional. Ronald Inghelhart opposes the traditional dimension of the society to the secular one. The first societies are conceived as societies in which religion is very important, whereas in the second ones, religion is not (Inghelhart, 2008). In both, the transformation implies an inherent alteration in the plane of expression rather than in the plane of content. In Ramadan, a variation happens in the hours for praying and a fracture in the fast, mainly due to the incompatibility of schedules and rhythms in the everyday life of the host society. In *Eid-al-Adha* the change in the expression plane is more marked because sometimes it might be carried out in quite unusual conditions. As an example, *Quran* says that all Muslims who can afford it must sacrifice their best domestic animals (usually a cow, but can also be a goat, sheep or ram). In Spain this ritual practice is known as *fiesta del cordero* (goat's holiday). Its name comes from the fact that goats are the most typical slaughtered animals, as well as the cheapest ones. This practice implies big gatherings with other Muslims. Our informants, lacking of

families, try to gather with other Muslims who can afford it and develop the ritual. These practices are kept in order to attain maximum similarity to the existing culture.

Another example of self-model is illustrated by means of *choosing a partner*. Quite often in Muslim societies, parents choose children's partners and fix marriages in advance. In spite of this Moroccan society is more open-minded concerning this issue. Our informants showed that most of teenagers don't really mind about the ethnicity of their actual partners (for those who have one). The great majority confirmed some expectations for getting married and raising children. Notwithstanding, it was common that our informants have chosen as ideal wives, women with whom they share an ethnic link, rather than someone from a different ethnic group or at least, someone whose faith was Muslim. From the opposite position, the only female in the sample didn't care neither about the ethnicity of his probable husband, nor about his religion. I assume this ideal choice as a self-description whose main aim is to obtain maximum similarity to the existing culture as well.

One more example of self-model has to do with *alimentation and eating habits*. Since Muslims have particular patterns of alimentation, for instance the *Halal*^{ix} food, they tend to carefully select what they eat and how. Another example is choosing ethnic-supermarkets (owned by Muslims) to buy groceries, Halal butcheries, or ethnic restaurants (either Turk, Moroccan, Lebanese or Pakistani restaurants). Choosing this type of self-models clearly entails an ideal approach of the native culture, that is somehow fulfilled through concrete "ethnic" signifiers.

A final self-model throughout they express an ideal self-consciousness is a material object: the residence permit that is expressed materially as *ID-cards*. By means of this objects they can achieve feelings of satisfaction and commitment, but also senses of being successful. This particular self-models are separated from their culture, and are not even oriented towards it, indeed. Nevertheless, ID cards are objects that convey particular meanings ascribed to future expectations. From 20 teenagers, 19 had a residence permit and just one person lived completely illegal. Everybody was convinced that having a residence permit was really important in order to deal with the authorities, or if they would manage to get a job, or studying something.

Choosing ethnicities

Concerning the issue of ethnic categories, the only category that was shared by all the informants and the most constant, was the characterization as *Muslim*. This general type is grounded not only on the basis of commitment to religious traits, but also on the facts that it has been "taught", "inherited", and strengthened during the acculturation process. I designated the second type of self-identification as *monoculturally Moroccan*. 11 people were ascribed to this category, and grounded on the basis of the type of received replies. This was one of the strongest and more constant self-identifications. The third type was called *mixed up*. Only 2 persons elected it, with some nuances however. Both of them were inclined to *biculturalism* showing better patterns of adaptation and integration. On the one hand, the first individual defined himself as *Moroccan* firstly, then *Spanish* and finally, *Basque*. On the other hand, the second individual defined herself as *Berber*, later on, *Moroccan*, and eventually, *Spanish*. As a matter of fact, she mentioned that a good knowledge of Basque would enhance her Basque identification.

Apart from ethnicity, the length of residence played an important role in the determination of this category. The fourth type was *Moroccan-Latin* and was chosen by only one individual. It was clearly defined on the basis of good social relations with Latin Americans, rather than Spaniards or Basques. The fifth type was completely defined on the basis of ethnicity: *Berber-Moroccan*, and was chosen by only one individual. The same individual was the first who chose Amazigh^x as his mother tongue. The sixth category was more oriented towards a mixed identity, but still was quite clear: *Moroccan, but a little Basque*. Only one person chose it and his reason was the length of residence in the Basque Country. The seventh self-identification was based on the length of residence as well, and chosen by one person: *Moroccan, but a little Spanish*. The informant that chose it arrived to the city of Valencia from Morocco, and some time later he traveled to the Basque Country. The eighth self-identification was quite peculiar since it belonged to an individual who chose Amazigh as his mother tongue too. Nevertheless he didn't care about his categorization. The traditional dichotomy language-identity, who usually enhances the choice of a particular identity didn't work in this case. Only one individual chose the ninth self-identification. He was predisposed to be *monocultural* but he declared, "to be open to something else". The reason of choosing this category was his openness towards the Basque culture and his commitment to it: *Moroccan but open*. The final self-identification category was deemed as *legalized Moroccan*. It was chosen by the fourth Berber in the sample, who also said having Amazigh as his mother tongue. This choice was based on the recent acquisition of a residence permit.

