

# GreeSE Papers

## Hellenic Observatory Discussion Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe



### **Transitioning from European Citizenship towards Immigration Identities after Brexit (the case of Greek diaspora in the UK)**

**Athanasia Chalari**

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# Transitioning from European Citizenship towards Immigration Identities after Brexit (the case of Greek diaspora in the UK)

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## ABSTRACT

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One of Brexit's aftermaths, has affected those UK residents who had been identified as 'EU citizens' prior Brexit, and re-identified as 'immigrants' after Brexit. Based on the case of 30 in-depth interviews with Greeks (European citizens), residing in UK between 5 and 20 years, this study explores identity transition as participants negotiate their citizenship and immigration identities. The main findings of this phenomenological study depict four aspects of identity negotiations (primarily involving ethnic, citizenship and immigration identities): a) erroneous resemblance between civic and cultural European identity, b) tendencies of prejudice towards non-European identities, c) coherent albeit unproblematic lack of belonging towards the host culture and d) underlying conflicting identity perceptions and experiences signalling ongoing identity(ies) in transition.

**Keywords:** Brexit, transitional, citizenship, immigration, ethnic identities.

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## Introduction

Identity as a concept, involves a complex and wide combination of collective, social as well as personal identities. Each person identifies more or less intensively with each one of the identity domains they may experience and be (or not be) aware of (eg ethnic, national, citizenship, immigration identities). Each of those identities entail certain meaning(s) not only ascribed by each individual concerned but also in relation to the social, regional as well as circumstantial context the individual finds oneself in, such as Brexit. In this context identities may change, either because the individual has initiated a change (eg Brexiteers), or because change was forced upon the individual (eg Remainers) but in both cases changes/transitions depend upon the circumstances (Brexit). In the case of Brexit, identity transitions may not even be intentional, anticipated or explicit (transitioning from the EU citizenship status of Immigration status).

This article aims in focusing on this distinctive socio-cultural consequence of Brexit, which may not have been observed in any former historical context, due to the uniqueness of Brexit *per se*. This concerns the identity transition experienced by the formerly classified 'EU citizens' residing in the UK prior to Brexit, who have been re-classified as 'immigrants' after Brexit. In other words, the EU citizenship status has been ceased and consequently replaced with the immigration status (and any relevant technical or policy related meaning attached to it). Although this shift may seem primarily technical, practical and legislative, this article will argue that it also involves inevitable process of identity(ies) transition for a specific group of people affected. In fact, the current study focuses on the case of Greek-born residents in the UK (as a case of EU citizens), and the possible ways they have experienced this particular identity(ies) transition. This study anticipates in becoming the first to reveal the uniqueness of such occurrence, in the hope that future studies will incorporate more EU nationalities currently residing in the UK under the settled and pre-settled status.

## Brexit

Britain is a multi-race and multicultural society tightly bounded by very strict immigration controls; is a relatively small nation (although significantly larger than Greece) with vastly over-blown self-conception about its place in the world, entailing clearly context-specific and nationally peculiar formulations of race, ethnicity and migration identities rooted in post-colonial immigration (Favell, 2001). Brexit has remained in our memory as a 'marginal' win of the Referendum of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2016, in which 52% of British voters opted in favour of Brexit while the marginal minority of 48% opted for "Remain" in the European Union (Andreouli and Nicholson, 2018). The main reasons leading to Brexit have been identified as

relating to political trust crisis and the global financial crisis (Osuna, et al, 2021). The socio-cultural drivers of Brexit have particularly been associated with nationalism and negative attitudes towards migration (Vasilopoulou, 2016; Virdee & McGeever, 2018; Andreouli, Greenland and Figgou, 2020), the need to control the national legislations and borders (Andreouli and Nicholson, 2018) along with a growing sense of insecurity, which has been generated by the long-term rise in inequality (Hobolt, 2016) fuelling xenophobia and racism (Khalili, 2017).

The legislative impact of Brexit primarily concerned UK citizens travelling or residing within the EU, signalling an increase in applications for EU citizenship by UK nationals residing in EU countries (Wood and Gilmartin, 2018) and EU residents travelling or residing in the UK; it also involved economical, political, diplomatic as well as socio-cultural consequences. The former has attracted most of the attention (Barrutia et al 2021; Hudson, 2022) whereas the later remains an under-researched territory. One of the core legislations which resulted from Brexit relates with the cease of the free movement of people between the UK and EU countries which applied to EU citizens residing in UK “EEA nationals acquire an automatic right of permanent residence in host members states in which they have legally resided for a continuous five-year period” (The House of Commons Library, 2019). The right of EEA nationals<sup>2</sup> to freely and permanently residence in UK (prior to the implementation of Brexit in 2020) was laid down in the Directive 2004/38, which is known as the Citizens’ Rights Directive. In the post-Brexit era, free movement and the right to permanent residence are implemented in domestic UK immigration law through the withdrawal agreement and the Immigration Regulations (2016). “In line with the Citizens’ Rights Agreements, the EU Settlement Scheme enables EU citizens resident in the UK by the end of the transition period at 11pm on 31 December 2020, and their family members, to obtain a UK immigration status”(Home Office, 2024). In few words, EU citizens residing in UK needed to obtain a UK immigration status after Brexit, which was not needed prior to Brexit. Therefore, Brexit signalled a transition for this specific group of people to alter, or shift, or adjust to a different status compared to the one they had prior to Brexit. Based on Office of National Statistics-Census 21 (ONS, 2021), the term “international migration” classification applies to those: “having a non-UK country of birth or holding a non-UK passport”. In England and Wales reside 3.6 million EU-born residents, and less than half held a UK passport. Thus in terms of official numbers: about half of 3,6 (out of 66.97) million of the UK population are EU-born and officially classified as ‘international Immigrants’ according to the Office for National Statistics-Census 21 (ONS, 2021)<sup>3</sup>. Regarding Greek-born residents in UK the ‘SEESOX-GDUK study’

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<sup>2</sup> EU citizens (who were living in UK by 31/12/2020) have been offered the right to apply for the EU Settlement scheme instead of applying for a visa (Gov.uk -a). Depending on the duration applicants have resided in the UK, they were entitled to a ‘settled’ or ‘pre-settled’ status which could lead to the right of applying for British Citizenship (Gov.uk-b).

