

## **FINAL DRAFT**

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### **Place identity construction in Greek neomigrants' social media discourse**

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#### **Abstract**

The phenomenon of brain drain migration from Greece, also known as Greek neomigration, has acquired an astoundingly massive character due to the ongoing economic crisis in the country. Considering that a migrant's identity is defined by a physical move from one place to another, this paper aims at exploring the discourse practices of place-making by Greek neomigrants, focusing on the role of social media in this endeavour. Drawing on discourse analysis (Myers 2010; Aguirre and Graham Davies 2015), identity construction theories (Blommaert 2005; Benwell and Stokoe 2006), environmental psychology (Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff 1983) and discourse-centred online ethnography (Androutsopoulos 2008), this study presents and discusses empirical data from a Greek neomigrant settled in the UK, who writes about his migration experience on his blog as well as on his Twitter and Facebook accounts. The analysis demonstrates that the Greek neomigrant place identity construction can be realized through a complex of linguistic and discourse strategies, including comparison and evaluation, construction of in-groups and out-groups, language and script alternations, entextualisation of other voices, and visual connotations. It is shown that, for migrants, social media constitute significant outlets for place-making, constructing place identity and asserting (or eschewing) belonging. In so doing, it also brings to the surface crucial social, cultural and psychological aspects of the current Greek neomigration phenomenon and confirms the potential of social media discourses to heighten

awareness of neomigrants' dis/integrating processes, placing discourse analysis at the service of global mobility phenomena.

**Keywords:** brain drain, Greek neomigration, place identity, social media, discourse-centred online ethnography, multimodality

## 1. Introduction: Social media, migration, and the Greek brain drain phenomenon

Figure 1 shows a Facebook post by Dimitris, currently a Greek brain drain migrant in the UK, whose social media activities I have been studying since 2016 (more details are given further down, in the research context section). In this post, which is based on Dream Theatre's song *Another Day*, Dimitris announces he is about to migrate, to leave Greece, and "look another way" (according to the lyrics of the song) in a new land. This example illustrates the topic of this paper, namely, migrants' place identity construction in social media. Focusing specifically on Greek brain drain migrants, a special and important case due to the ongoing economic crisis in Greece, the study seeks to explore the kinds of place-making practices they adopt in relation to both Greece and the host society, as well as the ways in which they utilise social media in so doing.



Figure 1. Announcing migration on Facebook

Place is not just a position in space; it is the location plus everything that occupies that location: practices, routines, memories, interpretations, ideas, attitudes, values, beliefs, social meanings, preferences and feelings (Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff 1983; Myers 2006). Such an assertion gains special prominence in the case of migrants, whose status is defined by a physical move from one place to another (Aguirre and Graham Davies 2015). The advent of social media, namely digital services (e.g., blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Skype, Instagram, discussion forums, chatrooms) which promote social interaction between participants through the exchange and sharing of user-produced content, has radically transformed the lives and location-based experiences of migrants worldwide.

Many scholars have considered social media and migration from various theoretical perspectives and with varied methodological concerns. Table 1 offers a non-exhaustive overview of recent research on migrants' social media usage. The exact ends for which specific migrants have adopted social media are presented in the second column. The third column lists the social media platforms that are most relevant to each study. The fourth column refers to the migrants' country of origin and host society. The next column situates the studies within their respective fields. The rightmost column features the methods of analysis each study has employed distinguishing between qualitative and quantitative ones. "Qualitative" encompasses textual and multimodal analysis as well as ethnographic methods such as offline and/or online participant observation and face-to-face and/or online interviews. "Quantitative" comprises quantifications based on questionnaire data, network visualisations of data crawled with the help of special software and codifications deriving from corpus analysis. Despite this growing surge of studies, which treat different facets and types of migration, brain drain, and particularly the Greek one, still remains an unexplored area, especially within linguistics and discourse studies.

**Table 1.** Classification of selected studies on migrants' social media usage  
(Platforms: IM=Instant Messaging. Methods: QL=qualitative, QN=quantitative)

Authors	Usage	Platforms	Migrants	Discipline	Methods
Komito (2011)	Building new forms of social capital	Skype, IM, Facebook	Polish and Filipino in Ireland	Information and communication studies	QL, QN
Diminescu (2012)	Participating in diasporic communities	Discussion forums	Palestinian, Yugoslavian, Lebanese, Egyptian, Tunisian, Hindu, Tamil, FYROM diaspora, French colonial repatriates	Sociology	QN
Madianou & Miller (2012)	Maintaining long-distance parent-child relationships	IM, Friendster, Facebook, blogs, Skype	Filipino in UK, migrants' relatives in Philippines	Communication studies, Anthropology	QL
Doutsou (2013)	Celebrating transnational mobility and building networks	Facebook	Greeks in London	Cultural and media studies, Sociolinguistics	QL, QN
Dekker & Engbersen (2014)	Seeking information on settlement	Orkut, Hyves	Brazilians, Ukrainians and Moroccans in Netherlands	Policy studies	QL
Heyd (2014, 2016)	Performing race and ethnicity	Discussion forum	Nigerian diaspora	Sociolinguistics	QL, QN
Aguirre (2014)	Constructing a diasporic identity	Facebook, blog	Filipino in New Zealand	Discourse studies	QL

Aguirre & Davies (2015)	Claiming belonging to the host country	Facebook	Filipino in New Zealand	Discourse studies	QL
Leurs (2015)	Articulating gender, religious and youth identities	Discussion forums, IM, Facebook, YouTube	Moroccan youth in Netherlands	Gender and communication studies	QL, QN
Witteborn (2015)	Maneuvering life under physical and social arrest	Facebook, blogs, Skype	Asylum seekers in Berlin and Munich	Communication studies	QL
Lawson (2016)	Celebrating transnational mobility and building networks	Discussion forum	British in Ariège	Discourse studies	QL