Summing up, we are in front of 10 types of self-identification that go from the general to the particular, going ahead from the shared largest category: being Muslim. Through this little stroll we could realize how Moroccan youth chose among a multifarious set of identities in order to express their own in terms of membership and commitment to a certain group. As well as how they differ from each other. Portis-Winner sees self-identification as an *ethnic function*. I agree with her in the sense that by fulfilling this ethnic function, our informants present descriptive materials that characterize themselves (Portis-Winner, 1983a, p. 122).

Commenting the other: Basque traits

In this final section I will briefly account for some issues related with Basque identity markers. Basque identity has been strongly re-shaped in the last 40 years and the Basques have gone from being a hermetic culture, mainly based on folk and rural structures with a population mostly centered on peasantry, to a culture that has been moving forward by means of industrialization. This radical shift happened due to several historical, economical and political reasons; for instance, the industrialization process came together with migration waves that brought thousands of workers from other parts of Spain, resulting in an increase of living standards. Furthermore, the end of Francisco Franco's dictatorship in 1976, the enactment of a new Spanish constitution in 1978, and the Basque nationalism's awakening supported by the separatist group *ETA*, are all strong factors in this identity shift as well.

Based on the intercultural interaction that I have had along the years with Basques, I suggest that Basque identity is grounded on the basis of *language* and *ethnicity*, in opposition to the identity-traits of my informants. Firstly, identity is focused on the

inherent relation of language and culture; hence Basque identity is linguistically centered.

In a nutshell, Basque or Euskera is spoken by around 900,000 people distributed throughout 4 Spanish provinces, Navarre, and 3 French provinces. Basque is probably the oldest language spoken in Europe and itself makes up one of the 3 European linguistic families —Indo-European, Finno-Ugric and Basque. Among other languages spoken in Spain such as Galician, Catalan or Aranese, was banned by the dictator Francisco Franco for a period of 40 years. This ban prohibited the speaking, teaching and using of these languages in every layer of the social and institutional life, resulted in a significant decrease in native speakers of these languages. Language started to be considered a symbol of the resistance against the repressive politics held by Franco during the dictatorship. On the other hand, ETA's military action not only gave legitimacy to the defense and promotion of Basqueness and *Euskera*, but also provided credibility, and people started to believe in the need of encouraging the use of the Basque language in every social layer. Thus without any governmental support, people started to spread the language little by little. Later on, and after the dictatorship, they started to make progress with the first generations of bilingual children.

The second component of identity is based on the generation of a set of dialectical relations between linguistic and ethnic identity. Basque ethnicity on the other hand, was produced in a political environment insofar as nationalistic movements arose during the 20th century. However, during the last years, ethnicity has been reshaping, adapting itself to the arrival of modernity, and will continue reshape insofar new immigrant waves arrive. The arrival of immigration to the Basque Country is also contributing to the readjustment of their identity by means of developing new politics of integration in so far people get acquainted with the Basque ethnic culture and with the language. Last but not least, immigrants are taking their cultural diversity with them. Along the last 5 years I have witnessed some changes in the Basque culture. Namely, the insertion of immigrants in politics, the opening of "ethnic" restaurants, shops, schools and mosques.

The exchanging of texts that has been happened between the host culture and the immigrants has produced an increase in the information, contributing to the dynamics of the Basque culture. Nevertheless, this is a topic that still can't be measured, so we must wait at least 5 more years for showing better results.

Concluding remarks

In the course of this work I have provided some theoretical suggestions, supplied with practical applications that helped me to show how acculturation works. I have deemed the immigration processes as explosive phenomena that are grounded on the basis of the Lotmanian concept of *cultural explosion*. This process is also one of the bases for the approach to the own and its dialectical relationship with the other. Furthermore, I have proposed that the management of the self is based on a triple relationship implying autocommunication, self-description and self-identification.