<sup>3</sup> It has to be noted though that according to Home Office (2024) there were 6.9 million concluded applications from EU nationals by 2023, and the 3 nationalities with the highest number of applications

(Pratsinakis, 2021) reports that less than half of Greeks in UK, self-define as 'immigrants' and even fewer as 'expats'. Most of them self-define as 'citizens of the world/cosmopolitans' and/or 'European citizens'. Therefore, Greek diaspora in UK does not seem willing to adopt the classification of 'immigrant' as they insist in self-identifying as 'EU citizens'. The specific findings of the 'SEESOX-GDUK research' might have been intensified due to Brexit which hit the European Identity of the Greeks, as well as their related privileges (Pratsinakis, 2021:92).

## Identity (Theories, Transitions, Domains)

### Theories

The concept of identity has been approached by a wide variety of interdisciplinary approaches mostly agreeing that it consists of 'personal' and 'social' components; sociological and social-psychological perspectives perceive personal and social identities as being interconnected and interdependent as they are both shaped by the social context (Turner and Onorato, 1999). Identities are made not given but remain a complex and multidimensional concept quite accurately defined by Jenkins (2008:5) as 'the human capacity [...] to know who is who (and hence what is what). This involves knowledge of who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on'. Due to lack of a concrete and universal definition, the concept of identity has been approached through dominant identity theories and specific identity domains. Several identity theories have been developed but the most relevant to the current study are the Culturally Based Identity Theories (associated to Cultural Sociology), focusing on how cultural identity meanings are implemented within situations that evoke them (Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, 1979, 1981) emphasising how social contexts may reveal certain identities and shape their meaning (eg the embracement of EU citizenship status within the UK culture prior Brexit, has shaped the meaning and thus performativity of EU citizenship as a different status compared to immigration status). The emphasis is placed on the culture (eg EU citizenship status within British culture before and after Brexit) instead of the internalised social identity (eg being EU citizen in any other country) (Owens, Robinson and Smith-Lovin, 2010). Davis (2019: 360-361) terms this approach on Identity as culturally performed and summarized its core ideas as: i) focusing on external actions (eg the impact of Brexit on EU citizens), ii) people performing identity (EU citizens becoming immigrants), iii) involving status hierarchies (EU citizenship vs immigration status) and iv) identity performances vary across settings and contexts (not all EU citizens experienced such status transition in the same way).

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granted (settled and pre-settled status) were, Romanian (1.2 million), Polish (1.1 million) and Italian (310,895). The later numbers do not clarify how many of those receiving the settled/pre-settled status in fact reside in UK.

## Transitions and Prejudice

Identity theories share the acknowledgement that identity is socially constructed resulting from interactions between individuals and their social environment (Davis, 2019) making identity (as a concept and as lived experience) fluid, dynamic and adaptable (Chalari, 2017, 2020). In the case of aspects of identity that are changing or altering or adjusting during the life course, we refer to 'identity transition' as personal and social circumstances change, triggering people to redefine their sense of self and redevelop in response to disruptive life events (Kralik, Visentin, and Van Loon, 2006; Crafter and Maunder, 2012). Disruptive events can be perceived as events that disrupt the continuation of life as known to the individual concerned and a characteristic example would that of Covid-19 Pandemic (Chalari and Kountantou, 2022) as well as Brexit, although not everyone has been equally affected. Life transitions entail a need to find new ways of living resulting from changes one has experienced and involve interruptions to identity processes. Although identities may resist change and remain somewhat stable, inevitably they transform, readjust and are redefined during the life course in response to disruptions or identity inconsistencies (Burke, 2006). Social identity specifically, is formed and expressed under specific historical, cultural and ideological conditions (Tajfel, 1981) making the current configuration in UK a unique case of investigating identities.

Ultimately, transitions entail the disengagement of the actor from a central role of one's self-identity and the reestablishment of one's identity in a new role (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988) resulting as the outcome of a core life-alteration. Specifically, in such contexts Fuchs Ebaugh's approach becomes more relevant claiming that transitions of identity to new roles involve the learning and unlearning of social expectations associated with those roles (eg readjusting from EU citizenship status in UK to immigrant status in UK). Such identity shifts often involve tension between one's past present and future identities (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988). The significant disruption of identity continuation in this work's context, refers to the EU born residents in UK affected by Brexit, as the new policies implemented, involved a shift between EU citizenship identity to immigration identity. The related identity characteristics will be further discussed in an attempt to explore the unique occasion of such identity(ies) transition which concerned a very specific group of people (EU nationals/citizens residing in UK), who have been experiencing this transition more or less consciously, nevertheless universally. Such transitions in identity may involve prejudice as the position of people within society may change.

Prejudice is a core concept in understanding the possibly changing position (and thus identity) of any person or group in a society and is defined as the positional arrangements of groups (Blumer, 1958) deriving from an institutionalised racial (and as this study demonstrates an ethnic) social order, group interests and status expectations. It concerns the ideas each one has about where one's own group should stand in the social order whereas the dominant group needs to be differentiated from the subordinated group(s), and is occupied by feelings



of perceived superiority, entitlement, intrinsic difference, competition, negative stereotyping, fear and suspicion of the out-group's intentions (Bobo,1999). Such fear and suspicion has been contextualized as the collective emotion of threat (Reichelmann, 2021). Blumer through his Group Position Theory (GPT) was among the first to argue that fear of losing group position, and its privileges (in the case of this study EU citizenship status after Brexit), may result in outbursts of racial prejudice against the subordinate groups (eg other minorities within UK). Although Blumer was referring to prejudice as a collective feeling of racial threat shared within a dominant group, it can help us understand the hierarchical relations formed between in-group and out-group racial (or ethnic) minorities which are deeply rooted in a collective process of meaning-making.

