Université de Liège

Faculté des Sciences Sociales

Migration perceptions and othering-solidarity practices. Insights from Italian, Greek and Turkish privileged migrants in Brussels.

Par Elodie HUT

Thèse de doctorat en vue de l'obtention du grade de Docteur en sciences politiques et sociales à l'Université de Liège

Année académique 2024-2025

Thèse dirigée par:
François Gemenne (Hugo Observatory, Université de Liège)
Bruno Frère (PragmApolis, Université de Liège)

Membres du jury:
Fiona. B. Adamson (SOAS University of London)
Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels (University of Kent)
Jean-Michel Lafleur (CEDEM, Université de Liège)
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Abstract

The present research explores how privileged migrants from Italy, Greece and Turkey living in the multicultural city of Brussels perceive migration in both their places of origin and settlement, and the extent to which their attitudes generate 'solidarity' and/or 'othering' towards other migrant groups. Indeed, in addition to having long histories of emigration, these three countries have grappled with increasingly politicised and polarised immigration-related debates since the 2000s. Drawing from 54 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted between November 2020 and April 2022 with Italian, Greek and Turkish nationals living in Brussels, this thesis mobilises intergroup contact and integrated threat theories, social identity theory, as well as concepts associated with transnationalism, to question the transformational impact of migration lived experiences on respondents' perceptions and practices. It addresses an important gap in the literature on attitudes towards migration by investigating migration through the oft-overlooked perspective of people who are migrants themselves. By focusing more specifically on the perspective of migrants who are not typically depicted or do not necessarily identify as such due to certain material and symbolic advantages (such as their citizenship status, socio-cultural capital, or whiteness), this research highlights how categories of migrant (un)deservingness are formed along nationality, class, race, ethnicity and religious lines, amongst others. By identifying and scrutinising five prevalent migration discourses in respondents' countries of origin (i.e. discourses depicting migration as a 'threat', a 'crisis', 'an opportunity', humanitarian discourses, and discourses of migrant categorisation), this research further shows that migrant othering and solidarity primarily materialise in discourses, if not in tangible acts. Furthermore, it analyses the existence of a subtle 'othering-solidarity continuum', which reveals, on the one hand, the pervasive nature of migrant othering in respondents' discourses and, on the other hand, the conditional and selective nature of solidarity. Based on nuanced and qualitative insights, this thesis aims to move beyond simplistic and binary representations of attitudes towards migration, whereby people are typically described as being either 'for' or 'against' migration.

Keywords: Perceptions; Othering; Solidarity; Italy; Greece; Turkey; Brussels; Privileged Migrants; Migrant Categorisation

Résumé

Cette étude explore la manière dont des migrant·e·s privilégié·e·s originaires d'Italie, de Grèce et de Turquie résidant dans la ville multiculturelle de Bruxelles perçoivent la migration dans leurs lieux d'origine et d'installation, et la manière dont ces perceptions débouchent sur des pratiques de solidarité et/ou d'altérisation (*othering*) à l'égard d'autres personnes migrant·e·s. En effet, en plus du long passé d'émigration de ces trois pays, les débats liés à l'immigration y font l'objet d'une politisation et d'une polarisation croissantes depuis les années 2000. Basée sur 54 entretiens semi-structurés menés entre novembre 2020 et avril 2022 auprès de ressortissants italiens, grecs et turcs vivant à Bruxelles, cette thèse mobilise les théories du contact intergroupe, de la menace intégrée et de l'identité sociale, ainsi que des concepts issus du transnationalisme, afin d'interroger l'impact transformateur des expériences migratoires sur les perceptions et les pratiques des personnes enquêtées. Cette étude comble une lacune importante dans la littérature sur les attitudes à l'égard de la migration en s'intéressant au point de vue souvent délaissé de personnes qui sont elles-mêmes migrantes. En se concentrant plus spécifiquement sur le point de vue de migrants qui ne sont pas typiquement dépeints ou qui ne s'identifient pas nécessairement comme tels en raison de certains avantages matériels et symboliques (liés notamment à leur citoyenneté, à leur capital socio-culturel ou à leur blanchité), cette recherche illustre la manière dont différentes catégories de migrants – plus ou moins méritants – sont formées, en fonction de critères tels que la nationalité, la classe, la race, l'ethnicité ou la religion. En examinant cinq discours migratoires répandus dans les pays d'origine des personnes enquêtées (les discours décrivant la migration comme une 'menace', une 'crise', une 'opportunité', les discours humanitaires, et les discours de catégorisation des migrants), cette recherche démontre que l'altérisation et la solidarité à l'égard des migrants se matérialisent davantage dans les discours que dans des actes tangibles. Par ailleurs, cette thèse analyse l'existence d'un subtil 'continuum de l'altérisation-solidarité' (*othering-solidarity continuum*), révélant, d'une part, l'omniprésence de l'altérisation des migrants dans les discours des personnes enquêtées et, d'autre part, la nature conditionnelle et sélective de leurs pratiques de solidarité. Sur la base de données nuancées et qualitatives, cette thèse vise à dépasser les représentations simplistes et binaires des attitudes à l'égard de la migration, qui tendent à décrire les gens comme étant soit 'pour', soit 'contre' la migration.

Mots-clé: Perceptions; Altérisation; Solidarité; Italie; Grèce; Turquie; Bruxelles; Migrants privilégiés; Catégorisation des migrations

Acknowledgments

Embarking on a PhD can be a lonely and tumultuous journey, punctuated by moments of self-doubt, unexpected challenges (in my case, the outbreak of a global pandemic), as well as sacrifices in terms of work-life balance. Although I did occasionally experience such difficulties, they were mostly mitigated thanks to the unwavering support of several people whom I was fortunate enough to have had by my side these past five years, and whom I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the members of my PhD committee – François Gemenne, Bruno Frère, and Fiona B. Adamson – who have trusted and accompanied my research project since the beginning and have continuously provided constructive and expert feedback on my work. Thank you for your kindness and for turning our annual meetings into a space that felt both safe and stimulating.

I am also forever indebted to the 54 respondents who agreed to participate in this research and whose impactful testimonies form the core of this thesis. Thanks to their authentic and thought-provoking insights, conducting interviews was by far the most enjoyable part of this whole process. I sincerely hope that my analysis truthfully reflects the wealth and nuance of their personal accounts.

I also want to acknowledge my brilliant friends and former Hugo Observatory colleagues (Caroline Zickgraf, Tatiana Castillo Betancourt, Başak Yavçan, Lisa Thibaut) for providing me with invaluable academic advice and continuous emotional support throughout this PhD adventure. Thank you to Augustin Bourleaud, Claire Iceaga, Gauthier Mertens and Eloïse Goffart for their precious help in transcribing several interviews, as well as to Tola Ositelu for expertly proofreading my manuscript. A special thanks also goes to my fellow PhD friends, in particular Dorine for inspiring me to follow in her footsteps, and Tatiana and Mariam for our animated and caffeinated co-working sessions.

I would lastly like to express my deepest gratitude to my friends and relatives, who bring a personal meaning to my work on migration and who have been a source of endless and unconditional support. My parents Catherine and Jean-Charles raised me and my brother

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Introduction

> The emotions of fear or insecurity do not always obey rational considerations. They may be exaggerated or even paranoid; but once a whole population is afraid, we are dealing with the reality of the fear rather than the reality of the threat (Maalouf, 2000:28).

Since the early 2000s, migration has gained considerable media and political salience in the European context. While the internal borders of the EU have been reduced through the effects of the Schengen agreement, its external borders have been progressively reinforced. Public debates around migration have become particularly polarising in the Euro-Mediterranean region. At the time of writing this introduction, in the summer of 2024, far-right – and overtly anti-immigration – parties have made significant gains in Europe (obtaining an additional 69 extra seats in the 2024 European Parliament elections[1] and an extra 54 seats in the French snap elections).[2] Anti-Syrian riots are spreading in Turkey following an alleged sexual assault involving a Syrian man in the town of Kayseri. No later than July 2024, far-right Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni declared that "illegal migration is the enemy of legal migration" (InfoMigrants, 2024). A week prior, the Council of Europe's anti-torture committee urged the Greek state to improve immigrant detention conditions in the Aegean islands of Lesvos, Kos and Samos and to put an end to violent migrant pushbacks at land and at sea (Council of Europe, 2024). When I started my PhD, back in April 2019, European countries were grappling with the aftermath of the so-called 'migration crisis' of 2015/2016.[3] As illustrated by the recent examples mentioned above, instead of giving way to more solidarity towards people on the move (with the notable exception of people fleeing Ukraine) and states located at EU's external borders, EU migration policies and discourses in the post-2015 period exacerbated previous patterns of securitisation and criminalisation of migration, reinforcing representations of migrants as an economic, cultural and/or security 'threat'.

In an influential essay on identity and the need to belong, and as highlighted in the opening quote of this chapter, Franco-Lebanese author Amin Maalouf aptly highlighted the profound

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[1] The 'European Conservatives and Reformists' group obtained 69 and 78 seats in 2019 and 2024 respectively. The 'Identity and Democracy' group had 49 MEPs in 2019. It merged into the 'Patriots for Europe' group in 2024, which obtained 84 seats. A new far-right group ('Europe of Sovereign Nations') was created, totalling 25 MEPs.
[2] The far-right *Rassemblement National* party obtained 143 seats following the 2024 elections. Prior to these, it counted 89 Members of Parliament.
[3] This thesis acknowledges the potential negative consequences of framing migration as crisis and seeks to deconstruct this discourse (See 2.1.2 and 5.1.2). Unless I am citing authors or respondents, or discussing this particular migration discourse (particularly in 5.1.2), I will refer to the so-called 'migration crisis' of 2015/2016 as "the 2015/2016 migrant arrivals".

mismatch between subjective perceptions and objective realities. This reflection easily applies to attitudes towards migration, which tend to be rooted in affect rather than in a material basis (Sides & Citrin, 2007). As such, understanding subjective perceptions of migration matter as much as documenting objective facts about it. Indeed, (mis)perceptions rooted in emotions and fear can fuel prejudice and result in hostility towards migrants. Importantly, anti-migrant behaviour manifests not only in overt exclusionary practices (on the part of individuals as well as state actors) but also in insidious othering practices, which range from 'casual' and structural racism to the normalisation of Islamophobic discourses which are often embedded in migration public debates.