Brain drain, or skilled migration, refers to the migration of people who are endowed with a high level of human capital (Beine, Docquier and Rapoport 2001), that is, a stock of knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, training, judgment, and wisdom. Three substantial caveats invite consideration here concerning the usage of the term “brain drain”. First, the term initially referred to qualified people who migrated from less to more developed countries. Yet, nowadays, as crises tantalise economies and societies in different parts of the world, skilled migration occurs from already developed countries to other developed ones (e.g., from the European South to the European North and the USA). Second, the term has different denotations depending on the research context and analytical frameworks (Labrianidis 2011: 28). For some studies, brain drain is tantamount to the *crème de la crème* of professionals who migrate; for others (including the present one), it is inclusive of well-educated individuals generally. Lastly, most studies use the term to focus only on the economic aspects of the transfer (i.e. loss to the sending country and benefit to the host). This study takes the term to a new

context, focusing on the transfer of skills and experience in a socio-cultural, rather than economic, framework.

Greece has seen a noteworthy outflow of its educated population in four periods: the Second World War (1939–1945), the civil war (1946–1949), during the dictatorship (1967–1974), and from 2010 onwards due to the current crisis in the country. This recent migratory wave has been termed “Greek neomigration” (Bozatzis 2015).<sup>1</sup> Thousands of young and gifted Greeks choose or are forced to migrate abroad so as to break free from unemployment<sup>2</sup> in Greece seeking better prospects and more opportunities to work, satisfactory income and recognition of their qualifications (Labrianidis 2011). Skilled Greeks may also decide to migrate as a way of renouncing certain aspects and mentalities prevalent in the Greek society, which they do not like (ibid.).

Against this backdrop, the organisation of this paper is as follows: the study begins by outlining the theoretical perspectives that inform it. This is followed by a discussion of the research methods and data. Based on the case study of a Greek neomigrant settled in the UK, the next sections explore different aspects of constructing place identity in social media. The last section reflects upon the contributions of the findings.

## **2. Theoretical perspectives**

The present study synthesises conceptual cruxes from the social constructionist approach to identities, the environmental psychological approach to place identity, and the discourse analytical and multimodal approach to place-making in social media.

For social constructionism, identity is dynamic, flexible and necessarily contextual - socially, politically, culturally, and discursively (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). When studying identities in discourse, Blommaert (2005) suggests taking on board the following points:

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the paper, I use the terms “Greek brain drain migrants” and “Greek neomigrants” interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2016), the unemployment rate in Greece reached 24,9% in 2015. The unemployment rate of those aged 15 to 24 years was 49,6%, while the rate of those aged 25 to 29 years was 36,7%. The unemployment rate of higher education graduates reached 19,4%. It is estimated that during 2010-2013 more than 135,000 young skilled Greeks moved abroad - 70% of them had either a master’s degree or a PhD (Fotakis 2016).

- Performing identity is not a matter of articulating a single identity, but of mobilising a whole repertoire of momentarily positioned identity features.
- Identities are constructed in practices that produce, enact, or perform identity; identity thus is identification, a product of socially conditioned semiotic work (e.g., symbols, narratives, textual genres).
- Identities can exist long before an interaction starts and thus can condition the course of this interaction.
- Identities are established when ratified by other people.
- Identities can be attributed and ascribed in hindsight.

As noted above, it is of paramount importance to think of identity as “a process - identification” and “not a thing” because identity “is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does” (Jenkins 2008: 5) principally, one could argue, via discourse. The ways in which we identify ourselves as well as the ways in which we are identified by other people can differ radically across contexts: self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

Environmental psychologists duly acknowledge that “who we are” is intimately related to “where we are”, arguing that identity is not only shaped by place, but we ourselves may also serve as contextual markers for shaping place identities (Dixon and Durrheim 2000). In their seminal article, Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983) view place identity as consisting of cognitions about the physical world in which we are located. These cognitions, they maintain, represent an assortment of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, attitudes, values, beliefs, social meanings, preferences and feelings about specific physical settings. Put it plainly, place identity refers to the ways in which we understand ourselves by investing places with meanings. As such, it should not be understood as a separate part of identity related to place, since all aspects of identity often contain significant references to place or incorporate locations or trajectories as crucial constituents (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996; Blommaert 2005).

Place within the context of digital communication has been at the forefront of recent research (see, for instance, Kytölä 2016). In the sections that follow, my discussion is principally informed by elements from Myers's (2010: 48-64) categorisation of forms and functions of place references in blogs. It also derives support from Aguirre and Graham Davies's (2015) study on how semiotic resources afforded by social media sites can foster claim to belonging to certain places.

According to Myers (2010: 48-64), although the blogosphere is a non-physical place, bloggers and blog commenters have a wide range of ways of referring explicitly or implicitly to the geographical place in which their posts and comments are written such as giving their home address, naming (or not naming) a specific place, flying the flag, using deictic expressions and first person plural pronouns, alternating between two languages, and posting photographs of places. Myers pinpoints that mention of a place in a blog has almost always a certain effect: claiming an identity, making a contrast, giving a perspective on a given topic, narrating a story, or celebrating one's routine everyday world.

Focusing on the social network site of Facebook, Aguirre and Graham Davies (2015) have illustrated how a Filipina migrant settled in New Zealand signifies place and belonging by dint of sharing images. Relying on the spatial representation network framework (van Leeuwen 2003), complemented with connotative analysis (Barthes 1972), Aguirre and Davies arrive at two conclusions which offer significant analytic purchase to the present study: 1) photographs that are posted on Facebook and depict or imply places potentially signify migrants' national belonging; and 2) the "migrant gaze" can transform everyday images to narratives of place. I will come back to these points towards the end of the paper.