In order to employ any of the abovementioned identity theories and explore the transitional or prejudice aspect of any identity, we need to concentrate on specific identity domains as people develop their identities around certain interconnected characteristics including (but not limited to) race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, age, education, ability (Chalari, 2017). The current identity exploration involves identity transformation around the domains of citizenship and immigration identity. The following sections focus on each of those domains.

## Identity Domains

The present study focuses on the transition between citizenship to immigration identity which involves specific social identity characteristics associated with the identity domains of ethnic, national, citizenship and immigration identity all of which being culturally dependent and determined. Social identity refers to the wider spectrum of relationships between individuals and the larger social world, whereas cultural identity refers to more specific relationships between individuals and members of a group sharing common history, a common language, and similar ways of understanding the world (Kim & Ko, 2007) such as Greeks permanently residing in UK.

### *European Citizenship Identity*

A core definition of citizenship maintains that people who live within the boundaries of the nation could become its citizens; citizenship is thus related with national identity as the later comes with the territory, meaning, that being, for example, a citizen of any member state of the European Union makes you European (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2009). Citizenship may also depend on the origin, culture, or bloodline of the person (Brubaker, 1992) although it can remain flexible, strategic and spatially complex (Isin, 2007). Ultimately, citizenship relates to civil rights and political participation as well as the sense of belonging to a national community and thus to the exclusion of non-nationals (Sapountzis and Xenitidou, 2018). In short, those possessing the European citizenship they could be identified through the European identity.

The term 'European identity' in wide terms, refers to a feeling of being European "as an integral part of one's own social identity" (Hooghe and Verhaegen, 2017: 163) although people might attach quite different meanings to 'being European' (Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009). The term 'identification as European' is also used to imply a "sense of belonging together" (Kaina, 2013: 189; Cram, 2012). However, Bruter (2003) distinguishes between the civic and cultural component of European identity as 'civic identity' emphasises the participation in the European political system and the consequent rules, laws and rights, whereas the European 'cultural identity' emphasises the shared culture, values or history that brings fellow Europeans closer (Bruter, 2003). In the case of EU citizens residing in UK, Brexit has affected their civic European identity as UK has been removed from the European political system, but has maintained its cultural European identity. Notably, scholars like White (2012:3), advocate towards the idea of European identity being an illusion reminding us of the relevance of objectivists' and subjectivists' understanding of one's own (eg European) identity, although in most cases both understandings are combined; the former perceives identity involving aspects of objective reality (eg enjoying the legal benefits of being an EU citizen) which are subjectively renegotiated (eg Brexiteers abolishing those rights by voting for Brexit). This approach may lead to a 'false consciousness' (in Marxists' terms of national identity) as people might be 'European' without knowing it (British people maintaining their cultural European identity even after Brexit), or believe they were Europeans when they could not be (EU-born residents losing their rights attached to their civic EU citizenship in UK after Brexit). Subjective identity on the other hand, depends on people's interpretations, referring to identities which may stand or fall by people's willingness to express them (the case of Brexiteers abolishing their civic and cultural European identities after Brexit).

Therefore, the meaning of citizenship, is indeed related with the ways people perceive themselves through their citizenship (Haste, 2004). Yet, it is not limited to it, as the type of recognition (in terms of citizenship) afforded to individuals and groups determines what it means to be a legitimate political actor and a member of the national community (in the case of Brexit, the civic European citizenship identity has been ceased). In the same vein, and as will be further explained, the way immigration policies are formed (in this case as a result of Brexit), help or not, the ways immigrants are seen and perceived (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012). Such argumentation becomes even more relevant in the light of a combination of objectivists' and subjectivists' perception of one's own citizenship identity, as in the case of Brexit, the objectively legitimate European citizenship status has been replaced with a subjectively determined immigration status.

### *Immigration Identity*

The study of immigration *per se*, is certainly associated with specific historical relations of dominance (Clifford, 1988) and continues to arouse public and scholarly controversy inevitably associated with different prescriptions of national identity (Yans-McLaughlin, 1990) as well as cultural and ethnic identity (Phinney et al., 2001). Cultural, ethnic, national and

citizenship identity(ies) are distinct but interdependent domains of identity which may be experienced simultaneously and have been studied through interdisciplinary approaches (Deaux, 2000; Berry, 2001). Immigrants often share common ethnic and cultural identity(ies) although national identities may differ as the later comes with the territory, and relates with citizenship identity (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2009). Minorities' identification with the majority society in which they live is widely regarded as an important indicator of cohesion and of successfully integrated societies although lack of national identification, signals the failure of multiculturalistic policies to create a coherent sense of national belonging (Koopmans, 2013). British national identity for minority groups within UK has been reported to be as strong or even stronger than the majority population and minorities in UK are likely to hold strong dual identities (ethnic minority and British national) (Nandi and Platt, 2015).

The study of immigration identity is primarily associated with social identity, and as such is a dynamic construct; it derives from individual's self-concept and awareness of membership in a social group, the values as well as the emotional significance attached to that membership (Phinney, 1990; Tajfel, 1981). Immigrants arrive in the new country bringing their own ethnic and cultural identity(ies) along with their own attitudes and beliefs which interact with a new reality as well as their actual and perceived level of acceptance; through this process a new social identity is taking shape, related to the new culture (Phinney et al., 2001). Immigration identity "involves leaving one domain in which identity has been enacted and supported, and coming to a new domain on which identity must be resituated and often redefined" (Deaux, 2000: 429). Inevitably, shaping, and reshaping of ethnic identity is taking place, as heritage and mainstream cultural identities are relatively independent of one another but in constant (re)negotiation (Berry, 1997; Phinney, 2003). Immigrants can have, simultaneously, either a strong or a weak identification with both cultures; adaptation and identity formation theory has proposed four strategies of acculturation-one of which achieving integration (Berry 1997), although such model has been criticised as normative (Phillipmore, 2012). Still, identity formation and acculturation are often used by relevant literature interchangeably, and acculturation is often perceived as a process of identity change (Phinney et al., 2001).