The present PhD research was mainly conducted in the framework of the MAGYC (Migration Governance and Asylum Crises) project, which assessed how migration governance has been influenced by the recent 'refugee crises' and how these shape policy responses on migration more broadly.[4] This thesis also received funding by the ongoing ACRONYM (Advancing Cooperation on Migration and Asylum) project.[5] The overall conceptual background of the MAGYC project largely influenced the focus of my PhD dissertation on perceptions of migration and migrants in the context of the recent European asylum 'crisis' of 2015-2016 in three key countries of transit (Italy, Greece and Turkey) (MAGYC, 2023; See 2.1.2). Although my research project was not directly tied to any specific deliverable or work package, which meant that I was free to define my research question, it needed to remain coherent with the MAGYC project. I gradually nurtured the idea of investigating the perceptions of Greek nationals living in Brussels regarding migration governance in Greece, as well as related practices of hospitality and hostility towards migrants. I later decided to incorporate two additional national groups into my sample, who were likely to face comparable situations back home, namely: Italian and Turkish nationals. Indeed, Italy, Greece and Turkey were at the forefront of the 2015-2016 arrivals and count well-established yet diverse diasporas in Belgium. My specific focus on Brussels as a place of destination is further justified by its unique position as the heart of EU migration governance and as a cosmopolitan and global city. This double positioning as countries of immigration and emigration felt like an interesting

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vantage point to complement previous studies about attitudes towards immigration in Italy, Greece and Turkey. Indeed, the perspectives of emigrants regarding the ways in which migration is perceived, discussed and governed back home seem largely overlooked. The salience and politicisation of migration over the past decades have prompted well-documented reactions of both hospitality and hostility in these three countries. In light of this, some of the questions that soon started guiding my reflection included: Are (Italian, Greek and Turkish) emigrants more likely to relate to, and therefore perceive the migration situation more positively than their co-nationals back home? How did the salience of immigration – fed by sensationalistic and fearmongering discourses – and people's own migration experience influence their views and attitudes towards migrants in both their countries of origin and destination? To what extent can emigrants play a role in the (re)definition of migration governance in their countries of origin and destination?

In addition to striving for academic relevance, the questions addressed throughout this PhD stem from personal and quasi-existential interrogations which have never left me as a so-called 'third culture kid' – or, as I would later start identifying myself, as a 'privileged migrant'. Having grown up and lived most of my life outside of my countries of birth (the United States) and nationality (France), including in two cities which are deemed to be amongst the most cosmopolitan in the world (Dubai and Brussels), I have witnessed the paradox under which certain migrants are actively hierarchised and constructed as more or less deserving than others, based on identity-based criteria such as nationality, race, religion, class, etc. I also observed countless instances of overt and covert racism emanating from the so-called 'expat' communities (to which I am deemed to belong as a white, European, and socio-economically privileged migrant) and which I perceive as fundamentally contradictory. As a result of my personal experience of the global visa regime, I deeply believe that one's place of birth constitutes one of the main sources of global inequality, and feel personally committed to interrogating this contradiction.

This thesis asks *how the migration experiences and perceptions of privileged migrants in the multicultural city of Brussels affect their othering-solidarity practices towards other migrant populations* (See 3.1.1). It notably seeks to address an important research gap in the literature on attitudes towards migration, namely investigating migration through the migrants' perspective, and particularly through the perspective of migrants who are not typically depicted as such ('privileged migrants'). Looking at perceptions of migration in a given country through

the eyes of its emigrants therefore allows me to introduce an innovative angle to my initial focus on perceptions of migration governance crisis in the Euro-Mediterranean space. Indeed, studies on public attitudes towards migration have largely focused on the attitudes of an 'in-group' of nationals towards an 'out-group' of foreign nationals (See 1.4.1). As argued by Sarrasin et al., "it is necessary to go beyond the citizen ingroup vs immigrant out-group distinction when studying anti-immigration prejudice" (2018:1-2). I focus instead on the perceptions of an out-group (selected privileged immigrant groups living in Brussels) regarding another out-group (other migrant groups in the country of origin and destination). By incorporating class and racial considerations into my analysis, I explicitly adopt an intersectional approach, allowing to complexify the analysis of existing structures of inequality.[6] This thesis further highlights 'migranticisation processes' (Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022), or, in other words, why some people are labelled or identify as 'migrants' while others are/do not (and with what effects), as these are key to understanding the double standards in discourses of inclusion and exclusion that target migrants according to their status and social identities. Finally, it identifies and deconstructs the most prominent migration narratives which veer towards migrant othering or solidarity and which can help interpret perceptions of migration in the Euro-Mediterranean context. In order to move beyond a binary representation of attitudes towards migration, I coin and advance the concept of 'othering-solidarity continuum' as a way to stress both overt and covert exclusionary practices that lie at the intersection between racism, classism, islamophobia, etc.

This thesis is organised in two sections. The first section (made up of Chapters 1, 2 and 3) is dedicated to the theoretical, contextual and methodological aspects that will lay the groundwork for the second section (Chapters 4, 5, 6), which is devoted to the qualitative analysis of my empirical data. Chapter 1 kicks off the thesis by discussing the main relevant findings of past studies related to attitudes towards migration and the identity-migration nexus, justifying the usefulness of concepts such as 'othering' and 'solidarity' to nuance and complexify current understandings of migration perceptions. I notably introduce the relevance of certain theories (e.g. intergroup contact, integrated threat, social identity theories) and frameworks (e.g. intersectionality, transnationalism), which proved particularly helpful in

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[6] Although gender holds a central role in Kimberlé Crenshaw's initial conceptualisation of intersectionality (See 1.2.2), this aspect did not feature as prominently as class and race considerations in my analysis. In this research, I therefore use an intersectional lens to highlight the embeddedness of classism and racism (but less so of sexism) in the experiences, perceptions and practices of my respondents.

building my conceptual framework. Chapter 2 then delves into the main contextual elements of my thesis, in order to justify my choice to focus on Italian, Greek and Turkish privileged migrants living in Brussels, from a conceptual and methodological standpoint. As expressed above, this choice is based on the premise that Italy, Greece and Turkey have a dual position as both countries of immigration and of emigration (notably in Belgium), and that, as such, investigating the perceptions of their nationals brings a unique and innovative perspective into the study of attitudes towards migration. Chapter 3 completes the non-empirical section of this thesis by presenting my research design, which was grounded in a qualitative and iterative approach. This chapter notably presents my research questions, methods, sampling strategy and my positionality as a researcher, before introducing and justifying my data collection and analysis processes. The three subsequent chapters make up the empirical section of my thesis and seek to explore the different sub-questions which fed into my overall research question. Chapter 4, for instance, applies the concept of 'privileged migrants' to my sample of respondents, and highlights the complexity of the migrant self-identification process and its effects on intra-migrant solidarity. It ends by deconstructing the taken-for-granted idea that diverse contexts necessarily lead to a greater appreciation of difference. Instead, I show that important national and/or class-based boundaries remain and distinguish social groups in spite of Brussels' cosmopolitan setup. Chapter 5 delves into respondents' perceptions of migration in their place of origin, by exploring their reactions to the most prominent migration discourses (i.e. migration as crisis, migration as a threat, migration categorisation discourses, humanitarian discourses, and migration as an opportunity) and migration policies at both a national and EU level. It notably includes a criticism of externalisation policies, which are deemed to reveal an overall lack of solidarity of EU member states towards countries located at its external borders (including Italy, Greece and Turkey). It also presents respondents' main policy preferences regarding how migration should be addressed. Lastly, the sixth chapter further builds from the previous empirical chapters by exploring how respondents thought that their distinct experiences and positionalities could have impacted their perceptions of migration. As a next step, I highlight whether these (subjective) perceptions turn into (objective) action at the national and transnational level, by delineating several migrant solidarity practices and the different factors that may hinder their realisation. I close this chapter by arguing that migrant solidarity and othering practices actually form a subtle continuum, providing concrete examples taken from my interview data.

Chapter 1: State-of-the-art and conceptual framework

1.0. Introduction

In addition to favouring restrictive policies around the management of Europe's *physical* borders, discourses and narratives that set 'host' societies against a 'migrant Other' (Schenk, 2021) exacerbated *symbolic* acts of bordering in the past decades. Recent events, such as the 2015-2016 arrivals of migrants in Europe, emphasised the polarisation of attitudes towards migration, worsening negative feelings about immigration whilst encouraging various acts of solidarity towards newcomers (Rea et al., 2019). Migration has been at the heart of contemporary societal debates, renewing scholars' interest for studying intergroup relations. In this thesis, I explore recent patterns of othering and solidarity towards migrants from the overlooked perspective of people who are migrants themselves, hoping to address an important gap in the literature. Indeed, despite some notable exceptions, attitudes towards migration are predominantly studied from the perspective of 'non-migrants'. More specifically, this research focuses on the perspective of transnational 'privileged migrants' originating from key immigration countries (Italy, Greece and Turkey) and living in a multicultural city which lies at the heart of international migration-decision making (Brussels). In order to guide my enquiry and connect the studies of attitudes towards migration with the sub-field of privileged migration research, I draw from several valuable concepts, theories and findings. Individuals' social identities (e.g. class, race, gender, age, religion, nationality) shape their sense of belonging to a social group, which may result in ingroup solidarity or outgroup othering based on an 'us versus them' framework. In addition to playing a major role in attitude formation, social identities are embedded in systems of oppression and discrimination. Speaking of privileged migration notably allows for the analysis of the hierarchisation of migrants along several categories of disadvantage linked to assigned social identities. Considering privileged migrants' unique positionalities, their identities and lived experiences may impact their migration perceptions and ensuing transnational practices of othering and solidarity towards other migrant groups. After unpacking the implications of studying public attitudes towards migrants and migration (1.1), I will disentangle the links between the interrelated questions of identity and migration (1.2) and explore some helpful concepts for understanding migrant othering and solidarity practices (1.3). Lastly, I shall introduce my conceptual framework (1.4).

1.1. Attitudes towards migration

Encouraged by the growing salience of immigration in the public and mediatic spheres, immigration has become a standard topic of enquiry of opinion polls (Dempster & Hargrave, 2017; Dennison & Dražanová, 2018). These notably show that migration is often perceived as a fundamental issue of concern at both national and regional scales.[7] For instance, recent Eurobarometer Standard Survey data confirms that EU citizens have been consistently citing immigration as one of the most important issues of concern facing the European Union in the past decade (See 5.2.1). Measurements of public opinion on immigration are often interpreted as an indicator of populism (Fetzer, 2012) and can have a performative, concrete, impact as they can help policy makers craft and justify immigration and asylum policies (Blinder, 2013; Cantat et al., 2020; Van Hootegem & Meuleman, 2019). Additionally, scholars have made significant theoretical and empirical contributions to our understanding of the causes of prejudice towards so-called 'outgroups', including immigrants (1.1.1). These analyses typically seek to uncover whether people are in favour of or against (more) immigration, how they perceive the (economic and cultural) impacts of migration in their country of origin, and/or whether these attitudes vary depending on the migrant category being considered (1.1.2). They usually distinguish two kinds of factors driving attitudes: contextual-level factors and individual-level factors (1.1.3).