### **3. Research context**

For the purposes of my study, I have adopted a discourse-centred online ethnographic approach (Androutsopoulos 2008). This approach, which is

complementary to the textual analysis of online data, takes on two dimensions: a screen-based and a participant-based one. The former centres on systematic, longitudinal and repeated observation of online discourse, while the latter draws upon direct engagement with online actors, namely the producers of this online discourse, via face-to-face and/or mediated interviewing (e.g., using email, instant messaging services or Skype). It has been found that this two-pronged approach can yield rich and triangulated data for the topic under investigation (Barton and Lee 2013; Aguirre 2014; Stæhr 2014; Georgalou 2017). Moreover, it allows the researcher to acquire a deep understanding of the participants' discourse practices in given online environments, gaining in this fashion some of the "tacit knowledge" (Kytölä and Androutsopoulos 2012) underlying these practices, such as the motives behind code-switching or style-shifting, and deleting or editing social media posts and comments. Such an emic approach, which draws on the perspectives and insights of the participants' being studied, may act as a corrective to the researcher's assumptions and interpretations (Androutsopoulos 2008). What is more, it can make the participants realise the value of their online communication (Georgalou 2017).

The data for this article come from a discourse-centred online ethnographic study of Dimitris,<sup>3</sup> a Greek neomigrant in the UK. I came across Dimitris's case long before undertaking this research. At some point in September 2012, a Greek Twitter user I was already following tweeted a link from Dimitris's blog relating to moving and finding a house in the UK. The link instantly drew my attention as at that time I was looking for some temporary residence in the UK. Since then I have been reading Dimitris's blog and following him on Twitter. In March 2016 I started designing the study reported here as part of my postdoctoral research. I proceeded to recruit Dimitris employing the strategy of "methodological individualism" (Wiley, Moreno and Sutko 2012). Abiding by this strategy, the researcher starts by identifying individuals who engage in specific type(s) of activities that are of interest in the study. The researcher then systematically follows their activities and connections that link

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<sup>3</sup> This is his real name and not a pseudonym. Dimitris has chosen not to remain anonymous in the social media platforms in which he participates.

them to all of the assemblages (e.g., participatory cultures, affinity groups or communities of practice) in which they are involved. I contacted Dimitris for the first time via email and invited him to participate in my study. He willingly agreed to be interviewed and have his social media accounts painstakingly observed.

The social media services that Dimitris mostly uses include WordPress, via which he has built his blog *fromgr2uk* ([fromgr2uk.com/](http://fromgr2uk.com/)), Facebook, where he maintains a personal account, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Skype, Goodreads, Foursquare, TripAdvisor, Pinterest, Swarm and ebay. As can be deduced, Dimitris constitutes the epitome of the “connected migrant” (Diminescu 2008), who benefits from social media affordances “to be here and there at the same time” and “to maintain local connections and connections with elsewhere” (Leurs 2015: 43).

The data I introduce herein comprise posts (verbal and visual) which Dimitris has made on his blog as well as his Facebook and Twitter accounts during September 2011 – September 2016, extracts from an online interview he gave me via Skype in June 2016 and field notes from my systematic observation of his social media activities. Occasionally I send him drafts of my analysis to comment upon. Dimitris consented to providing me access to his social media material signing an appropriate online form.

Concerning his demographics and background information, Dimitris was born in 1980 and has lived in the cities of Thessaloniki and Komotini in northern Greece. He has a bachelor’s degree in Physics from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and a master’s degree in Business Information Technology Systems gained from the University of Glasgow, UK. In Thessaloniki, he used to work as an IT Project Manager but, due to the crisis, he was fired in November 2010. Some months later, he decided to migrate to the UK. He started sending CVs and found a job as an IT Business Analyst in Surrey (south east England) in September 2011. His wife, who is a structural engineer, and his then 1.5 year-old son joined him in December 2011. Currently (March 2019), Dimitris works as a Business Analyst in a brewing company in Woking, Surrey.

Considering the choice of a particular destination as instrumental in the shaping of migrant subjectivities (Benson 2016: 484), one of the very first questions I asked Dimitris in our Skype interview had to do with the choice of the UK as a place to migrate. Here is what he said:<sup>4</sup>

*My wife chose [England] because of the language. I was so desperate. Desperate... I was both annoyed and desperate that I said we can even go to Zimbabwe, I don't care. We gotta go. We discussed it with my wife and we said okay it's language as well. And she would feel more comfortable, because she was very scared. She didn't want, she didn't want. I mean one year before we left for England she had never imagined that she would ever leave her country. She was so attached to her parents mainly, so it was unthinkable for us to leave. Me I was okay. I had been to Glasgow for a master. I didn't care, okay, I didn't. I'm telling you I would even go to the US, to Australia, anywhere. But definitely language helped very much. That was the number one reason we thought of. And that I myself had some experience from Great Britain and I had talked to several former fellow students of mine who had already been here... In 2004 when I did the master, some of my fellow students stayed here [in the UK] and started working and they were telling me that there are jobs, [life] is good and that you should go to the south, because it is less cold. It sucks. This is a lie. Everywhere is shit. But [laughs] ... In essence the language and maybe the familiarity a little bit more and then okay the fact that it is in Europe, it's just 3 hours by plane from Thessaloniki.*

Despite Dimitris's hyperbolic assertion that he would go anywhere, we can see that there are three very plausible reasons he and his wife decided to move to the UK. First and foremost, both of them are proficient in English. Elsewhere in the interview, Dimitris highlights the need for being proficient in the language of the country one is planning to migrate to. Second, he mentions his brief familiarity with the British socio-cultural context on account of his

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<sup>4</sup> The interview was originally conducted in Greek.

postgraduate studies plus his former fellow students' feedback on the availability of jobs. Lastly, the fact that the UK is relatively close to Greece, and concomitantly to their next of kin, played a pivotal role in their decision. As regards the choice of Surrey in particular, Dimitris humorously refers to the supposedly milder weather in the south of the UK. In fact, and this is known to me through observation of his social media discourse, for Dimitris and his wife the proximity of Surrey to London increased the chances of pursuing good careers within their sectors at a somewhat lower cost of living compared to London.