Turjeman et al, (2008) explain that immigrants experience dilemmas and difficulties in their struggle to adapt to a new culture while trying to retain some of their heritage; they are confronted with contradictory feelings including desirability and wishful thinking about their place in the new society. But their actual social situation, adaptive stage, and acceptance level in the host society may be significantly different. Most importantly, immigrants may find themselves between two different cultures without belonging to either, namely, that they subjectively belong to the new culture but objectively do not; consequently, those immigrants who do not experience the conflict between objective and subjective acculturation are better integrated within one culture (Turjeman et al, 2008:123). An additional parameter associated to identity, in the case of immigration, associates to the socio-spatial location defined not only by one's position in relation to representations of national identity of the host country

(Britishness) and immigration but also in terms of one's treatment by official state policies, by political institutions and ultimately by the ways those institutions manage otherness (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012: 378).

It thus becomes understood that the way immigrants are perceived and treated by political institutions (an objectivists' perception of immigration identity) determines the ways the immigrant will be perceived by others/natives (subjectivist's' perception of immigration identity). Such perception of immigration identity ultimately brings us back to the initial definition of identity used in this study which demonstrates that identity is about knowing who is who; knowing who we are, who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on (Jenkins, 2008:5) which helps us comprehend better, that the way identities (eg citizenship and immigration) are managed by political institutions (eg Brexit policies) shapes the ways such identities will be reinforced by others/natives and ultimately the ways these identities will define each individual concerned (eg former EU citizens becoming immigrants in UK). In this vein, Andreouli and Howarth, (2012) conclude that the way immigration policies are formed determine the ways immigrants are seen and perceived; State policies are important in maintaining and legitimising status inequalities and the authors add that different immigration policies may also promote different types of identity strategies among diasporic communities. Such strategies may entail prejudice between diasporic minorities as a way to respond to perceived status inequalities (Blummer, 1958).

## Methods

### Sampling

The data of this study derives from a wider qualitative project focusing on the impact of Brexit on Greek Diaspora in UK. This study aims to explore the ways Greeks residing in UK have experienced citizenship and immigration identity transitions and forms an exploratory investigation (Hoaglin, Mosteller and Tukey, 1983). Participants (Table 1) have been selected based on their eligibility (Greek-born, settled or pre-settled holders, permanently residing in UK). Half of them have been recruited from Greater London and the other half from across England. The sample has been diverse in terms of age, gender, family status, educational and professional background and duration of residence in UK (residing in UK between 5 and 20 years). Interviewees were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study, as it is commonly deemed suitable with exploratory and non-probabilistic research designs (Ritchie et al. 2013). The sample was opportunistic and the recruitment strategy used 'gatekeepers' and 'snowballing' techniques (Maxwell, 2013).

<b>Demographics:</b>	Total: 30	Level of Education:	Total: 30	Specialisation:	Total: 30
Gender:	15F 15M	School graduates/Lykeio:	3	Medical	4
Ages:	22-63	College/BA	7	Academics	5
Location:	Greater London:17 Non-London: 13	MA:	9	Salary employed	10 (Managers: 3, Administrators:3, Services:4)
Years of residence in UK:	5-9yrs: 16 10-20yrs: 12	Medicine:	4	Unemployed	3
Parents:	18	PhD:	5	Teachers	4
Country of Education:	UK:23 GR: 7	Currently Students:	2	Self Employed	2
Religion:	Christian Orthodox: 26 Agnostic:2 Atheist:2			Students	2

**Table 1: Demographics**

## Procedure of Data Collection

30 interviews have been conducted including two pilot interviews to test the appropriateness of the questions. Data collection followed the ethical standards stipulated by the British Sociological Association guidelines on ethical research (BSA, 2022) concerning consent, anonymity, respect for participants, integrity, safe data storage and has received ethical approval by the LSE-Hellenic Observatory Ethics Research Committee. The research questions of the larger project addressed during interviews were informed by the research literature and were asked in an open-ended format (Light, Singer and Willett, 1990; Kvale, 1996), concerned solely with personal experiences of everyday living (Baker, 1997; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2005) in relation to immigration and citizenship identities. All interviews were conducted by a female Greek-born researcher. They lasted between 30 mins and 3 hours. They were all conducted within March and April 2024 through the following means: face-to-face, Microsoft Teams and telephone. All of them have been audio recorded by the researcher and transcribed by a research assistant.

Limitations: a different timing might have offered different findings, and in that respect a repeated data collection might have proven fruitful; similarly, a comparative approach including data deriving from different cultural origins (adding and comparing additional

diasporas residing in UK) might have offered more generalisable outcomes, however the capacity of this study had been limited.

### Premise of Analysis

In order to analyse experienced immigration and citizenship identities, fragments were selected by a large pool of 30 semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Maxwell, 2013). Interpretive phenomenology had been utilised as analytical tool as it offers a unique methodology for studying lived experience. It brings to light what is often taken for granted while allowing the emergence of phenomena from the perspective of how people interpret and attribute meaning to their existence; phenomenology and more specifically hermeneutics focuses on the interpretation of meaning through lived experience (Gadamer, 1976; 2004). More specifically, Blumer's (1969:2) Symbolic Interactionism offers further insights into group position within a culture which is the exact focus of the current study: (1) people act on interpretations, (2) social interaction shapes the interpretation and meaning-making process, and (3) the meaning-making process is informed by further interaction. Even more importantly, people's own self-interpretation shapes their interaction with their surroundings.

This study aims in exploring possible tendencies of the ways meaning making of immigration and citizenship identities, among Greek-born participants, shaped through shared experiences; in that sense, interpretive phenomenology offers the ideal epistemological foundation in order to describe, understand and explain the meaning making of the those particular identities and Blumer's premises on meaning-making allow a deeper understanding of the participants' position in the host culture. A commonly employed technique enabling the application of interpretive phenomenology is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 200) had been employed through the repeated readings of the translated transcripts of the interviews, focusing on meaningful and relevant categories and themes associated with aspects and elements related to participants' identity(ies) experience. The focus remained on the emergence of contiguity-based relations between themes, revealing relations among parts of transcribed text (Maxwell, 2013).