1.1.1. Intergroup contact and integrated threat theories

Social scientists who have investigated public attitudes towards migrants and migration have mostly drawn from two interrelated theories, namely intergroup contact theory and integrated threat (or intergroup conflict) theory. *Intergroup contact theory* is derived from the field of social psychology, which emerged in the 1930s-1940s to better understand intercultural relations. Initially formulated as the 'contact hypothesis' by Allport (1954), it advances that 'optimal contact' between an in-group and an out-group – whereby four positive factors are met: "equal status of the groups in the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities, law or custom" (Pettigrew et al., 2011:273) – reduces prejudice towards the out-group. Today, prejudice is widely understood as a preconceived hostile opinion

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[7] See for instance the European Social Survey, the Eurobarometer, Arab Barometer, and Afrobarometer polls, the World Values Survey, or the 2014 Transatlantic Trends Survey on "Mobility, Migration and Integration" (2014).

towards a certain individual or group, based on their social identity or characteristics. Prejudice is an attitude, or way of thinking, that can very well lead to discriminatory behaviour against the disliked person or outgroup. Intergroup contact scholarship posits that reduction of prejudice towards outgroups depends on the quantity and quality of social contact, as well as through indirect exposure to outgroups (e.g. through the media or friends in common, See 6.1.2) (De Coninck et al., 2020a; Pettigrew et al., 2011). In a 2006 review of 515 studies mobilising intergroup contact theory, Pettigrew & Tropp (2006) largely confirmed the positive effects of increased intergroup contact on reducing prejudice towards outgroups (including towards those that are not primarily based on ethnicity, such as sexual minorities and people with disabilities). Due to the relevance of migration in diversity studies, contemporary migration scholars regularly draw from intergroup contact theory to assess relations between migrants and non-migrants. For instance, in a study of public attitudes towards refugees in the context of the 2015-2016 'European refugee crisis', De Coninck et al. measured *direct* intergroup contact based on survey respondents' quantity of "interethnic friendships" and the frequency of "interethnic random contact on the street, at work, or in shops" (2020a:8; See 4.3). They further assessed *indirect* intergroup contact through the consumption of news on refugees, showing greater positive effects of public news consumption as opposed to commercial news (See 6.1.2). Beyond the quantity (frequency) of contact, they further recognised that quality of contact (or 'valence' – namely whether this contact is positive or negative) strongly mattered in determining attitudes towards refugees (See 6.3). Other studies that have relied on intergroup contact theory in relation to migration in the European context reached similar findings (e.g. Bohrer et al., 2019; De Coninck et al., 2020b; Green et al., 2020; McLaren, 2003).

Beyond intergroup contact theory, additional material and symbolic elements are crucial to understanding intergroup relations and attitudes towards migrants and migration. In fact, social scientists argue that increased contact between groups can also enhance conflict, using the *theory of intergroup conflict*. It presents realistic threats (e.g. economic or security-related threats), and/or symbolic threats (e.g. threats to one's national, cultural and/or religious identity, norms and values; See 5.1.1) as sources of opposition between groups. Licata et al. (2011) identify four theoretical approaches (See Table 1)[8] that "locate the causes of prejudice in the structure of intergroup relationships, which can be defined in terms of economic or power

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[8] All tables and figures used in this thesis are my own elaboration. Sources are cited wherever applicable.

inequalities between groups, or in terms of the nature of their interactions (cooperation or competition)" (2011: 38).

Table 1. Theories underpinning intergroup competition.

Theory	Explains intergroup opposition through…
Realistic conflict theory (Sherif, 1967)	Economic and material competition between groups
Relative deprivation theory	Perceived disadvantage vis-à-vis an outgroup
Social dominance theory	Existence of social hierarchies between dominant and subordinate groups
Social identity theory	Symbolic threats to group members' sense of identity

Source: Licata et al. (2011)

Integrated threat theory goes beyond realistic conflict theory by including social identity theory (and thus symbolic threats) in the analysis of intergroup competition. In a comparative quantitative analysis of the evolution of economic and cultural threat perceptions among 26 European countries from 2002 to 2016, Van Hootegem & Meuleman (2019) highlighted strong regional variation. In particular, they found that threat perceptions remained stable in Northern and Western Europe, whilst feelings of cultural threat considerably increased in Eastern Europe since 2014. In Southern Europe, both economic and cultural threat perceptions strongly increased following the 2008 financial crisis. In addition to being measured at a country-level, supported by macro-level indicators related to the economic climate or to migration trends (De Coninck et al., 2020b), threat perceptions also materialise at an individual and more subjective level. Past studies have thus analysed whether survey respondents felt personally threatened by migrants' arrivals on an economic and/or cultural standpoint. Dissatisfaction with one's personal economic situation (i.e. one's income level) was notably found to lead to more negative attitudes towards immigrants (Dennison & Dražanová, 2018; Van Hootegem & Meuleman, 2019). Although intergroup conflict and integrated threat theories primarily focus on economic and cultural threat perceptions, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has shown that public health concerns constitute another kind of contextual threat that can lead to xenophobia and migrant scapegoating (Esses & Hamilton, 2021; Freitag & Hofstetter, 2022; Politi et al., 2021; See 5.1.1.4).

1.1.2. The different types of studies on attitudes towards migration and migrants

Studies on attitudes towards migration can generally be distinguished according to the elements they seek to measure, namely: attitudes towards incoming immigration (and prospective immigrants); attitudes towards the (economic and cultural) impacts of migration; or attitudes towards different categories of immigrants. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, these elements can be measured in conjunction with each other.

Figure 1. The different analytical dimensions of attitudes towards migration
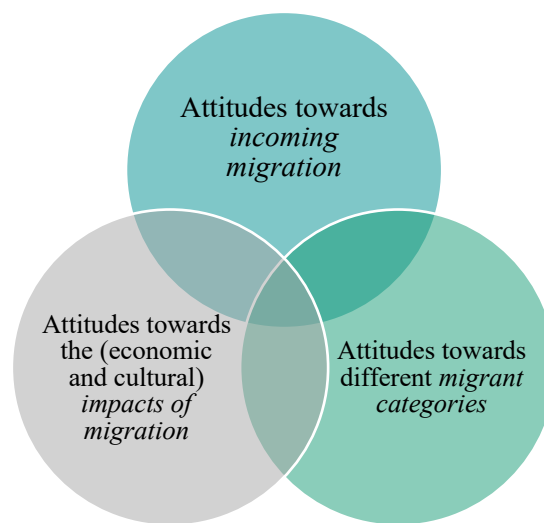
A first category of studies interrogates *attitudes towards incoming migration (and prospective immigrants)* (Dennison & Dražanová, 2018; Dražanová et al., 2024). These studies explore whether people are in favour of more or less immigration, including which kind of asylum and immigration policies they support. For instance, Jeannet et al. (2019) show that, despite Europeans' generalised acceptance of their obligations pertaining to international refugee law, they favour policy reforms that would establish greater control over the conditions under which asylum is granted. Van Hootegem & Meuleman (2019) also focused on preferences regarding asylum policies and prospective refugees, comparing the evolution of attitudes in 20 countries between 2002 and 2016. Through an index measuring support for a "welcoming" government (understood as treating asylum claims "generously") and for family reunification, they found that most EU citizens' attitudes were moderate (neither extremely positive, nor extremely negative), despite tremendous cross-national variation (See 1.4.3 and 2.1.3).

A second type of enquiry focuses on attitudes regarding the *impacts of migration in destination areas*. In line with integrated threat theory (See 1.1.1), these studies highlight the perceived economic and cultural impacts of immigration. For instance, European Social Survey (ESS) datasets, which are frequently referenced in the scientific literature (e.g. De Coninck & Matthijs, 2020; Heath et al., 2020; Just & Anderson, 2015; Marfouk, 2019; Van Hootegem & Meuleman, 2019) ask the following three questions when considering immigration: 1) "Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country's] economy that people come to live here from other countries?; 2) Would you say that [country's] cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?; 3) Is [country] made a worse or better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?".[9] Expressed support for certain models of integration (e.g. assimilationism versus acculturation)[10] can illustrate the perceived importance of cultural factors in determining migrants 'belonging' to the national ingroup (Licata et al., 2011). For instance, Politi et al. (2020a) showed that in order for Swiss citizens to deem naturalisation applicants deserving of Swiss citizenship, the latter must 'assimilate' by renouncing their "heritage culture" and demonstrating their attachment to the norms and values of the so-called 'host' nation.

A last strand of studies has focused on understanding how *attitudes vary depending on the type of migration (or migrants) under consideration*. Such studies usually found that some groups of migrants are seen as more desirable and deserving than others depending on various subjective criteria (Dempster & Hargrave, 2017; Dennison & Dražanová, 2018). For instance, De Coninck & Matthijs (2020) have used the CARIN typology (control, attitude, reciprocity, identity, need) as a basis to determine a "deservingness framework to migrant settlement". Their survey results indicate that migrants with the least *control* over their situation, who are perceived to make efforts to 'integrate' into dominant society (*attitude*), whose religious and ethnic *identity* is similar to that of the majority population, who show *reciprocity* by participating in the national labour market and welfare system, and who have higher *needs,* tend to be seen as more deserving. Similar indicators are measured in the European Social Survey, with questions related to immigrants' education qualifications, language skills, work skills, religious background, ethnicity, and commitment to the country's 'way of life' (Dennison & Dražanová, 2018). The criterion of migratory status also highly matters and many

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[9] See https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org.
[10] While assimilationist integration approaches encourage immigrants to abandon their culture of origin at the expense of the dominant culture, 'acculturation' more explicitly favours cultural pluralism (Licata et al., 2011).

studies suggest that asylum seekers and refugees are deemed more desirable than so-called 'economic migrants' (Rasmussen & Poushter, 2019; Van Hootegem & Meuleman, 2019). For instance, based on an online survey administered in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Sweden following Europe's 2015 'migration crisis', De Coninck (2020) showed that respondents held more negative attitudes towards 'immigrants' than 'refugees', suggesting that the dualistic framing of these categories in the media played a role in reinforcing such representations. The prevalent perception that human mobility is either 'forced' or 'voluntary' further consolidates the "migrant/refugee binary" (Hamlin, 2021) and strongly impacts the construction of categories of (un)deservingness that symbolically and effectively set border crossers apart (See 1.2.3.2 and 5.1.3). Although studies have found that 'forced' migration tends to be seen more positively than more 'voluntary' forms of mobility, evidence has been more mixed in the aftermath of the 2015/2016 migrant arrivals in Europe. Indeed, refugees are increasingly portrayed as posing a security threat. This has been largely facilitated by prevalent public discourses about so-called 'bogus' asylum claims on the part of individuals who are perceived to qualify as economic migrants rather than 'genuine' refugees (Dempster & Hargrave, 2017; Hamlin, 2021). Migrants' social identities (See 1.2.1) – such as their national, ethnic, racial and/or religious background – may also affect people's opinion of them. For instance, based on survey data obtained in the UK, where people were asked about perceived immigration levels from seven regions, Ford (2011) demonstrated a clear 'ethnic hierarchy' driving preferences of the British public. Indeed, while Australians, New Zealanders, Western Europeans and – to a lesser extent – Eastern Europeans, were identified as the least opposed groups, immigrants from Hong Kong, Africa, the West Indies, and South Asia were, in this order, the most opposed to. This leads Ford to "call into question the wisdom of persistently basing analysis and policy on views of immigrants as an undifferentiated mass" (2011:1028). In a study underlining growing negative opinions vis-à-vis Turkish immigrants amongst German citizens as opposed to Italians and Poles, Yavçan similarly called for a "heterogeneous approach" to studying attitudes towards migrants, arguing that "people's opposition to immigration should be differentiated based on the ethnicity of the prospective immigrant group" (2013:158). De Coninck (2020) also found that, regardless of migratory status, survey respondents from Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden were more willing to welcome newcomers from "rich", "European", countries, and who were "of the same race or ethnicity as most of [their country's] population". Using survey data from the European Social Survey, Marfouk (2019) found that a majority of Europeans were in favour of restrictions and/or bans

to Muslim immigration, demonstrating clear evidence of the intersection between xenophobia, racism and islamophobia (See 1.3.1.2).