The next section proceeds to the empirical discussion, which will be concerned with the following discourse strategies of asserting a place identity: flying the flag, naming specific places (or not), constructing in-groups and out-groups, using two languages / scripts, projecting other voices, and depicting places visually.

#### **4. Constructing a neomigrant place identity on social media**

##### **4.1 Flying the flag**

Dimitris conceived the idea of creating his blog while flying from Thessaloniki to Heathrow to start his new life in September 2011. As he explains in his first post, the purpose of the blog, in which he writes exclusively in Greek, is:<sup>5</sup>

- (1) Να ενημερώνει τους φίλους, την οικογένεια μου αλλά και όποιον άλλο ενδιαφέρεται για την ζωή μου σαν μετανάστης στο εξωτερικό. Να

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<sup>5</sup> The following format conventions are used throughout the paper. Italics are used for interview excerpts and for mentioning words from the data. Underlines have been added to examples to indicate the feature I am discussing. All textual data are rendered intact including the use of different or transliterated scripts, stress omissions (in Greek), typo and spelling mistakes, multiple punctuation, absence of or double spacing between words, incomplete meanings and unconventional usages. All Greek examples are translated into English. The English translations are found within double quotation marks (“...”). Underneath each example a parenthesis is given which indicates the social media platform on which the example was posted along with its date of posting.

συμβουλεύει, να μοιράζεται εμπειρίες και όνειρα ακόμα και να νοσταλγεί την πατρίδα που αφήνει πίσω.

“To inform friends, my family and whoever is interested in my life as a migrant abroad. To give advice, to share experiences and dreams, even to feel nostalgia for the homeland it leaves behind.”

(blog, 20 September 2011)

Visiting the blog’s first page (Figure 2), we notice that Dimitris instantly states place with flagging (Billig 1995; Myers 2010: 53), that is, explicitly invoking the Greek and the British nations. Flagging is achieved in two ways: verbally, via the name of the blog, *fromgr2uk*, which indicates Dimitris’s movement, and visually, via the Greek and the British flags that appear in the logo of the blog (top left), created by a web designer and a friend of Dimitris’s. A similar flagging strategy is observed in Twitter, where Dimitris’s username is @fromGR2UK.

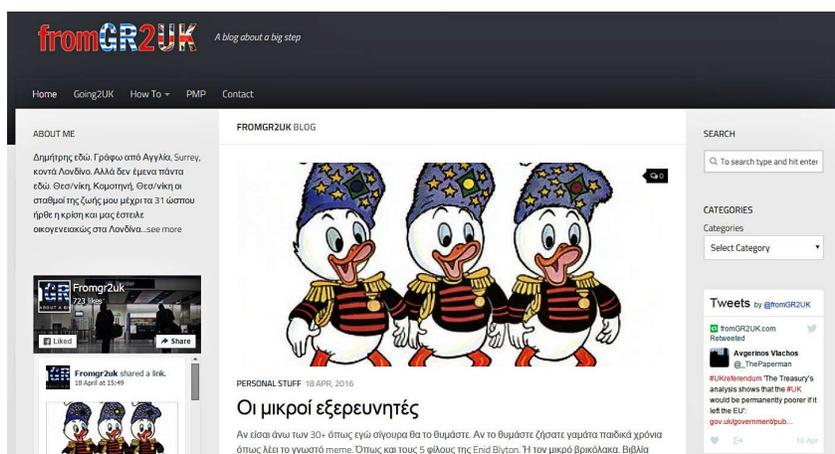


Figure 2. First page of Dimitris’s blog

## 4.2 Naming specific places (or not)

In his posts, Dimitris very often invokes the names of specific places to different purposes: to evoke nostalgia, to compare and contrast, to label and to evaluate.

### 4.2.1 *Evoking nostalgia*

In the extract below, Dimitris refers to different places in his home town, Thessaloniki, to evoke nostalgia.

- (2) Αναπολώ τις βόλτες στο πεζόδρομο Καλαμαριάς που κάποτε τους είχα βαρεθεί αλλά τώρα μου λείπουν: από τον Αριστοτέλη, πίσω από το ωδείο και μετά κάτω στο πεζόδρομο, παγωτό από το Θέμη (το καλύτερο παγωτό του κόσμου), σπόρια από τον Αχιλλέα, πιτάκι για τον μικρό πίο κάτω, φραπεδάκι στο all-time-classic 51. Κάτω στην Αρετσού για φαγητό, για βόλτα πλάι στη θάλασσα. Το βράδυ με το κοντομάνικο, μπυρίτσα να δροσιστούμε στο Emerald και αέναες συζητήσεις για πολιτικά, για metal, για ποδόσφαιρο με τη παρέα.