### Interview Questions

In order for this study to reveal the ways participants experience their immigration and citizenship identities, the interview started with questions related to their experienced cultural identity(ies) in the light of Brexit (utilised in a separate publication), the causes and impact of Brexit (utilised in an additional publication) and was completed with five interview questions (found below and in tables 2-6). Within this context, thematic analysis of relevant responses involved the phenomenological interpretations of the stream of thinking of the participants involving all answers simultaneously, instead of each answer separately. Therefore, instead of analysing isolated fragments associated with specific questions, it turned out more fruitful to focus on a combination of characteristic fragments associated with

all related responses for each participant, while interviewees had been considering the relevant questions in real time, during each interview. This particular technique of analysis, was able to capture participants' stream of thinking while they construct, shape and even reshape their responses during the deployment of their discourse.

How others' categorise you	Total: 30
Foreigner	9
Immigrant	8
Mediterranean	6
Human/Person	2
Not Immigrant	2
Refugee	1
International Student	1

**Table 2: "How do you think other British people categorise you?"**

Has this changed after Brexit?	
No	28
Yes	2

**Table 3: "Did they categorise you differently before Brexit?"**

## Findings

### Numerical Analysis

The first and rather superficial level of analysis focused on a descriptive numerical depiction of the participants' answers as can be seen in tables 2-6. In table 2 (how participants think they are categorised by British people), the three most popular answers are 'foreigner', 'immigrant' and 'Mediterranean'. All categorisations are irrelevant of Brexit as it seems that participants think that they are perceived as non-British as their European or ethnic identity is not seen or recognised by natives. This was further confirmed by the next question as seen in table 3 (did they/British people categorise you differently before Brexit?) was answered negatively almost by all participants. Table 4 (how participants think they are categorised by the British government), show a different picture; almost half of the participants think that the British government categorise them as 'white European citizen' (which was the case before Brexit) and only one fifth states that the government perceives them as 'immigrants' which is indeed the case after Brexit. The race (whiteness) component of the identification as European has emerged as a repeated pattern among participants<sup>4</sup>. Any other characterisation is irrelevant of Brexit. Therefore, the impact of Brexit is evident in the ways participants' sense of being treated/categorised by the British government. This impact can be further confirmed by the answers of the following question shown in table 5 (how do you self-define?) as almost half identify as "Greek living abroad"<sup>5</sup>, followed by two equally popular answers "immigrant" and 'white European citizen'. Most identify through their ethnicity as Greeks although they are not recognised as such by natives or the government. Those who are self-identified as 'white Europeans' are not recognised as such by natives or the British government (as after Brexit this classification became irrelevant). Those self-identified as immigrants are indeed perceived as such both by natives and the government but this depiction of data won't show if those who have been identified as immigrants are the same who believe that natives and/or the British government identify them as such. The following section entailing qualitative data analysis can reveal this trend.

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<sup>4</sup> As several participants have explained, they have picked this characterisation which is offered as a choice among other ethnic identifications that applicants need to tick. Whiteness is certainly relevant in this discussion but this approach would expand the content of the present analysis beyond its initial purpose

<sup>5</sup> "Greek Living abroad" (Ελληνας εξωτερικού) is the official Greek governmental classification of those Greeks residing away from Greece and within the Greek culture is occasionally perceived as a somewhat elevated status.



Government Categorise you	Total: 30
<b>EU Citizen/White European</b>	<b>13</b>
Immigrant	6
Tax Payer	4
Non / Potentially British	3
Foreigner permanent resident	2
Human	2

**Table 4: “How do you think the British government officially categorises you?”**

Self-Identify	Total: 30
Greek living abroad	13
Immigrant	6
<b>White European</b>	<b>5</b>
Greek and British	2
British citizen with reduced rights	2
Citizen of the world	1
Non-British	1

**Table 5: “How do you self-define?”**

Are you happy with your self- categorisation?	
Yes	22
No	3
Yes & No	5

**Table 6: “Are you happy with your self-categorisation?”**

## Hermeneutics Analysis

The following fragments will help understand better the ways participants perceive their identities as a combination of how they think they are perceived by others, by the British government and by themselves. As will be revealed, there is limited consistency in identity domain combinations, which shows the multiple identities participants are negotiating with. The following fragments were depicted as the most diverse and representative cases in terms of identities combinations, including gender, length of residency in UK, employment and location of residency. The prime focus of analysis aims in capturing the multiple layers of identity(ies) participants negotiate with, and derives from Jenkins (2008) core portrayal of what identity stands for, including the ways we perceive ourselves, the people and the situations around us, as well as, the ways we think we are perceived by others. Such multidimensional capture of identity is inevitably incomplete, nevertheless very helpful in understanding the ways citizenship and immigration identity may co-exist and shape one another. Following the premise of Culturally Based Identity Theories (Smith-Lovin, 2010), the ways participants have been negotiating and giving meaning to their citizenship and immigration identities are shaped by the cultural situations that evoke them (living in UK/host culture, and being affected by Brexit) beyond or on top of the social identity they have been ascribed to (Greek/home culture and EU citizenship identity).