1.1.3. Individual and contextual determinants of attitudes towards migration

Drivers of attitudes towards migration are typically broken down into two main categories: individual determinants (e.g. socio-economic status, demographics of the person whose perceptions are being assessed) and contextual determinants (e.g. socio-economic context, policy context, public narratives), which respectively operate at the micro or macro (or country) level (Dražanová et al., 2024; Heath et al., 2020; Van Hootegem & Meuleman, 2019). Having outlined the role of intergroup contact and integrated threat theory in driving attitudes towards migration, I will now focus on three additional types of attitudinal determinants that appear relevant to my analysis, namely: socio-demographic characteristics, values and socialisation effects, and migration narratives.

1.1.3.1. Socio-demographic characteristics

Different socio-demographic characteristics have been found to affect attitudes towards immigrants. For instance, *age* is considered an important factor driving attitudes, with older age groups regularly found to demonstrate more hostile attitudes than their younger counterparts (De Coninck et al., 2020b; Dražanová, 2021). In a recent meta-study, Dražanová et al. (2024) focused on eight individual-level indicators that are regularly associated with positive or negative attitudes to immigration in the literature (i.e. age, gender, education, income, occupational and unemployment status, minority background, residential area). Amongst those characteristics, they found that age and education were most consistently linked with attitudes toward immigration and more specifically confirmed that younger and more educated individuals viewed immigration more positively than their older and less educated counterparts. Similarly, holding a high-skill occupation, having a higher income, and living in an urban area was found to positively impact attitudes. Likewise, Van Hootegem & Meuleman (2019) found that individuals with a lower socio-economic status (measured through an index combining respondents' occupational status, educational level and subjective income) held more negative views towards asylum seekers, "as they generally access similar job or housing markers as migrants and have less resources to protect them from competition" (2019:45). De

Coninck et al. (2020b) reached similar findings in a multi-country study looking at how residents of Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and Turkey perceived Syrian refugees. They notably found that older respondents were more likely to hold negative attitudes than their younger counterparts in both Turkey and Western Europe, and that individuals with higher levels of educational attainment and hailing from higher socio-economic backgrounds experienced less economic and cultural threat. Additionally, they gauged the role of religious denomination and piety. While they found that, in Western Europe, non-Muslims perceived higher levels of threat than Muslims, this was not the case in Turkey, where shared religious identity did not necessarily lead to more positive attitudes towards Syrian refugees. Individuals' religiosity level, however, was found to positively affect their attitudes in both Turkey and Western Europe.

1.1.3.2. Values and socialisation effects

Researchers have also analysed how one's *personality style, psychological profile,* and *core values* may influence their migration perceptions. According to Dennison & Dražanová (2018) human values, personality type and moral foundation underpin individuals' attitudes towards immigration, and remain strong and stable over time as opposed to other attitudinal determinants which tend to be weaker and unstable. For instance, four out of the ten basic personal values identified by Schwartz (1992) are believed to strongly affect attitudes towards migrants and immigration, namely: universalism; conformity; tradition; and security. More specifically, prioritising universalism is believed to have a positive effect on attitudes towards immigration, while prioritising any of the latter three values has been found to lead to more negative views.[11] *Socialisation effects* – which can be distinguished between early-life and later-life socialisation effects – can further help explain attitudes towards migration (Dennison & Dražanová, 2018). Early-life socialisation effects refer to norms that are acquired at a young age, through one's parents, schooling or community, and which "lead to latent political values, which then inform attitudes to immigration when activated by political exposure and events" (2018:35). In particular, having a tertiary education, living or being born abroad, performing

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[11] These ten values include: conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism and benevolence. They can each be defined by their underlying motivations. While universalism's goal is "understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature" (Schwartz, 2012:7), tradition aims for "respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides" (2012:6). Conformity and security are driven by, respectively, the "restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms" (2012:6) and the "safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self" (2012:6).

white collar-work, being an ethnic minority or being religious have been associated with more positive attitudes towards migration. In line with intergroup contact theory, early socialisation into ethnically diverse peer groups and neighbourhoods is likely to result in pro-immigration attitudes later in life (Dennison & Dražanová, 2018). On a macro-scale, politics and institutions also shape the general context in which individuals are socialised. Countries in which right wing political parties are powerful, and where society is built around collectivism rather than individualism have been found to be more hostile towards immigration (Dennison & Dražanová, 2018). Differences across generational cohorts can therefore appear. For instance, Jeannet & Dražanová (2019) have demonstrated how youth's exposure to certain principles during their politically formative years shaped their attitudes towards immigration later on in life, with greater exposure to the principle of equality (as opposed to tradition) leading to more positive attitudes towards immigration during adulthood. Similarly, McLaren & Paterson (2020) have shown that although more highly educated youth may be more welcoming towards immigrants, this effect can be reduced when they have been socialised in contexts where far-right parties had strongly (and negatively) influenced migration-related debates. Later-life socialisation effects, which refer to norms that are acquired in the context of one's lived experiences, outside of the context in which one has been raised or educated, are equally significant. Importantly for this thesis, individuals with international travel and/or internal migration experience are thought to be more sympathetic towards immigrants (Dinas et al., 2021; Dražanová et al., 2024; Fetzer, 2012). Contextual elements that may negatively affect attitudes towards migration include party cues, the absence of effective immigrant integration policies, terrorist attacks, as well as poor perceptions of state capacity. At the individual level, life course (e.g. starting a family, becoming a parent) and feeling unsafe in one's neighbourhood have also been found to lead to anti-immigration attitudes (Dennison & Dražanová, 2018).

1.1.3.3. Public discourses and migration narratives

Through various methods of discourse analysis, scholars have studied the ways in which migration is talked about and portrayed through various multimedia productions, such as mainstream daily newspapers, TV broadcasts, or social media (e.g. Abdelhady, 2019; Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2018; Lee & Nerghes, 2018). Such research largely confirms the central role of mainstream media in driving negative and stereotypical representations of migration (Eberl et al., 2018). While mediatisation "describes the processes whereby politics become

increasingly dependent on both mass media and other facets of mediated practices (most recently via social/online media)" (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018:6), politicisation can be defined as the process of making "all questions political questions, all issues political issues, all values political values, and all decisions political decisions" (Hartwell, 1979:4, cited in Kryzanowski et al., 2018). Both of these processes imply that influential stakeholders – mainly policy makers, the media, and civil society organisations – rely on public discourses or narratives which, in turn, play a significant role in shaping individuals' attitudes towards migration, as well as the migration policy process (Güell & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2024). Indeed, migration narratives can be used "to set the policy context, (…) to define a threat or problem or to define an opportunity, (…) to mobilise support for policy actions." (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2021: 8-9). Amongst other things, exposure to negative mediatic coverage of immigration can "prime the populist response" (Fetzer, 2012) or justify further border enforcement. For example, De Genova (2013) argues that the Mediterranean Sea has become the centre-stage of an ongoing "border spectacle" whereby migrants' 'illegality' is produced and transformed into an argument justifying increased immigration controls. Media actors, notably, shape perceptions and representations of migration by turning it into a 'salient' issue (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2021; Dennison & Geddes, 2019; Huddleston & Sharif, 2019).[12] Van Hootegem and Meuleman (2019) identify four types of frames that are used in the mediatic and political sphere to discuss matters of immigration.[13] Three of these frames directly speak to the construction of migration as a 'threat' – thus resonating with the integrated threat theory (See 1.1.1) – namely: the economic frame, the cultural frame, and the securitisation frame. They respectively present migration as detrimental to the national economy, culture and security. The fourth frame is the humanitarian frame, which emphasises principles of tolerance, inclusion and solidarity, and stresses the "moral duty" (2019:45) of welcoming asylum seekers (See 5.1.4).

1.2. The identity-migration nexus

Having demonstrated how immigrants have become socially and politically constructed as objects of public opinion, I now turn to disentangling the ways in which the questions of identities, migration and diversity intersect, further illuminating how they became such highly

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[12] Salience refers to "the relative importance and significance that voters ascribe to an issue" (Dennison, 2019:4).
[13] Framing can be defined as a way "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993:52, cited by Lee & Nerghes, 2018:2).

contentious and polarising topics in the European context. After unpacking the concept of 'social identity' (1.2.1), I explain how this notion can contribute to shedding a light on underlying structures of social disadvantage, justifying the relevance of an intersectional approach (1.2.2). I then discuss the implications of looking at migration as a distinct social identity, introducing 'privileged migration' as an illustration of intersectionality (1.2.3).

1.2.1. Social identities: Defining the ingroup and the outgroup

The concept of identity refers to "ways in which people conceive of themselves and are characterised by others" (Vertovec, 2001:573), or to "how individuals respond to and psychologically negotiate the oft-ask question: "Who Are You/Who Am I?" (Telles, 2021:112). Thus, identities are inherently relational. Going beyond formal identity characteristics listed in identity documents, which are meant to make individuals 'identifiable', social identities take into account the more subjective aspects of one's identity, which make individuals belong to a socially-defined group or 'ingroup' (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. The embededness of social identities
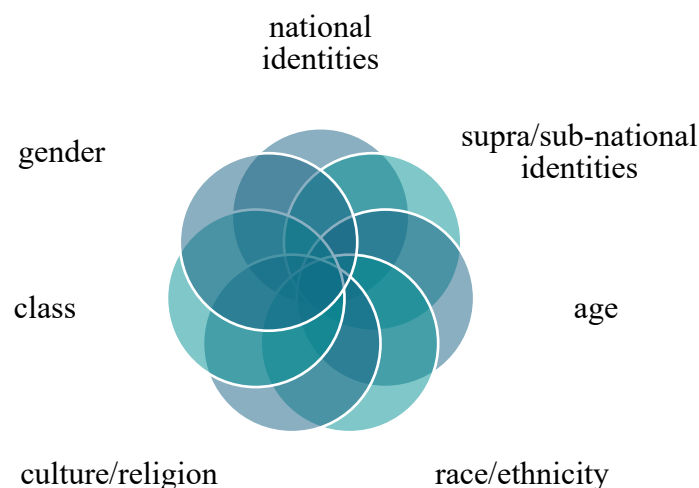
Studies of intergroup relations draw on social identity theory (SIT) (Licata et al., 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to emphasise the existence of social conflicts rooted in symbolic – or identity-related – threat. Social identity theory hinges on the central idea that three cognitive processes – social categorisation, social comparison, and social identification – shape relations between social groups. According to these, identifying as a member of a social group inevitably leads

to processes of ingroup/outgroup distinctions. Social identification processes are extremely complex and unstable. Indeed, social identities are inherently dynamic, as they may evolve over time or over someone's life course. They can stem from specific life experiences, whether linked to one's occupation, education, marital or parental status, amongst many others. They are also relational and contextual, in the sense that individuals may decide to stress a certain identity depending on their interlocutor and the social context they find themselves in. Identities therefore ebb and flow, (re)surface and succeed one another with varying intensity depending on the situation. Social identities are multiple, and can either compete with or complement one another.[14] Furthermore, there can be a discrepancy between (externally) assigned identities and self-assigned identities. Recent debates around the recognition and inclusion of gender-neutral pronouns into administrative documents and forms illustrate how rigid and binary identity categories do not always match people's modes of self-identification and self-expression.