“I reminisce the walks at Kalamaria pedestrian street with which I was once bored but now I miss them: from Aristotelis, behind the conservatory and then down the pedestrian street, ice-cream from Themis (the best ice-cream in the world), seeds from Achilleas, small pie for the boy further down, frappe coffee at the all-time-classic 51. Down in Aretsou for food, for a walk next to the sea. Evenings with a t-shirt, beer to cool down at Emerald and endless conversations about politics, metal, football with the company.”

(blog, 2 April 2013)

Dimitris in (2) enumerates, perhaps with a tendency of idealisation due to the distance, a series of social places (van Dijk 2009), that is, places that used to locate his activities in everyday life and especially during his leisure time in Thessaloniki. It is interesting how food (*ice-cream, seeds, small pie, food, beer*)

gets related to these places becoming a synecdoche of whole periods in Dimitris's life. Chiming with Myers (2010: 53), in actual fact, we do not need to know where exactly these places are to get Dimitris's point; the names are invoked for their sentimental associations and not for their locatability.

#### 4.2.2 Comparing and contrasting

In (3), Dimitris names *England* and *Greece* in order to compare and contrast them.

(3) Το σύστημα της Αγγλίας είναι 4-4-2, ομαδικό. Στην Ελλάδα είναι το 1, ο καθένας μόνος του.

“England's system is 4-4-2, team play. In Greece it is 1, each one on their own.”

(blog, 29 January 2012)

As an ardent football fan, Dimitris here wittily employs a metaphor taken from formation in football, namely the way in which the players of a team are positioned along the pitch. In the 4-4-2 formation, there are four defenders, four midfielders and two forwards. It is considered to be one of the best formations as the players collaborate to protect the whole width of the field (Bate 2015). On the other hand, formations like 3-6-1, 4-5-1 or 4-3-2-1 have a lone striker who plays against an entire defence alone. By means of this metaphor, Dimitris juxtaposes the collectivistic outlook of the English society with the individualistic outlook of the Greek society. In this vein, he identifies himself with the English outlook disidentifying at the same time himself from the Greek one.

#### 4.2.3 Labelling

In the following post, without naming the UK, Dimitris labels it as *my new country*. *Not homeland*. *Country*, reserving the label *homeland* only for Greece.

- (4) Με τον καιρό θα πάψω να ορίζω το χρόνο με το πότε θα επιστρέψω ξανά Ελλάδα και να κοιτάω να απολαμβάνω περισσότερο τις μικρές καθημερινές στιγμές στην νέα μου ζωή, στη νέα μου χώρα. Όχι πατρίδα. Χώρα. Γιατί πατρίδα είναι μόνο μια.

“Gradually I will stop define time in terms of when I return to Greece again and I will care for enjoying more the small daily moments in my new life, in my new country. Not homeland. Country. Because homeland is only one.”

(blog, 29 July 2012)

However, the above was written back in 2012, just one year after Dimitris’s migration. In tune with Hiller and Franz (2004), at that point, Dimitris had entered the post-migration phase in his migration experience: he was located in the UK for less than five years and was under a process of being assimilated in the host community staying simultaneously in touch with what was integral to life in the community of origin.

Remarkably, Dimitris’s usage of the label *homeland* changes some years later, when the UK European Union membership referendum took place on 23 June 2016. Figure 3 is Dimitris’s Facebook profile picture three weeks before the referendum. Dimitris has added a special filter to his picture via a third-party app to show his support for Britain remaining a part of the European Union. Although Dimitris did not have the right to vote on the referendum (he has not applied for a British citizenship yet), he is entitled to express stances on the issue as an EU citizen who has migrated to the UK and worries about his

future once the UK withdraws from the European Union. Here is what he wrote on his blog after the Brexit result:

- (5) Η στεναχώρια από το αποτέλεσμα του Brexit δεν έφυγε. Επειδή νιώθω ότι όμως αρκετή μαυρίλα έπεσε και επειδή το αποτέλεσμα είναι αυτό που είναι και δεν αλλάζει, θέλω να δώσω λίγο χρώμα. Θέλω να μιλήσω για τη νέα μου πατρίδα. Το νέο σπίτι της οικογένειάς μου. Μετά από πέντε χρόνια στην Αγγλία [...] μετά από 5 χρόνια λοιπόν μετανάστης θέλω να γράψω μερικά πράγματα που αγαπώ στη χώρα αυτή, στη νέα μου ζωή.

“The sadness from Brexit result is still there. But because I feel that it’s not all doom and gloom and because the result is what it is and cannot change, I want to give some colour. I want to talk about my new homeland. My family’s new home. After five years in England [...] after 5 years as a migrant I want to write about some things that I love in this country, in my new life.”

(blog, 21 July 2016)

This is the first instance where Dimitris attaches the label *homeland* to the UK. Such a choice, sparked by the Brexit outcome, may be related to the fact that Dimitris seems to have entered the settled migrant’s phase (Hiller and Franz 2004), who, having exceeded the timeframe of five years in England, is acculturated in the destination.



**Figure 3.** Dimitris’s Facebook profile picture (June 2016)

#### 4.2.4 Evaluating

Brexit constituted a recurrent theme in Dimitris's social media posts by and large. In the tweet depicted in Figure 4, he personifies Britain to express his deep disappointment over the referendum result.



Figure 4. Tweeting about Brexit

It is worth noting that in this instance Dimitris participates in a wider online community, first, by writing in English (unlike his blog) and, second, by the use of the hashtag #brexitin5words, which coordinates mass expression of value around the particular topic (Zappavigna 2012: 83-99).