### *Citizenship and Immigration identity: false perceptions*

As has been discussed, almost half of the participants think that the British government categorise them as 'white European citizens' (which was indeed the case before Brexit) and only one fifth of the answers states that the government perceives them as 'immigrants' which is the case after Brexit (Table 4). Therefore, the impact of Brexit is evident in the ways participants' sense of being treated/categorised by the British government. As discussed, after the implementation of Brexit, EU citizens are perceived by the official government as immigrants (Home office, 2024). Consequently, their civic EU citizenship status associated with rules, laws and rights (Bruter, 2003) and thus European citizenship identity, has been replaced with immigration status and identity. However, it does not seem that the majority of participants have realised this shift as they believe that they are still treated through their EU citizenship civil status. Thanos' fragment offers an indicative attitude:

Thanos (46, 16yrs, school teacher, North London) explains that "I am the only non-British teacher in my job and one of the few in my neighbour, but I haven't felt discriminated before or after Brexit. [...] Of course they perceive me as **foreigner** but not necessarily negatively". Thanos adds that the British government would categorise him "within the group of people coming from a **European Union** country [...] and it seems to me that the government is treating us more favourably compared to those coming from commonwealth countries or Latin Americans.[...] Of course, if I had the British passport this would have been different". He concludes by stating that "I am 100% **Greek** but I act professionally as British" and he is satisfied with the way he self-identifies.

Thanos' response, offers a typical example of those responses recognising that they are perceived by natives as foreigners (but not in a negative sense), they are still perceived/treated by the government as EU citizens and thus are seen favourably compared to other minorities, while they self-identify predominantly as Greeks. This fragment reflects the confusion between the objective reality of the participants' (cultural instead of civic) European identity as they remain culturally and regionally Europeans, but it also shows a false identity consciousness (White, 2012) as the majority of participants feel that the government perceives them as EU citizens or white Europeans, which is not the case after the implementation of Brexit. On this occasion, the meaning of (European) citizenship and identity, is shaped by the ways participants perceive themselves through their EU citizenship (Haste, 2004) which they feel is still an identity domain that may distinguish them favourably within UK. Even more importantly, the type of recognition of the participants primarily by the government and secondarily by the natives, determines what it means to be a legitimate political actor and member of the national community (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012). The majority of participants have failed to recognise the shift in their ascribed status from EU citizens to immigrants by the government (as can be seen in Table 4). On the contrary, table 2 shows that participants have been able to recognise that natives perceive them as

foreigners and/or immigrants (even before Brexit as Thanos explains) which is the exact status ascribed to them by the government after Brexit. Consequently, there seems to be an inconsistency in most participants' perceptions, between the ways the government and natives perceive them.

### *Immigration and citizenship identity: Prejudiced perceptions*

As discussed, in terms of civic European citizenship identity, a transition has taken place towards immigration identity by the official government, although it has not been depicted by most participants as such. The way immigration policies are formed determine the ways immigrants are seen and perceived (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012); in the case of the participants, there is a sense among them, that they are perceived by natives as foreigners and/or immigrants regardless of Brexit, a fact that implies that the pre-Brexit classification of 'EU citizen' was not different in the eyes of natives, compared to immigration status. State policies (like the shift from EU citizenship to immigration) are important in maintaining and legitimising status inequalities (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012) which seems relevant in this case as ultimately Brexit legitimised the dominant perception of natives (seeing EU citizens as foreigners/immigrants). Immigration policies may also promote different types of identity strategies among diasporic communities (ibid) as the above and the following examples demonstrate.

For Markos (42, Doctor, 11yrs, Bromley) British people probably see him "as an **immigrant** as they usually ask where I am from, but I am not bothered, they ask politely". He adds that the government would see him as "**white European citizen** although things have changed after Brexit, but not in a discriminatory way" and concludes that he self-defines as "I belong to the ethnic minority of **Greeks** and in fact I feel that I am culturally superior, that I am not inferior compared to natives and I think that all Europeans feel that in contrast to Commonwealth immigrants. Europeans never felt inferior compared to British we were never part of the British Empire. [...] And this may be a reason why Brexit was voted. Because Europeans wouldn't feel inferior".

This fragment offers one more example of the multi-layered ways participants are negotiating the different domains of their own identity. Although Markos feels that he is perceived as an immigrant he clarifies that he is not bothered. He also explains that while the government perceives him as a European citizen, he does not feel discriminated. But he concludes by identifying with the Greek minority stating that he does not feel inferior compared to British people, because he is European; Europeans wouldn't feel inferior as they were never part of the British Empire. This fragment reveals the case of a diasporised person who explains that he is seen as an immigrant by natives, falsely thinks that the government perceives him

through his (civic) European identity, self-identifies as a member of the Greek minority, but feels superior due to his European (cultural) identity. Markos is one of the participants who raises the issue of prejudice (Bobo, 1999) compared to natives and/or other minorities which is linked to the perception people have about their group's (European identity) position within the dominant culture (Blumer, 1958). Such comparisons relate with immigrants' anticipations (Turjeman et al, 2008) about their place within the host culture as can be explained through cultural based identity theories emphasising the significance of the impact of the cultural setting on the ways people performing identity which also involves status hierarchies (Davis, 2019). Markos's fragment demonstrates the way identity is performed through a hierarchical status which places the European status as superior even though, its civic aspect is not applicable any longer within UK. The following fragment further reinforces the aspects of prejudice (Blummer, 1958, 1969) and hierarchy status in relation to immigration identity compared to other ethnic minorities and the dominant majority although it does not reveal any impact of Brexit in the participants' identity formation as no aspect of their European identity is involved.

Julia (43, 7yrs, Project Manager, London) explains that others possibly see her as an "**immigrant** but in a better position compared to blacks. I am inferior compared to English but superior to blacks or other Europeans and Asians. I am not a racist and I have no problem with other ethnicities. I am **white Greek** and this works well in UK". She adds that for the British government she "**must be an immigrant**" and she self-defines as an "**immigrant** but treated equally as others [...] Well, I do feel that I am in a better position compared with some other British". She concludes by saying that: "I am 60% happy with this answer. I don't like being an immigrant but I can't change it either".