National identity is one of the identity factors most often and spontaneously referred to in migration-related discourses, as it raises the question of who is deemed to belong (or not) to the "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) of the nation (Schenk, 2021). A sense of shared community and belonging may be based upon other geographical scales, resulting in *sub-national or supra-national identities*. For instance, studies have focused on people's sense of identification to a supra-national Europe (Antonisch, 2012; see also Standard Eurobarometer polls).[15] Indeed, the fact that EU citizens hold a EU passport does not mean that they will necessarily self-identify as EU citizens. Oftentimes, such (assigned) identities are therefore thought of as secondary and not proactively claimed by individuals (See the 'migrant self-identification spectrum' presented in 4.2.1). Similarly, globalisation can encourage people to identify as 'cosmopolitans', 'internationals' or 'world citizens' (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt, 2018; See 4.1.2). Other identity factors are based on key demographic characteristics such as *age* or *gender*. These may evolve over time and be constantly (re)negotiated by individuals. For instance, feminist scholars have stressed the need to move beyond conceiving gender as a binary (male/female), emphasising instead the diversity and fluidity of gender identities and

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[14] As such, they are often associated to the concept of 'diversity', which can be defined as "the presence of differences for social categories like ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, socioeconomic status, age, and health status" and "the opposite of homogeneity" (Jacobs, 2022:96).Terms such as 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007) and 'hyper-diversity' (Tasan-Kok et al., 2017) have also emerged to further describe the complexity of socio-cultural diversification processes, especially as it relates to migration.

[15] For instance, the 97 Eurobarometer survey instrument (Summer 2022) asked respondents questions such as: "To what extent do you feel you are a citizen of the EU?" and "How attached do you feel to the EU?".

how masculinities and femininities should be considered as social constructs rather than a natural characteristic or essence (Bührmann, 2019; Butler, 1990). In Europe, the question of identity is politicised and regularly linked to questions of belonging through the lens of *culture and religion* (Schlueter et al., 2019). Samuel Huntington's controversial yet influential 'clash of civilisations' hypothesis – according to which conflicts in the post-Cold War world will be largely driven by religious and cultural identities – has found renewed interest amongst conservatives in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre (Huntington, 1996). This narrative of religious and cultural incompatibility between peoples has fostered representations of a foreign, non-Christian, non-White, and non-Western 'Other' in Europe, durably impacting public debates about the integration of immigrants and other minoritised populations in destination areas (Vermeulen, 2019; See 4.3.2.3. and 5.1.1).[16] Similarly, *ethnicity and race* constitute additional markers of identity. Although the biological theory of race has long been discredited, the persistence of racial discrimination demonstrates the continued relevance of race as a social construct (See 1.3.1).[17] *Class identities* are equally relevant to my analysis. Through the theory of 'habitus', referring to "a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (1977:86), Pierre Bourdieu demonstrated how social classes are distinguished through habits that are socially ingrained into their members and socially reproduced across generations. Perceptions of class belonging therefore lead to processes of socio-economic distinctions, which can be very relevant to the study of migration, and notably of privileged migrants who possess distinct forms of economic, social and cultural capital (See 4.1; Clément et al., 2017).

1.2.2. Social implications of identity: Power and social positions of (dis)advantage

As previously shown, identities are complex and multi-dimensional. What's more, they do not develop in a social vacuum. Instead, they are socially constructed and embedded into a complex social environment. Social identities are also highly political, as they are often linked to a

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[16] In this thesis, I generally use the term 'integration' due its widespread use amongst my research participants. When appropriate, I critically reflect on its normative connotations (as it denotes an expectation that migrants should 'assimilate' into a 'majority society'), using the term 'inclusion' as an alternative.

[17] In practice, ethnicity is often conflated with race. Yet, ethnicity usually tends to refer to a wider range of elements that constitute a people's identity, such as a people's shared culture, language/dialect, religion, homeland, transcending national and/or racial boundaries.

search for social recognition and justice for minoritised groups who have been discriminated against (e.g. women, the LGBTQI+ community, racial and religious minorities, people with disabilities). The creation of the Rainbow flag, for instance, is one but many examples showing how identity-related claims can become a form of socio-political expression.

The concept of intersectionality has become essential in looking at identities through the lens of oppression and discrimination. Adopting an intersectional lens allows not only to explore the intersection of multiple identities but also that of multiple systems of oppression and discrimination (in particular, patriarchy, white supremacy and classism). 'Intersectionality' was coined by black feminist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Although she initially set out to look primarily at the interactions between racial and gender inequalities, class considerations were later incorporated into her analysis:

> Intersectionality is a conceptualisation of the problem that attempts to capture both the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination. It specifically addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discriminatory systems create background inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes, and the like. Moreover, it addresses the way that specific acts and policies create burdens that flow along these axes constituting the dynamic or active aspects of disempowerment (Crenshaw, 2002; cited in Lutz, 2019:368).

Intersectionality thus speaks to the potential interconnectedness of inequalities and disadvantages that certain oppressed groups may be facing (e.g., a poor black woman may be more at a disadvantage socially than a poor White woman or than a poor black man, on the two-fold basis of her race and gender). Due to the considerable influence of the concept of intersectionality, its scope has been widened to include other layers of oppression stemming from other identity categories, such as nationality, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, religion, citizenship status, sedentariness, and geopolitical location (Lutz, 2019).

Adopting an intersectional perspective implies looking at positions of oppression as much as positions of privilege, notably in migration studies (Duplan & Cranston, 2023). Oppression and privilege are indeed the two faces of the same coin, and any enquiry into systems of discrimination would be incomplete without looking at the perspective of those who are benefitting (consciously or unconsciously) from such systems of oppression. The concept of 'white privilege' emerged in the United States around the same time as the concept of intersectionality. Its proponents argue that privileges (whichever identity category they relate

to) operate as an "unconscious bias" (Choonara & Prasad, 2014), thus contributing to systemic oppression should they remain 'unchecked'. Privilege theory pioneer Peggy McIntosh famously referred to white privilege as an "invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" (1989:1). According to Bourdieu, (economic, social and cultural) capital is acquired and reproduced within families and social classes (notably through heritage and the education system), implying a taken-for-granted reproduction of privilege (or disadvantage) across generations and within social groups.

1.2.3. Identity, Migration and Privilege: complexifying social identities

Discourses which construct migrants as a separate social group (with distinguishable identities and experiences) have a dual effect. On the one hand, they objectify the existence of an observable phenomenon (namely the crossing of spatially bounded borders by individuals) and serve as a basis for describing and analysing these movements, their causes and impacts, in contexts of growing socio-cultural diversity. On the other hand, the blurriness of migration may lead to labelling practices that distinguish migrants along certain identity lines and reproduce categories of oppression. This calls for a deconstruction of migration categories (Dahinden et al., 2020) and a critical inquiry into the concept of 'privileged migrants', which is central to this thesis.

1.2.3.1. Who's a migrant?

To this day, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of migration. This definitional problem and inherent subjectivity partly explain why migration is such a debated (and misunderstood) issue. In public debates, terms such as 'migrants', 'immigrants', 'foreigners' are often used interchangeably. Migrants are often represented as a homogeneous group and conceived of as 'Others' who hold distinct cultures and identities than the native, so-called majority population. National statistics offices may define migrants in terms of their country of birth, country of citizenship, or length of stay, amongst others (Anderson & Blinder, 2024). The United Nation's Department of Economics and Social Affairs' Population Division considers international migrants as individuals living outside of their country of birth or

citizenship (UN DESA, 2020), while the International Organisation for Migration's working definition defines a migrant as "a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons" (IOM, 2019:132). Additionally, migration patterns, dynamics, and situations are extremely diverse. Population movements can be distinguished on the basis of their scale (e.g. internal, international, regional), temporality (e.g. permanent, temporary, short-term, long-term, circular, seasonal), type (e.g. forced, mixed, irregular, labour migration) and drivers (e.g. social, political, economic, environmental, demographic). While these characteristics are often presented as linear and following a binary model (e.g. 'forced' versus 'voluntary' or 'international' versus 'internal' movements), a growing number of migration scholars situate human mobility along a spectrum, or *continuum* (Hamlin, 2021)*,* stressing the interconnectedness of migration drivers and the multi-causality of migration (The Government Office for Science, 2011).

This subjectivity surrounding definitions of migration can be illustrated through the concept of "imagined immigration" coined by Blinder (2013). Asking "how do survey respondents understand the term 'immigrants'?", he identified a disconnect between how, on the one hand, the British public conceived of immigrants and how, on the second hand, policy actors defined and targeted immigrants through dedicated policies.[18] Such findings confirm the importance of analysing "the making of migration" (Tazzioli, 2020) or 'migranticisation' processes (Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022). In other words, understanding who is – or not – considered a 'migrant', as well as the causes and consequences of such representations, should be the starting point of any discourse around migration. Indeed, "since mental images of immigration vary across individuals, measuring these perceptions may help develop better models of individual attitudes towards immigrants and immigration policy" (Blinder, 2013: 17). When answering the question "who's a migrant?", it thus becomes crucial to reflect on the highly subjective (and under-researched) processes of migrant self-identification (See 4.2.1). Indeed, in current public debates, migrants' identities are largely constructed, essentialised, and assigned to them, rather than claimed by them. Furthermore, migrants' cultural identities are increasingly scrutinised, politicised and debated, especially in the face of growing social and cultural diversity. In migration and diaspora studies too, the 'grouping' of migrants into particular

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[18] More specifically, Blinder observed that while the British public tended to think of immigrants in terms of "asylum seekers and permanent immigration", governmental efforts towards measuring immigration had placed a larger focus on temporary immigration (notably on international students).

communities (Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022) is standard practice. For analytical purposes mainly, distinct migrant and diasporic groups are thus conceived as characterised by a set of common features and experiences (e.g. their ethnicity or nationality), that in turn, may shape their sense of (collective) identity. The notion of 'diaspora' itself – which is often used interchangeably to refer to certain migrant groups – has historically been used to refer to groups sharing a collective history, traditions, experience of persecution and exile beyond borders (see the Jewish or the Armenian diasporas) (Bauböck & Faist, 2010). This grouping approach is consistent with the requirements of certain academic disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, or social psychology, which require the study of groups that are bounded by a set of common characteristics and can develop a sense of belonging on this basis (Butcher, 2009; Story & Walker, 2016). Yet, in line with social identity theory, migrants – like any other individuals – can also claim "dynamic, situational and relational" (Telles, 2022) social identities regardless of their different administrative statuses and immigration pathways. Indeed, migrants move with their own individual identities (which they can either seek to assert or suppress in the place of destination) and may also develop new forms of identification (e.g. 'European', 'cosmopolitan'), depending on their experiences at the place of destination, even more so should they acquire the nationality of their state of residence. Furthermore, their own identification as migrants may change with time or location (See 4.2.1).