In sum, this section explored place references as identity. At this juncture, I should note that there is a distinction between place references and place references as identity; not all place references are identity. Place identity is a much more complex entity than mere references to a place. The aspect of place identity I was particularly interested in was references to different place names that are used as identity. The preceding discussion centred on those references to places that my interpretation of them was offered as identity marker, in other words, places that were meaningful to Dimitris for personal, socio-cultural and national/ethnic reasons (see also De Fina 2009).

#### 4.3 Constructing in-groups and out-groups

Previous literature on migration, belonging and discourse has paid assiduous attention to the complex phenomenon of inclusion and exclusion (see, for instance, chapters in Delanty, Wodak and Jones 2008). In the blog extract that

follows, entitled *Συνεχίζετε να μας αγνοείτε* (“You keep on ignoring us”), Dimitris identifies himself with a particular group: skilled Greeks who have migrated because of the crisis.

- (6) Είμαστε πλέον πάρα πολλοί για να είμαστε απλώς ένα ρεύμα της εποχής. Είμαστε πλέον παραπάνω από όσοι φαντάζεστε. Είμαστε πλέον τόσοι που δεν μπορούμε να αγνοηθούμε όσο και αν η σύγχρονη Ελληνική κοινωνία στρουθοκαμηλίζει και αρνείται να δει τί εξελίσσεται ραγδαία μπροστά στα μάτια της. Αναφέρομαι σε αυτή τη λέξη που ενοχλεί πολλούς ίσως γιατί αρνούνται να δουν την πραγματικότητα στα μάτια τους ή επειδή τους πειράζει που ήρθαμε σε ξένες χώρες για να κυνηγήσουμε τα όνειρα μας και δεν δουλεύουμε στα ορυχεία του Βελγίου ακούγοντας ‘Στις φάμπρικες της ξενιτιάς’: Μετανάστες. [...]. Δεν υπάρχουνε σαν Έλληνες εμείς απλώς είμαστε μια μετακινούμενη άμορφη μάζα που επέλεξε να ζήσει αλλού. Μια δίλεπτη αναφορά στα κανάλια και αυτό ήταν. Δεν καταλαβαίνει η Ελληνική κοινωνία ότι ίσως η χειρότερη πληγή της κρίσης είναι αυτή η αιμοραγία της νεολαίας που δεν θα γυρίσει πίσω ίσως ποτέ.

“We are already too many to be just a fad of the era. We are already more than you can imagine. We are already too many that we can’t be ignored no matter how much contemporary Greek society has its head in the sand and denies seeing what is rapidly taking place in front of its eyes. I’m referring to this word that annoys many people maybe because they deny seeing reality or because they are bothered that we have come to foreign countries to pursue our dreams and not work at Belgium’s mines listening to the song ‘In the factories of the foreign land’:<sup>6</sup> Migrants. [...] We don’t exist as Greeks we’re just a mobile amorphous mass that chose to live elsewhere. A two-minute mention in the channels and that was all. Greek

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<sup>6</sup> This song was performed in 1965 by Stelios Kazantzidis (1931-2001), a famous Greek folk singer. Kazantzidis is considered to be the voice of the Greek working-class people who migrated abroad after World War II, capturing in his songs their feelings during this difficult period.

society doesn't understand that maybe the worst wound of the crisis is this bleeding of young people who will perhaps never come back.”

(blog, 4 August 2013)

Dimitris poses here one of the paradoxes of the Greek neomigration: the migrants do not seem to experience discrimination from the host society but from Greeks living in Greece, who avoid using the word *migrant* for them (Dimitris, though, characterises himself as a migrant; see Examples 1 and 5), failing to recognise, either deliberately or not, that brain drain migration is a serious problem for Greek society. In the extract above, Dimitris proceeds to a sharp demarcation between “us” and “them”. Starting with the construction of the Greek migrants in-group, Dimitris uses an array of membership categorisation devices: the first person plural pronoun *we*<sup>7</sup> and the first person plural possessive *our*, the metaphor *a mobile amorphous mass* and the synecdoche *a two-minute mention*, with the latter two being other-perceptions of them. With respect to the out-group of Greeks from which he dissociates himself (*contemporary Greek society, many people, they, Greek society*), Dimitris opts for attributing to it negative traits by dint of predicates that deprecate its perceptive and cognitive capacity (*has its head in the sand and denies seeing, deny seeing reality, doesn't understand*) and point to its hostile attitude (*are bothered*). This in-group and out-group construction suggests that Greek neomigrants appear to be doubly displaced: (1) because of the crisis, and (2) because of Greek society's prevalent mentality (see also Example 9 further down).

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<sup>7</sup> Greek is a pro-drop language. This means that the use of the pronoun as a theme is largely unnecessary since it is signalled by the inflection of the verb as is the case with the suffixes in *Είμαστε, μπορούμε, ήρθαμε, δεν δουλεύουμε, Δεν υπάρχουμε*. In the extract, there is only one actual occurrence of the pronoun *εμείς* (“we”) being placed in initial thematic position in *εμείς απλώς είμαστε μια μετακινούμενη άμορφη μάζα* (“we’re just a mobile amorphous mass”) for extra emphasis.

#### 4.4 Using two languages / scripts

Affiliation with place can also be marked through language and script choices. These choices do not tell the reader where one is but by whom and how they want their texts to be read (Myers 2010: 56). In the post below, Dimitris compares public sector in Greece and Britain.

##### (7) Δημόσιο vs dimosio

Δημόσιο στην Αγγλία vs Δημόσιο στην Ελλάδα. Ευκολάκι θα μου πείτε. Στάνταρ άσσος. Και είναι! Απλά δεν υπάρχει σύγκριση και δεν εννοώ ως προς τους ανθρώπους και τις προθέσεις τους (αν κ ως γνωστόν road to hell if [sic] full of good intentions) γιατί καλοί και εργατικοί άνθρωποι υπάρχουν παντού, αλλά μιλάω ως προς την οργάνωση, το τρόπο δουλειάς, την απόδοση και βασικά τη νοοτροπία!