Julia offers one (of the very few) examples of a participant who is using the same domain of identity (immigrant) in the ways she feels that she is perceived by others, the government and herself. This may indicate vigilance in how others perceive her (as the governmental categorisation and the way she is perceived by others coincides and is indeed accurate in terms of the official classification). The way she self-defines has become the extension of how she is perceived by others, or in Blummer's (1969) words, is shaped through the interactions with others, although Julia is not entirely happy about it. Notably Julia, like Markos, is trying to exonerate her status as an immigrant by stating her perceived superiority over other race groups she compares herself with, which indicates a form of prejudice in the way Julia perceives her position in British society (Bobo, 1999). Certainly, immigrants experience dilemmas and difficulties in their struggle to adapt while they are confronted with contradictory feelings (Turjeman et al, 2008). Through such negotiations a new social identity is taking shape, related to the new culture, and in the case of Julia, this new identity is the identification with the immigration identity. The emotional significance (Phinney, 2001) Julia attaches to her identification is not pleasant for her, but she is accepting it.

### *Immigration, citizenship and ethnic Identity: unproblematic lack of acceptance and belonging*

The sense of belonging to the host and/or the home cultures is certainly a core negotiation immigrants experience (Berry, 1997; Phinney, 2003). In the case of several participants thought, such negotiation extends beyond the ethnic and cultural identities of participants as the additional component of European citizenship identity is also involved, which inevitably shapes not only their sense of belonging to the host and/or the home cultures but also involves the unsettlement of the interruption of their established citizenship identity (Crafter and Maunder, 2012) legitimised through their former civic European identity status. Thus they experience an additional layer of identity transition (if not disruption) caused by Brexit, beyond (or on top) of identity transition experienced on an immigration (relocation) level. As Sapountzis and Xenitidou (2018) explain, in the case of EU nationals residing in UK prior and/or after Brexit, the sense of belonging to 'a national community' had to be re-defined because the sense of belonging to EU or UK, became fragile. The lack of belonging to the host country has been profound among participants, who feel that they are perceived as foreigners and/or immigrants even if they still relate with their European as well as their Greek identities as the example of Artemis demonstrates:

Artemis (52, 14yrs, Doctor, Dulwich) explains that "probably my British patients look at me as another **foreigner** who works for us" and he adds that "as a doctor working in NHS I think I am classified as **white European**", concluding that "but ultimately I am an **economic immigrant** [...] as I left Greece to excel in my profession [...] and Britain offered me and my family a home, a space to live in".

Artemis, has a sense of being perceived by others as a foreigner, the government would classify him as white European and he would perceive himself as an economic immigrant. Like all fragments this is an additional case of a participant who does not feel accepted by natives, but he does not feel threatened either. Like in previous examples, Artemis maintains a false civic European identity but he identifies as an economic immigrant and like Markos, he seems to have made peace with his multi-layered identities while feeling grateful towards the host country. A rather unproblematic sense of acceptance and inclusion omission by the host culture has been repeatedly expressed among participants especially demonstrated through the participants' perceived immigration identity.

As has been seen in tables 2 and 4, the overwhelming majority of participants think that they are perceived by natives predominantly as foreigners and/or immigrants, whereas a marginal minority feels that the government also characterises them in the same way. As Phinney et al (2001) explain, immigrants arrive in the new country bringing their own ethnic and cultural identity(ies) along with their own attitudes and beliefs which interact with a new reality as

well as their actual and perceived level of acceptance; For most participants their perceived level of acceptance is profoundly affected by their awareness of being perceived as immigrants. Another characteristic example of how immigration identity is experienced by the participants, derives from Rina who feels that she is perceived as a foreigner by natives, as immigrant by the government and self-identifies as a Greek immigrant:

Rina (44, Senior Manager, 14yrs, South Backs) thinks that British see her as “**foreigner** and non-British but I have lived here for many years and I can understand their culture”, she says that the government categorises her as an: “a legal **immigrant** having lived too many years in this country” and she self-identifies as a “Greek who has decided to live away from Greece. So that makes me a **Greek economic immigrant**”. When asked if she is happy she explained that “I have no problem, this is the exact true”.

Like in the case of Julia, this fragment depicts a participant who recognises that she is perceived as a foreigner and immigrant and also identifies as such, which probably portrays a person who has identified with the (bureaucratically accurate) way others and the government would perceive her. Rina’s immigration identity derives from individual’s self-concept and awareness of membership in a social group (Phinney, 1990; Tajfel, 1981). This is a typical occasion of meaning ascribed to cultural identity (Rina perceiving herself as an immigrant) implemented within situations that evoke them (being perceived by others as such) (Owens, Robinson and Smith-Lovin, 2010). Like in the case of Artemis, this participant describes her identity as a foreigner and an immigrant while also attempts an exonerated depiction of those particular identity domains stating that she has not felt discriminated which reflects the emotional significance attached to her awareness and connexion to this particular social group (Phinney et al, 2001).

### *Immigration and ethnic Identity: conflicting perceptions*

Most participants have been self-identified as Greeks living abroad (Έλληνες εξωτερικού) as their ethnicity is the dominant identity domain they would identify with (table 5). Less than one third would self-identity as immigrants and even fewer as white European citizens as has already been seen in most of the fragments analysed. Such picture allows us to see that although most of the participants believe that they are perceived as European citizens by the British government, they do not perceive themselves in the same way. Although Phillipmore (2012) explains that immigrants can have, simultaneously, either a strong or a weak identification with the home and host cultures, participants seem closer to their ethnic (Greek) identity, followed by their immigration identity and lastly their European identity. In contradiction to Nandi and Platt’s (2015) findings, any association with the host culture identity is barely mentioned. A characteristic occasion of a contradictory sense of identity negotiation is also depicted through Lena’s fragments:

Lena (31, Academic, 8yrs, London) was asked how she thinks other British people would categorise her and she explained that “because of my accent they would immediately think that I am not British, not established and therefore an outsider. They would see me as an **immigrant** but most importantly as non-British”. She adds that “I don’t know how the government categorises me, like a **tax-payer?**” and she self-identifies as a “citizen with reduced rights maybe? I do feel Greek but integrated at the same time, I like my life here, I am part of Britain. [...] so maybe I am a **Greek living abroad?**”. Lena is happy with this description as she emphasises how much “I prefer my life here. I can’t stand Greeks complaining about everything in Greece”.