1.2.3.2. The limits of migration categories

Categories can be used to make sense of a human phenomenon as complex and multi-dimensional as migration. Yet, a subset of migration scholarship is calling out the potentially harmful effects of certain migrant categorisation processes. As observed by Roger Zetter in his pioneering work on the 'labelling' of refugees, labelling is "a process of stereotyping which involves disaggregation, standardisation, and the formulation of clear cut categories" (Zetter, 1991:44). Discursive processes of labelling go beyond mere linguistics and can have very concrete effects in terms of how 'labelled' migrant groups are treated. In other words, migrant categorisation processes have a strong performative effect as they determine who is and who is not deemed a 'deserving' migrant. As mentioned earlier, previous research confirmed that refugees tend to be preferred to so-called economic migrants (See 1.1.2). Migration-related events – from the 2015-2016 mass arrivals into Europe to the recent arrival of people fleeing Ukraine – further reveal the existence of a "migrant/refugee binary" (Abdelaaty & Hamlin, 2022; Hamlin, 2021). It is one which is centred around the premise that

International law and the immigration laws of most receiving states mimic and reinforce a conceptual dichotomy between those viewed as voluntary (often economically motivated) migrants who can be legitimately excluded by potential host states, and those viewed as forced (often politically motivated) refugees who should be admitted (Abdelaaty & Hamlin, 2022).[19]

Furthermore, scholars have warned against the uncritical use of the term 'migrant' (Dahinden et al., 2020). For instance, Scheel and Tazzioli (2022) have encouraged scholars to move away from the 'nation-state point of view" implied by this label (reiterating the critique of 'methodological nationalism' previously formulated by Amelina & Faist (2012), calling instead for the "[redirection of] scholarly attention from "migrants" to the "making of migration, that is, to processes of migrantisation that enact and govern some people as migrants in the first place" (2022:10). According to them, state-centred conceptions invisibilise "the practices of bordering through which nation-states constitute and govern some people as migrants in order to reproduce themselves as territorially-bounded, culturally distinct, imagined communities and sovereign orders" (2022:9). Building from the 'reflexive turn' in migration studies (Nieswand & Drotbohm, 2014), Dahinden further calls for the 'de-migranticisation' of research on migration and integration, to avoid naturalising and (consciously or unconsciously) reproducing "migration- and ethnicity-related difference" (2016:2). She suggests doing so "by clearly distinguishing between 'common-sense' and 'analytical' categories in research,[20] articulating migration theory more closely with other social science theories,[21] and re-orienting the focus of investigation away from 'migrant populations' towards 'overall populations'" (Dahinden, 2016:2).

1.2.3.3. Privileged migration as a discrete migration category?

The development of the studies of 'privileged mobilities' in recent years calls into question the idea that migration studies "largely assume marginality" (Croucher, 2012:5). As such, studying privileged migration can enable for a critical assessment of who is (constructed as) a migrant or not, why, and with what effects. In particular, it can be used "as a way to better highlight the

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[19] Hamlin (2022) argues that the migrant/refugee binary hinges on three assumptions: (1) that "refugees and migrants have distinguishable motivations for crossing borders"; (2) that "refugees are the neediest among the world's border crossers"; and (3) that "true refugees are rare" (2022:9-18)

[20] Dahinden refers here to Brubaker's call to distinguish 'categories of practice' from 'categories of social analysis' (Brubaker, 2006). While the former refer to categories mobilised in everyday life, including by public and legal actors, the latter refer to those used by researchers as conceptual tools.

[21] In particular, Dahinden suggests drawing from mobility studies, theories of ethnicity developed within the fields of sociology and social anthropology, as well as social network analysis (SNA) studies.

nature and implications of global inequality" (Croucher, 2012:2), including inequalities produced by global migration regimes, which have notable economic, social, cultural, and political impacts on both countries of origin and destination. The relatively under-researched sub-field of privileged migration studies currently covers a wide range of immigration situations that are generally not constructed as migration in public debates. Such categories may include, amongst others, diplomats (Lequesne 2017; Neumann, 2005), highly-skilled migrants (Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020), expatriates (Green, 2009; Kunz, 2016), mobile entrepreneurs (Sontag, 2018), or digital nomads (Makimoto & Manners, 1997; Mancinelli, 2020), as well as international students, retirees, or tourists. Scholars have developed concepts such as that of 'lifestyle migration' (Benson & O'Reilley, 2016; King, 2017), 'middle-class' or 'middling migration' (Conradson & Latham, 2005; Jaskulowski & Pawlak, 2020; Scott, 2019) or 'liquid migration' (King, 2017) to conceptualise the distinct experiences of privileged migrants. Lifestyle migration, for instance, involves "relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that are meaningful because, for various reasons, they offer the potential of a better quality of life" (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009:02). Importantly, privileged forms of movement are more spontaneously referred to as 'mobility' than 'migration' by scholars, practitioners, and the general public alike, creating hierarchies amongst movers (Piccoli et al., 2024). As such, mobility is one but many manifestations of social privilege: "Mobility is perceived as a resource with which not everyone has an equal relationship, a resource that is differentially accessed" (Dahinden, 2016:9). The most distinguishable aspect of privilege in the context of migration arises from one's nationality (and passport) and associated subjugation (or lack thereof) to current visa regimes (Gemenne, 2020; Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022), as illustrated by the Henley Passport Index, which classifies national passports based on the numbers of countries they allow their holders to travel to without needing a visa. Additional forms of privilege – both material (e.g. economic capital) and immaterial (e.g. class, gender, ethnicity and nationality) – also shape power dynamics and further distinguish migrants' relative positions towards one another. Privilege is indeed relational, in the sense that "the advantages that some people experience are related to and causal of the disadvantages of others" (Duplan & Cranston, 2023:2).

Similar to mainstream migration studies, empirical research on privileged migration has largely focused on describing and analysing the aspirations, experiences, identities, practices and relationships of people on the move, and, more specifically, of those that benefit from certain

advantages prior to, during, and/or as a result of their migration journey. These studies are often grounded in qualitative, ethnographic work and focus on populations who benefit from some sort of mobility-related privilege. They may focus on describing their general profile (e.g. Casier & Decroly, 2022; Dubucs et al., 2017a; Gatti, 2009; Nicola et al., 2021; Scott, 2006), analysing their migration drivers and aspirations (e.g. Bartolini et al., 2017), their socio-economic integration and social adaptation practices in their places of destination (e.g. Ullah et al., 2021; Dubucs et al., 2017b; Favell, 2001; Geurts et al., 2021; Mendoza, 2019; Piekut, 2013), their identity-formation mechanisms (e.g. Breunig, 2019; Cesur et al., 2018; Ratynski, 2017), and/or their experiences and – transnational and spatially-bounded – social practices (e.g. Brahic & Lallement, 2018; Favell, 2003; Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou, 2018; Ryan & Mulholland, 2013; Ryan et al., 2015). These studies generally confirm that these migrants' privilege hinges on certain material and symbolic advantages (such as their whiteness, Westernness, citizenship or high levels of socio-cultural capital), but often nuance the idea of privilege as absolute. Instead, they present privilege as being situated and contextual, becoming salient or concealed depending on a given social situation, and acknowledge the ambivalence of privilege (See 4.1.3.3). For instance, Global South migrants who are privileged by virtue of their class (through their social or educational background) may still find themselves at a disadvantage in their area of destination by virtue of their race and/or gender. Migrant women who may be advantaged on the basis of their educational background can be forced to abandon their career or experience downward social mobility upon arrival, leading to a disadvantage on the basis of their gender. In fact, the notion of 'trailing spouse' has been coined to refer to the situation of 'expat' wives' who have had to abandon their career and were demoted to the domestic sphere after their partner's move, due to prevailing gender norms and dynamics at the place of arrival (Cangià, 2018; Van Bochove & Engbersen, 2015). Similarly, migrants can be privileged on the basis of their nationality/citizenship but disadvantaged on the grounds of their perceived ethnicity or race. Le Renard (2016) has for instance highlighted the relative privilege of racialised French migrants in Dubai who can be hierarchised according to their perceived level of 'Frenchness'. Another strand of the scholarship on privileged migration more explicitly adopts a critical perspective, seeking to deconstruct existing 'categories of practice' (e.g. 'expats', 'high-skilled migrants') to stress the differential treatment of migrants on the basis of their privileged position – whether it is rooted in nationality, citizenship, race, ethnicity, religion, age, class, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability status, and others. The embeddedness of privileged migrants' advantages – particularly in terms of class, race, ethnicity, nationality – and their role in (un)consciously (re)producing inequalities supports the

usefulness of an intersectional approach to analyse privileged mobilities and global inequalities in migration (Duplan & Cranston, 2023). Critical studies usually seek to unpack the ways 'expats' are labelled differently than 'migrants' (Kunz, 2016; 2019; 2020; Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2014). While the former term is often associated with white, Western, affluent movers, the second one is mostly seen as referring to non-white, Global South, low skilled movers (See Image 1). Similarly, post-colonial, anti-racist and feminist scholars have demonstrated how privileged migrants reproduce racist and post-colonial hierarchies of social difference in their discourses and practices (e.g. Carangio et al., 2021; Cosquer, 2021; Fechter & Walsh, 2010; Kunz, 2018; Leonard, 2008; Le Renard, 2019), particularly in the context of North-South migration. As observed above, the persistence of privilege relies on its invisibilisation or normalisation. As such, being unaware of (or unwilling to acknowledge) one's advantages, and how they contribute to reproducing a patriarchal, neoliberal and racist order, can be considered a defining feature of white privilege (McIntosh, 1989) and of privileged migration (Duplan & Cranston, 2023; See 4.2.1).

Image 1. "Migratory birds from the 'first world".