“Public sector in England vs public sector in Greece. Easy-peasy you’ll say. The former is the odds-on favourite. And indeed it is! There’s just no comparison and I don’t mean it as regards people and their intentions (although as is known road to hell is full of good intentions) because good and hard-working people exist everywhere but I’m talking about organisation, way of working, efficiency and basically mentality!”

(blog, 25 April 2013)

The title of the post, *Δημόσιο vs dimosio*, includes Greeklish, a case of trans-scripting (Androutsopoulos 2013) where Dimitris makes a deliberate use of the Greek word *δημόσιο* (public sector) with English wrapping. This choice playfully highlights the differences between the two societies (see also Example 3). The effect would not be the same if, for example, he had written “Ελληνικό δημόσιο vs Βρετανικό δημόσιο / Greek public sector vs. British public sector”. In the main text, he code-switches (the part where he writes *road to hell if full of good intentions*) to show that he has a good command of the English language and to mark a kind of affiliation with and assimilation in Britain. Interestingly,

Dimitris had provided a positive metalinguistic comment on his use of English on an earlier tweet (Figure 5), where he also code-switches (*english expressions, nice*), indexing in this way his current linguistic and cultural identity.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 5.** Dimitris reflects upon his language use on Twitter (Translation: “I have started using English expressions without a second thought....nice!”)

#### 4.5 Projecting other voices

Identification and disidentification with places does not necessarily have to be expressed in one’s own words. In the examples that follow, Dimitris relies on other people’s voices to different effects: to identify with them, to critique them or dramatise them.

##### 4.5.1 Identifying

Dimitris has titled one of his blog posts “Stranger in a strange land”, which is actually a song title by the British heavy metal group Iron Maiden released in 1986. At first blush, one might think that Dimitris is referring to himself as being a stranger in the UK. But towards the end of his post, he specifies:

- (8) Τουρίστας στην Ελλάδα είπαμε! 3 χρόνια λείπω και στην παλιά παρέα έχουν προστεθεί νέες παρουσίες και πλέον εγώ είμαι ο “ποιος είναι αυτός είπαμε;”. Περίεργο συναίσθημα.

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<sup>8</sup> For in-depth discussions on metalinguistic discourse online, see Barton and Lee (2013: 107-123) and Lee (2017: 71-88).

“Tourist in Greece we say! I’ve been away for 3 years and new people have been added to the old company and now I’m the ‘who’s this guy?’ Strange feeling.”

[Underneath he embeds from YouTube Iron Maiden’s video clip “Stranger in a strange land”.]

(blog, 10 March 2014)

Dimitris here adopts an entextualisation process (Blommaert 2005; Leppänen et al. 2014), namely he extracts an instance of culture (the song “Stranger in a Strange Land”) and relocates it in his discourse, to encapsulate his feelings of estrangement during one of his return visits to Greece.

#### 4.5.2 Critiquing

Dimitris opens one of his blog posts by reproducing a tweet written by the Greek journalist Aris Portosalte (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Portosalte’s tweet (Translation: “It seems that characterising, these days, labour mobility within the EU as migration like the one in the 60’s, shows some people’s..need for whining!”)

Further down in his post, Dimitris provides a critical reading of Portosalte’s tweet:

(9) Το ακούσαμε και αυτό! ‘Κινητικότητα’ εργαζομένων. Αντί σαν ‘δημοσιογράφος’ να ερευνήσει τα αίτια της ‘μετακίνησης’ και να διαπιστώσει ότι δεν πρόκειται απλώς για μια κινητικότητα με κίνητρο την φιλοδοξία αλλά την επιβίωση, πετάει μια σαχλαμάρα που ξέρει ότι οι περισσότεροι θα καταπιούν αμάσητη και φυσικά με απώτερο στόχο να εξυπηρετήσει τα συμφέροντα των εργοδοτών του.

“That’s one for the books! ‘Labour mobility’. As a ‘journalist’ instead of researching the reasons behind this ‘mobility’ and see that it’s not just mobility motivated by ambition but by survival, he talks nonsense knowing that most people will eat it up and having of course as an ultimate purpose to serve his employers’ interests.”

(blog, 9 May 2013)

Dimitris uses Portosalte’s words to detach himself from them and critique them. At the same time, he constructs the journalist as belonging to that outgroup of Greeks who do not recognise that there is an actual problem emanating from the crisis.

#### 4.5.3 *Dramatising*

In (10) Dimitris brings in English friends’ and colleagues’ voices to dramatise his view about the British weather.

(10) Χρόνια πολλά σε όλους και ελπίζω σύντομα η Άνοιξη να έρθει και στο Surrey γιατί ο καιρός είναι απίστευτα χειμωνιάτικος και ξενέρωτος. ‘Η όπως μου λένε οι Άγγλοι: “It’s typical and soon you’ll be miserable like us”.

“Happy Easter to everyone and I hope that spring will soon arrive in Surrey as well because the weather is unbelievably wintry and boring. Or as English people tell me “It’s typical and soon you’ll be miserable like us”.”

(blog, 18 April 2012)

Beyond setting a humorous tone, direct speech in this instance also functions as a powerful device of social identity (Lampropoulou 2012), which allows Dimitris to present himself as immersed in the British collectivity (*like us*). The fact that direct speech is rendered in English further attests to his assimilation in the host society (see also Example 7).