Lena sees herself as been perceived as an immigrant although for the British government she is another tax-payer. She self-identifies as a ‘citizen with reduced rights’ and as a ‘Greek living abroad’. Being perceived as an immigrant, Lena does not feel accepted or as belonging to the host culture while she feels that she is perceived as non-established, outsider, non-British and a citizen with reduced rights. At the same time however, she feels that she is integrated, that she likes and prefers her life in UK. Such contradictory identity negotiations are rather common among participants. Immigrants can have, simultaneously, either a strong or a weak identification with both cultures, may experience different levels of adaptation and/or strategies of acculturation (Berry 1997, 1999). Participants like Lena and Tina, may experience dilemmas and difficulties in their struggle to adapt to a new culture and they are confronted with contradictory feelings (Turjeman et al, 2008). As has been demonstrated through the fragments discussed so far, the participants’ actual social situation, adaptive stage, and acceptance level in the host society may be significantly different (eg Tina vs Rina). Lena’s fragment, like most in this study, involves contradictory identity perceptions and experiences which may signal a typical occasion of identity(ies) in transition. The last three cases illustrate occasions that the European identity is not involved and therefore the impact of Brexit on such identity transitions is not relevant as it does not form a component of any domain of participants’ identities. However, the cases analysed in the beginning depict a very different picture.

## Conclusion

The main findings of this study can be summarised in four interrelated and interconnected aspects of identity negotiations (primarily involving ethnic, citizenship and immigration identities): a) erroneous resemblance between civic and cultural European identity, b) tendencies of prejudice towards non-European identities, c) coherent albeit unproblematic lack of belonging towards the host culture and d) underlying conflicting identity perceptions and experiences signalling ongoing identity(ies) in transition.

Most fragments depict a false civic European identity consciousness (White, 2012) of those participants maintaining the belief that the British government still perceives them as European citizens even after Brexit. Perhaps, through their struggle to adapt to a new culture, participants also try to retain some of their (European identity) heritage (Turjeman et al, 2008). Although identities may resist change, inevitably they transform, readjust and are redefined during the life course in response to disruptions or identity inconsistencies (Burke, 2006) like in the case of Brexit. Such inconsistency is not only a matter of subjectively false perception of ones' citizenship identity (White 2012) but also a matter of the ways state policies and institutions manage otherness leading to the ways immigrants are seen and perceived which ultimately maintains and legitimise status inequalities (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012).

Such status inequalities may be further reinforced by the diasporised people themselves, as they perform their own (false or actual) citizenship identities through perceived status hierarchies (Davis, 2019). The sense of prejudice towards other minorities reported in specific cases, may be associated with the participants' view of their stereotypical ethnic and racial place in society (Blumer 1958, 1969; Bobo, 1999). Transitions of identity to new roles (in the case of participants from European citizens to immigrants) involve the learning and unlearning of social expectations associated with those roles (finding ways to negotiate the shift from citizenship to immigration status). Such identity shifts often involve tension between one's past present and future identities (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988) which may involve hierarchical comparisons between minorities leading to prejudicial misconceptions (Blumer, 1958).

The ways participants form their own self-concept (predominantly as Greeks and/or immigrants) reflects their actual and perceived level of acceptance in the host culture (Phinney et al., 2001) indicating a rather poor (if not omitted) process of integration (Berry 1997, 1999). Regardless their actual social situation (class/professional status) and adaptive stage (years of residence) it has been evident that the limited acceptance level in the host society (how participants think they are perceived by natives) is notably consistent. Given that participants think that are seen by natives as foreigners (immigrants and/or strangers), their own self-perception is shaped predominantly through their ethnic identity as Greeks (foreigner/Mediterranean) and secondarily through the affirmation of the natives' perceptions as immigrants. In this case the ways participants sense that natives perceive them, ultimately shapes how they see themselves (Blummer, 1969, Jenkins, 2008). The component of the way the official institutions perceives them is twofold, as on the one hand it shows a) a misconception about how the participants would have liked the government to perceive them (through their civic European identity) and b) how they are indeed perceived (as foreigners and immigrants) - a perception ultimately coinciding with how natives perceive them and how they perceive themselves (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012).



In both occasions there is an underlying tendency by most participants to express the view that they are not seen negatively or in a discriminatory way, or even, that they are seen in a favourable way by natives and the government. This brings us back to the culturally based identity theories which reveal how social contexts may reveal certain identities and (re)shape their meaning. In the case of this study the concepts of 'foreigner' and 'immigrant' are reflecting and entailing non-discriminatory meanings and interpretations by the participants, which can co-exist with a sense of lack of acceptance and belonging towards the host culture. This particular finding seems rather paradoxical *albeit*, indeed consistent among most participants who are aware of their place within the British society (Blumer, 1958) as foreigners and immigrants, but at the same time they are not threatened by it. Such conflicting experience of multi-layered identities has been surfaced through the distinct ways participants awareness of how they are perceived by natives and the government. Such perceptions have ultimately shaped the ways they perceive themselves. These multi-layered identities are best portrayed as transition identities entailing, conflicting as well as harmonious layers of ethnic, citizenship and immigration identities.

In conclusion, Brexit has indeed fostered the transition from citizenship to immigration identity to occur on a legislative level, reinforcing status inequalities between natives and non-natives on a social level. This transition does not seem to be absorbed by the participants, as for most their civic-European citizenship is still effective; it does not seem relevant to natives either, as they perceive participants as foreigners and/or immigrants regardless Brexit. But it does relate to implicit prejudicial hierarchical comparisons between European vs non-European identities. As most participants self-identity through their ethnic identity of origin, it seems that Brexit may not have significantly affected their self-perceptions in terms of citizenship and immigration identity, although methodologically, it is not possible to produce such conclusion with certainty. An additional study with Greek-born but UK naturalised participants would allow a comparative approach in comprehending such multi-layered identities whereas a more inclusive study involving wider participation of EU-born residents in UK may allow more generalised findings.

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