Source: Rohan Chakravathy, 2021. URL: https://www.greenhumour.com/2021/03/migratory-birds-from-first-world.html

1.3. From migrants' exclusion to migrant solidarity

Understanding individuals' subjective perceptions of migration is essential as they can translate into objective outcomes and actions in favour of and/or against migrants. Such actions can be material (e.g. concrete behaviour) and immaterial (e.g. discourses), leaning towards migrant othering (1.3.1.) or migrant solidarity (1.3.2.). While othering practices seek to exclude migrants from the dominant ingroup or 'majority' society (and can for instance be linked to xenophobia, racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, nationalism, ethnocentrism or chauvinism), solidarity practices tend to promote the reception, inclusion and equal treatment of migrants within receiving societies, emphasising their belonging.[22]

1.3.1. 'Racialised migrants' and the significance of cultural threat perceptions

1.3.1.1. The race-migration nexus: Bridging the gap between racism and xenophobia

In the European context, migration is increasingly connected to issues of discrimination that cut across several social identities (Fibbi et al., 2021a). The concept of discrimination is multi-layered and can generally be defined as "the unequal treatment of similar individuals placed in the same situation but who differ by one or several characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, or other categorical statuses" (Fibbi et al., 2021b:13). Racism is one of many forms of discrimination that migrants are likely to face in Europe, where feelings of cultural threat have been on the rise (See 1.2.1), and one of the most visible ways in which migrants are constructed as 'others' (De Genova, 2018; Ramos et al., 2020). Although race tends to be referred to – and euphemised – as 'ethnicity', explaining why racism is seldom explicitly tackled in European public debates (as opposed to populism or xenophobia),[23] the intersection between race and migration has received growing scholarly interest in the past decade (e.g. Adam et al., 2021; Erel et al., 2016; Fibbi et al., 2021a; Grosfoguel et al., 2015). Indeed, migrants and their descendants are often constructed as 'racialised others', blurring the

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[22] As I will demonstrate in the last chapter of this thesis, migrant othering and solidarity should not be seen as diametrically opposed, but rather as forming a subtle *continuum*.

[23] For instance, societies that openly embrace multiculturalism (such as the United States or the United Kingdom) acknowledge people's modes of self-identification by accounting for ethnicity in censuses or by encouraging the use of hyphenated identities (e.g. 'Italian-Americans', 'British-Pakistanis'). On the other hand, the universalist model and 'colorblind' approach to race that predominates in most EU countries minimises the explicit recognition of so-called 'minorities' (see for instance the ban on ethnic statistics in France).

line between xenophobia and racism. Racism actively distinguishes and hierarchises people based on ascribed characteristics – namely their phenotypic appearance (e.g., skin colour, hair texture). Although biological definitions of racism were once prevalent and used to legitimise systems of oppression and exploitation such as slavery and colonisation, they have been scientifically debunked, making way for the conceptualisation of race as a social construct (Ramos et al., 2020). Thus, 'race' has become a pertinent (albeit contested) category of analysis as well as an object of policy-making, public debate and collective mobilisation. Acknowledging social processes of racialisation further enables us to acknowledge the persistence of racism in diverse societies.[24] In recent years, the focus has moved from combating overt and explicit forms of racist ideology and behaviour (notably through adopting anti-racist legislation or regulations on the basis of which hate speech, as well as openly racist organisations and parties can be condemned) to more covert and insidious forms of everyday racism that manifest through both individuals and institutions (or systems). The development of concepts such as 'aversive' or 'colourblind' racism, 'implicit bias', as well as conceptualisations of 'systemic', 'structural' or 'institutional' racism (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Braveman et al., 2022), all support the idea that racism is firmly embedded in mentalities, intergroup relations and institutions (Simon, 2022). In line with integrated threat theory, Ramos et al. (2020) have confirmed the importance of 'cultural racism' in driving (negative) attitudes towards immigration in democratic societies.[25] Indeed, they demonstrated the extent to which individual immigration preferences across 20 countries could be tied to 'ethnicist criteria' (namely: "to be white, Christian and able to speak the hosting country's language" (2020:585). Similarly, dominant conceptions of migrant integration – and the expectation that newcomers should proactively and unquestionably adapt to dominant lifestyles at the expense of their own cultural heritage – illustrate the strong cultural underpinnings of migrant othering (Goździak et al., 2020). A recent illustration of the race-migration nexus can be found in the reactions sparked by the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Europe following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Amongst others, critical scholars have argued that European countries' differentiated treatment of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict on the one hand, and of asylum seekers from the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa during the 2015-2016 migrant arrivals

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[24] Racialisation refers to "the use of biological/phenotypical markers to categorise and thus inferiorise 'others'" (Simon, 2022:80).
[25] "Biological racism [refers to instances] when people organise their representations of humanity based on the idea of 'race', i.e. that human beings can be categorised and hierarchised into racial groups and cultural racism (or ethnicism) – when people organise their representations of humanity on the idea of 'ethnicity', i.e. that human beings can be categorised and hierarchised into ethnic groups" (Ramos et al., 2022: 576).

on the other hand, revealed 'selective empathy' and deeply entrenched racist double standards in asylum and reception policies (Cantat, 2022; Gemenne & Thiollet, 2022). While the former group was promptly received and overwhelmingly portrayed in a positive light, the latter was largely depicted as a threat. Additionally, dominant discourses more easily labelled (white) Ukrainian migrants as desirable 'refugees' than as racialised and undesirable 'migrants' (See Image 2), confirming the interconnectedness of racialisation and migranticisation processes (Schenck & Tazzioli, 2022).

Image 2. Political cartoon by Sié.
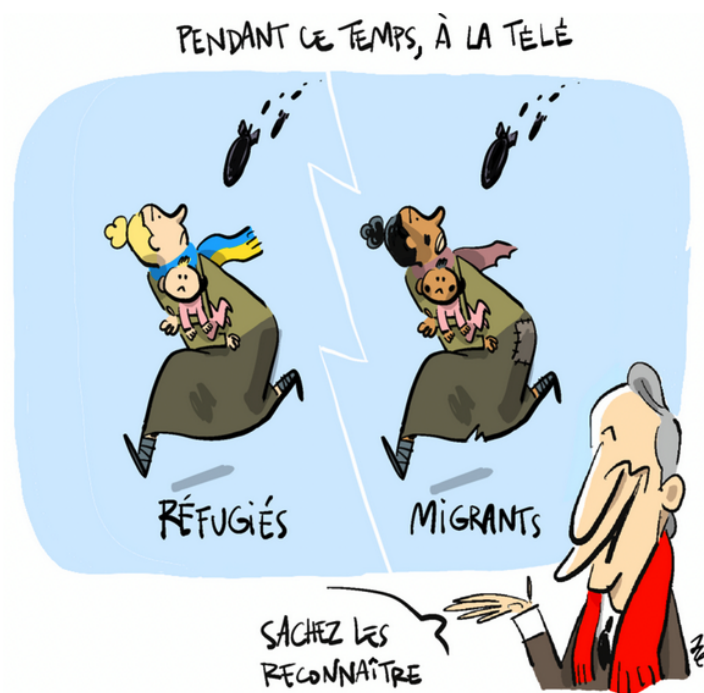
Caption (in French), from top to bottom: "Meanwhile, on TV. Refugees/Migrants. Know the difference".

Source: Mediapart et la Revue dessinée. March 2nd, 2022.
https://www.mediapart.fr/studio/portfolios/battre-la-campagne

1.3.1.2. Islamophobia: an illustration of the race-migration nexus in Europe

Due to historical reasons linked to Europe's colonial past, North African populations are commonly associated with Islam and depicted as religious and/or cultural others. In his influential book *Orientalism* (1973), postcolonial scholar, Edward Said demonstrated how representations of 'the Orient' and of 'the Oriental' (as a quintessential 'Other') have been essentialised and constructed in opposition to those of 'the Occident' and of 'the Westerner',

to legitimise the domination of the latter over the former throughout history. Importantly, assuming a link between Islam on the one hand and someone's North-African, Arabic, and/or Middle Eastern heritage or background on the other hand can be misleading. Indeed, more than half of the global Muslim population lives in the Asia-Pacific region (predominantly in Indonesia, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh) (Pew Research Center, 2009) and North African countries also count significant non-Muslim (i.e. Amazigh, Jewish and Christian) minorities. Yet, someone who is perceived as 'North African' (or 'Arab/Middle Eastern') will often be racialised as 'Muslim' even when they are neither Muslim nor religious and, therefore, potentially subjected to Islamophobia (Asal, 2014). In addition to being subjected to this racialisation process, people who are perceived as Muslim are often 'migranticised' (Dahinden, 2016), even when they are full-fledged citizens of an immigration state. As observed by Erel et al.: "(…) the contemporary intersections of race and religion, particularly Islam, are closely intertwined in the spectre of 'the Muslim' as a migrant/security threat" (2016:1355). As seen above, public opinion towards immigration can be influenced by migrants' religious background, and evidence has shown that Europeans are overwhelmingly in favour of restrictions to Muslim immigration (Marfouk, 2019) and to Muslim group rights (Fetzer & Soper, 2004; Helbling, 2014; Statham, 2016). Furthermore, Islamophobia also entails a strong gender component (Siddiqui, 2021). Indeed, public opposition to the *hijab*, on the part of both citizens and politicians leads to discriminatory behaviour and policies towards women who are visibly Muslim (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2019; Helbling, 2014; See 4.3.2.3).

1.3.2. The ambiguities of migrant solidarity

Positive attitudes towards migration can result in expressions of solidarity towards migrants, which are rooted in several key principles, such as tolerance, hospitality or humanitarianism, to name a few. Still, these principles need to be assessed with a critical eye in order to capture the conditions under which they can contribute to migrant solidarity. For instance, although *tolerance* is often claimed as a prerequisite for intergroup solidarity, and generally used to refer to the absence of prejudice towards outgroups (Hjerm et al., 2020), it can also denote a form of passivity or neutrality towards difference (as illustrated by the expression "live and let live", See quote by Christos in 5.1.4.). Rather than conceiving of (in)tolerance as a (negative or positive) attitude, Hjerm et al. (2020) view it as a multi-dimensional "value orientation towards difference" (2020:899), which includes *acceptance* of, *respect* for, and *appreciation* of

difference or diversity. They further argue that prejudice towards outgroups can only be reduced through the third dimension.[26] Similarly, Loobuyck observes that there has been a shift from 'toleration' to 'recognition' of minority practices and identities: "tolerance is nowadays less linked to negative appraisal and conflicting (religious) beliefs, but rather associated with a notion of respect for and recognition of those who are different or think differently" (2022:230). In other words, claiming tolerance should go beyond merely accepting the existence of minoritised groups' distinctive practices, beliefs and identities, and should instead be about proactively supporting the equal expression of these differences and demonstrating a personal preference for socially diverse environments (See 4.1.3.1).