Although verbal text is sufficient to construct place identities, it is not the only mode that Dimitris uses. The next and last analytical section tackles how posting images on social media can have specific resonance for place identity claims serving as a performative exercise of identity and belonging (see also Georgalou 2017).

#### 4.6 Visual place-making

Place may be depicted as “functional”, that is, its relevance lies in its utility (e.g. a photograph showing Dimitris drinking a beer in a pub in Guildford, Surrey, or swimming in one of Halkidiki’s beaches in Greece), or “meaningful”, that is, conveying specific connotations of place (van Leeuwen 2003; Aguirre and Graham Davies 2015) as is the case in Figure 7, a photograph Dimitris shared on Facebook. The Greekness of this combination of watermelon and feta cheese, which may seem mundane for residents in Greece, is not ordinary for Dimitris because it is embedded into a fresh, UK context (as can also be seen in the check-in of the post: Byfleet, United Kingdom) and therefore deserves to be captured and shared as a displaced symbol of home. This kind of posting, an instance of “semiotic mobility” in Blommaert’s (2010: 79) terms, is in line with Svašek (2008: 221), who suggests that migrants’ multi-sensorial engagement with “things from home” enables them “to have inner dialogues with the absent homeland and create a sense of belonging”. On the other hand, Figure 8, which

depicts the keys of the new home Dimitris and his wife bought in Surrey, connotes a sense of belonging to and acceptance in the new country. Notably, these connotations are also rendered through the choice of language in the photographs' opening comments. In Figure 7 Dimitris's Greekness is expressed in Greek, whereas in Figure 8 his belonging to the UK is expressed in English.



**Figure 7.** Greek eating habits in the UK (Facebook, June 5, 2016)  
(Translation: “It’s hot today so we decided to do it the Greek way with feta cheese and watermelon.”)



**Figure 8.** Dimitris's keys to his new home in Surrey (Facebook, December 11, 2015)

## 5. Concluding remarks

This article aimed at exploring the discourse practices of place-making by Greek brain drain migrants, with specific focus on the role of social media in this endeavour. Bringing together elements from discourse analysis (Myers 2010; Aguirre and Graham Davies 2015), identity construction theories (Blommaert 2005; Benwell and Stokoe 2006), environmental psychology (Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff 1983) and discourse-centred online ethnography (Androutsopoulos 2008), the study presented and discussed data from a Greek neomigrant who avidly uses social media to write about his migration experience. The analysis of these data offers an illuminating insight into the very nature of (skilled) migration and enhances substantially our understanding of the consequences of social media.

Taken together, the findings indicate that for Dimitris belonging and attachment are not based on a single place. Being caught up between two nations, two histories, two rules, two systems, two structures and two crises (the Greek crisis and the Brexit crisis), Dimitris's place identity can be characterised as "liminal" (van Gennep 1960), that is, as having an "in-between status". Aguirre (2014) makes a convincing argument in favour of "liminality" as the conceptual tool that binds migration, place, discourse, and social media. This is substantiated in the data at hand as this "liminal status" stimulates Dimitris to share his thoughts and experiences online. What we witness in his postings is that his place identity consists of several overlapping layers, both local and translocal.

The analysis demonstrated that the particular ways in which Dimitris construes his place identity involve a complex of linguistic and discourse strategies, including comparison and evaluation, construction of in-groups and out-groups, language and script alternations, entextualisation of other voices, and visual connotations. Importantly, the synergy between discourse analysis and online ethnography enabled us to gain an "insider perspective of a migrant" (Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2007), as opposed to a perspective from "outside" (e.g., official media, political and other institutional discourses). Such a synergy brought to the surface in a more nuanced way crucial social, cultural and psychological aspects of the current Greek neomigration phenomenon which are not apparent through statistics and questionnaires (see also De Fina 2003: 3-6), such as the distorted perceptions that some Greeks and media hold about Greek neomigrants as well as the externalisation of conflicting emotions experienced by the neomigrant (e.g., nostalgia, sense of uprootedness, irritation at Greek policies and mentalities, development of new attachments).

The findings herein put forward the argument that for migrants social media make up significant outlets for place-making, constructing place identity and asserting (or eschewing) belonging. In Dimitris's case, the conveyal of this belonging appears to be polymediated. Madianou and Miller (2012) have coined the term "polymedia" to refer to the use of a combination of (new and/or old) media that best relays one's feelings and intentions. For instance, we saw that

Dimitris uses his blog to address a Greek audience and describe personal thoughts, activities and experiences in detail while he prefers Twitter when he wishes to engage in international discussions on wider issues such as the Brexit result. Although Dimitris talked about the milestone of buying a house in Surrey on his blog and his Twitter account, only on Facebook did he take a more emotional stance towards the event sharing the photo of his house keys (Figure 8), making it visible only to his friends<sup>9</sup> and not to the internet as a whole. Dimitris's choice of social media and the combination of different social media for self-expression and dissemination is in itself a major communicative act (see also Madianou and Miller 2012: 139). It is through the analysis of Dimitris's polymedia usage that we can gain a more comprehensive picture of his identity and migration experiences.

This study provides insights on the discursive conveyal of migratory (non)belongings across social media venues zooming in on the under-researched case of contemporary Greek neomigrants. As social media are endowed with new affordances and as people choose or are forced to move across places, it is expected that social media will constitute – to paraphrase Vertovec (2004) – “the social glue of migrant transnationalism”, giving rise to even more diverse discourse practices than those examined here.

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<sup>9</sup> In Figure 8 there is an icon with two silhouettes next to the date and the place check-in. This indicates that Dimitris has customised his privacy settings so that his post is seen only by friends, that is, people (e.g., friends, relatives, colleagues, acquaintances) he himself has added to his Facebook friends list.

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