Through the examination of a case study I have illustrated these suggestion. In such a way we have seen how immigrants may introduce a series of codes for adapting the host codes to their own. Moreover, I have discussed the autocommunicative generation

process of codes that are fundamental during the adolescence, such as the linguistic code and style. In virtue of the fixation in the self, immigrants start to learn how to cope with the codes of the other, representing a first stage in the identity-generation process. When people *self-describe*, they do not only reorganize the amount of information received from the others, but also readjust the own cultural codes, and thus become able to translate them. The case study is focused on the re-creation of significant cultural practices that are closely related with choice: religious rituals, partner-selection and alimentation. Throughout the examination of self-identification, we can notice how people show their commitment and membership to a particular group, re-creating one (or more) ethnic identity, and distinguish from the others within the group. In order to achieve these self-descriptions, individuals have to choose one acculturation strategy. I have argued that only by choosing certain acculturation strategy, they will be able to face their acculturation process and proceed to create self-models. How well do they acculturate is not a mono-dimensional question, but a matter for the host society as well.

These multifarious mechanisms of meaning-generation — Identification, the seeking/constituting of the own and the other, are fundamental issues for cultural semiotics since they show how different cultural sign systems are interrelated and deployed, but also how they help to ascribe meanings and identities semiotically constructed. Acculturation is not a process of either losing the own culture, or achieving a new one, but rather of cultural readjustment and reorganization within particular contexts of interaction; is a sign of cultural diversity and dynamism. Given the fact that migrations are one of the oldest human processes, more comparative semiotic analysis should be planned and carried out. The worldwide increase in intercultural contacts and its mutual influences is one of the strongest arguments for continuing with researches on acculturation. Exploring new directions, choosing other ethnic groups as research targets, and larger samples of informants are necessary for implement further researches with more thorough fieldworks delivering new results and perspectives.

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Footnotes

ⁱFor Herzfeld, an ethnographic work "must be reflexive to the point of recognizing both the contingent nature of such interpretative devices, and the contextualized nature of all cultural phenomena" (Herzfeld 1983: 101).

ⁱⁱConcerning this issue, see Portis-Winner 1990, Torop 2006 and Mertz 2007.

ⁱⁱⁱSomehow, Cohen's definition is related with Lotman's definition of boundary in the sense that both differentiate the cultural *us* from *others*, regardless of the nature of the space of the *others*. Nonetheless, Cohen's boundary is seen as a fact of transgression that might exist, or might not because is a matter of choice. Lotman's boundedness is essential.

^{iv}Broadly speaking, *biculturalism* is related with the ability developed by people raised in multi-ethnic environments to develop more than one identity. Agar treats biculturalism as homologous to bilingualism and stresses the continuous character of culture (Agar 2006: 170).

^vIt is considered an unaccompanied foreign minor the person that being separated from both parents and other relatives, and not being "to the care of an adult whom for law or custom must be incumbent in his/her responsibility" tries to enter irregularly in the country or is already there without any authorization of residence permit" (Bravo Rodríguez 2005).

^{vi}The type of interaction between members with different cultural backgrounds is denominated as *intercultural communication*. Jef Verschueren, for instance, argues that this type of communication must be seen as "a form of communication that is approached from the pragmatic point of view" (Verschueren 2008: 22). This particular view is related with how meaning is generated and negotiated in interaction.

^{vii}*Ramadan* is the ninth Islamic month of the *Hijra* (literally "migration") calendar, it is considered as a holy month by Muslim communities in which they perform a month-long fasts, that lasts 29 or 30 days, from the sunrise until the sunset. Throughout the whole of the day they are not allowed to ingest any food or drink, nor smoking and of course, they can't hold any type of intercourse whatsoever. The *Hijra* refers to the time when the prophet Muhammad started his journey towards Mecca. Currently, we are in the year of 1433 *anno Hegirae* (in the year of the *Hijra*). There are three main religious reasons for celebrating Ramadan: a) The Quran was first revealed during this month; b) The gates of Heaven are open; c) The gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained up in Hell.

^{viii}The second most important ritual performed by Muslims happens during the so-called day of *Eid-al-Adha*, which commemorates the willingness of *Ibrahim* (Abraham for Christians) to sacrifice his son *Ismail* as an act of obedience to God.

^{ix}*Halal* stands for "permissible", and has to do with the ritualistic butchering of animals or with the food that is seen as permissible according to Islamic law.

^x*Amazigh* or *Berber* is a generic name for a language from the *Tamazight* linguistic group, whose languages are spoken widely in Northern Africa among 25 million people. These languages have their own official alphabet: *Tifinagh*. Furthermore, Berbers constitute the bulk of the population of the Maghrebian countries. In Morocco, they are the largest ethnic minority. Four interviewees in this work belong to this ethnic group.