Similarly, and due to the importance of the 'humanitarian frame' (See 1.1.3.3) that journalists, politicians and civil society organisations use to depict human mobility – and, in particular, to refer to forcibly displaced individuals – *humanitarianism* (Fassin, 2011) and *hospitality* (Agier, 2017; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000) have become key concepts when discussing migrant solidarity. Hospitality for instance, has often been presented as a historical value in the Mediterranean context (See 5.1.4), underpinning the reception of foreigners – and notably the advent of the tourism industry – in these regions. For instance, the concept of *philoxenia* (or 'love of the stranger') is portrayed by some politicians as a defining element of Greek culture and tradition (Brethes, 2021; Rozakou, 2012). Similar to the ambiguities surrounding tolerance, hospitality and humanitarianism can be contested and thus require a critical assessment (See 5.1.4 and 6.3). In an ethnographic study of volunteers engaged in migrant solidarity activities, Rozakou aptly observed that hospitality and hostility towards foreigners constitute "two sides of the same coin, of the control and management of strangers and the danger they embody" (2012:565). As such, hospitality should not only be perceived as an unconditional form of acceptance and altruism, but can also create, maintain, or exacerbate power dynamics (Rozakou, 2012; 2016a; 2016b). This can be seen in the relationship between so-called 'beneficiaries' and 'providers' of humanitarian assistance, which implies a dependency of the former upon the latter. Similarly, Agier (2016) identified four motivations that underpin people's engagement towards "the cause of migrants" (See Table 2), which all carry signs of othering (See 6.3).

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[26] In particular, Hjerm et al. (2020) measure appreciation of diversity through an indicator composed of the following survey items: "I like to spend time with people who are different from me"; "I like people who challenge me to think about the world in a different way", "Society benefits from a diversity of traditions and lifestyles".

Table 2. Four potential motivations underpinning "the migrants' cause"

Type of motivation	Description	Othering risk
The *individual* cause, in the name of "singular migrations"	Includes support to people fleeing political persecution; motivated by support for a particular political cause	Selective empathy
The *humanitarian* cause, in the name of "human suffering"	Apprehends migrants as 'victims' to be rescued.	Charity approach (Unbalanced beneficiary/caretaker power dynamic opposed to the reciprocal gift/counter-gift logic at the centre of social exchanges).
The *identity* cause, in the name of "resemblance"	Implies that one must identify with someone/their situation to feel concerned and take specific actions to support their cause.	Assimilationism (may blur migrants' particular identities)
The *exotic* cause, in the name of "difference"	Acknowledges (and praises) the cultural differences of migrants.	'Exoticisation' and 'commodification' of migrants, through the essentialisation of their otherness

Source: Agier, 2016

Solidarity is a complex and multifaceted concept, which can be helpful in moving beyond some of the current limits of concepts such as tolerance, hospitality or humanitarianism in the context of migration-related debates. *Migrant solidarity* can be understood in terms of individual and collective actions in favour of migrants and immigration, as well as of multi-level migration policies (relating to reception, asylum and integration amongst others), echoing the distinction between 'warm' (or 'primary') solidarity and 'cold' (or 'secondary') solidarity (Frère & Mertens, 2018).[27] During the 2015-2016 migrant arrivals for instance, citizen-based mobilisations multiplied in reaction to the lack of dignified reception solutions put in place by state actors. Collective mobilisations were embodied by a constellation of actors ranging from concerned citizens, NGOs and faith-based organisations to private sector companies, trade unions and political parties (e.g. Allsopp, 2017; Birey et al., 2019; Cantat, 2016; Rea et al., 2019). Based on case studies conducted in Germany, Sweden, Hungary, Greece, Italy and Belgium, Rea et al. (2019) identified two types of motivations driving actors' intention to welcome migrants during the 2015-2016 "refugee reception crisis": political motivations and socio-cultural motivations. While *political motivations* seek to ensure migrants' access to

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[27] While the former type of solidarity refers to assistance provided in the framework of interpersonal relations, the second category refers to state-led solidarity (e.g. the welfare system).

fundamental rights and services through impacting policy and decision-making processes, *socio-cultural motivations* are predominantly driven by humanitarian solidarity and consist of material donations and direct humanitarian assistance to newcomers. Solidarity actions can be further differentiated based on the temporality on which they focus. For instance, actions can seek to ensure dignified conditions for prospective or incoming migrants. Claims will be focused on guaranteeing their fundamental rights – regardless of their legal status or socio-economic background – and ensuring their physical safety while on the move or in transit. In the European context, this includes Search and Rescue activities which can seek to avoid or minimise migrants' deaths at sea, supporting the development of safe and legal routes for migration and asylum, or combatting harmful "politics of exhaustion" (Ansems de Vries & Guild, 2018), such as externalisation and other policies aimed at containing or deterring immigration. Mobilisation can also focus on ensuring dignified reception and integration conditions at the place of destination, through ensuring effective access to rights, services and livelihood opportunities for migrants and their families. Migrant solidarity practices (See 6.2.1) may therefore seek to improve migrants' conditions prior to, during and/or after their move.

1.4. Where to from here? Towards a conceptualisation of privileged migrants' attitudes towards migration

1.4.1. Attitudes towards migration from the migrants' perspective

Past studies on attitudes towards migration have overwhelmingly focused on the attitudes of natives towards incoming immigrants, rather than including or focusing on the perspectives of people who are migrants themselves (Becker, 2019; Politi et al., 2020b; Sarrasin et al., 2018). Similarly, most opinion polls often do not explicitly include foreign nationals in their samples,[28] focusing instead on nationals' perceptions of migration, reifying the binary opposition between citizens and non-citizens, between a national 'Us' and a migrant 'Them'. There is a need to bridge this gap in the literature, in line with Ramos et al. observation that:

> (...) little is known about migrants' own experience of immigration, *about how immigrant populations and communities evaluate the arrival of other immigrants into the country*, their political interests, their health or well-being, or their contact with natives. In reality, immigrants

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[28] The European Social (ESS) survey constitutes a notable exception as it has introduced in its 2014-2015 module a measurement of the ethnic background of respondents, allowing to gauge more precisely the opinion of respondents with a migrant background (Heath et al., 2020).

may possess multiple identities: On the one hand, they are conceived of as immigrants, from the point of view of natives; on the other hand, they are in the process of integrating into the host society themselves, they may experience difficulties associated with immigration, and *may in turn be threatened by new immigrants* (2019:254; emphasis added by author).

Furthermore, previous research (usually quantitative) have found that people with high levels of educational attainment and/or income, as well as people with an immigrant background, have a higher tendency to perceive migrants and migration positively (e.g.; Becker, 2019; De Coninck, 2020; De Coninck et al., 2020a, 2020b; Dinas et al., 2021; Dražanová et al., 2024; Fetzer, 2012; Hjerm et al., 2020; Just & Anderson, 2015; Sarrasin et al., 2018; Šedovič & Dražanová, 2023; Vollhardt et al., 2016). For instance, based on data obtained through an online survey administered in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Sweden, De Coninck observed that:

> Having a non-European migration background (…) is positively related to attitudes [towards immigrants and refugees]. This is in line with social identity theory, as Muslims and people with a migration background likely identify more with newcomers than Christians or people without a migration background do (2020:1676).

Previous studies, however, insufficiently assess the ways in which and the reasons why highly educated and/or highly skilled people, including those with a migration background, may appear hostile to immigration, particularly in diverse contexts. Indeed, efforts persist, including in multicultural contexts, to prevent the arrival of certain migrants on the basis of their nationality, citizenship, residence status, class, race, ethnicity and religion, amongst other factors. As observed by Faist, "(...) diaspora and transnational concepts often relate to the observation that, when it comes to understandings of the political, human mobility may reinforce and recreate all kinds of beliefs and -isms, including nationalism, patriarchism, sexism, sectarianism and ethno-nationalism" (2010:15). Past research has also provided evidence of 'gatekeeping' on the part of naturalised citizens (Politi et al., 2020b), or of migrants who have been settled in their places of destination for extended periods of time (as well as their descendants), towards newcomers or certain 'categories' of migrants whom they deem less *deserving* (Ramos et al., 2019, Šedovič & Dražanová, 2023). Just & Anderson (2015) notably highlighted the existence of migrants' "dual allegiances" – towards other migrants and their country of destination. On the one hand, they argued that the migration process creates "a sense of solidarity and kinship", as:

Being a migrant means having been born into and having lived in a different political, economic, and social environment; it also means an experience of the physical and psychological uprooting and relocation, which often require considerable efforts in adjusting to a new environment as well as learning how to cope with the consequences of being an outsider and being different in one's adopted homeland (2015:195-196).

On the other hand, they observed that acquiring the citizenship of the destination country led to an alignment of migrants' attitudes with those of non-migrants, leading to more negative views about immigration. Based on a qualitative study conducted in six Polish cities, Jaskulowski & Pawlak have similarly shown how 'middling migrants'[29] can (indirectly) contribute to reproducing neoliberal and racist discourses, despite having sympathy for racialised migrants and being potential victims of racism themselves. Therefore, qualitative insights may enable us to stress the ambivalence of the notion of privilege in migration contexts, and the importance of adopting an intersectional framework (Duplan & Cranston, 2023). The articulation and embeddedness of migrants' privileges and (dis)advantages – whether based on class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, nationality/citizenship, migration status, and others – must therefore be unpacked, for intersectionality to become a valuable tool for studying migrants' attitudes, intergroup relations, experiences and practices.

1.4.2. *Transnationalism*: Migration as a transformative experience?

In addition to transforming migrants' identities (Vertovec, 2012; See 1.2.1), migratory journeys and experiences can potentially transform migrants' practices. As an "approach to migration that accents the attachments migrants maintain to families, communities, traditions and causes outside the boundaries of the nation-state to which they have moved" (Vertovec, 2012:574), the concept of transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al., 1995) has crucial implications for migrants themselves, as well as for their spaces and communities of origin and destination. Remittances are often used as key examples of impactful transnational practices that tie migrants' spaces of origin and destination. Indeed, economic remittances allow migrants to contribute to the overall development of their communities of origin (World Bank, 2023). *Social* remittances – namely, the sending back of ideas and behaviours by returnees or migrants undertaking punctual visits to their country of origin – constitute another relevant transnational

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[29] 'Middling migrants' can be defined as "an emerging type of global middle-class migrants" (Jaskulowski & Pawlak, 2020:2).

(immaterial) practice (Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou, 2017; Levitt, 2001; Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011).[30] Social remittances nonetheless require further conceptualisation in the context of migration-related social mobilisations. Similarly, *political remittances*, which are embodied in the concept of 'immigrant political transnationalism' (Lafleur, 2008; Martiniello & Lafleur, 2008) can help frame and study migration-related social and/or political activism, advocacy, lobbying and voting behaviour. This concept refers to:

> (...) any political activity undertaken by migrants who reside mainly outside their homeland and that is aimed at gaining political power or influence at the individual or collective level in the country of residence or in the state to which they consider they belong. Such power or influence may be achieved by interacting with all kinds of institutions (local, subnational, national or international) in the country of residence and/or the home country, by supporting movements that are politically active in the country of origin or by intervening directly in the country of origin's politics (Martiniello & Lafleur, 2008:653).

Importantly, in addition to being considered "actors of state policy" (or homeland politics), emigrants can also be considered as "objects of state policy" (or of emigration policies) (Adamson, 2019). Indeed, certain national states, mindful of the economic, political and cultural role and weight of their citizens abroad, have put in place 'diaspora engagement strategies' to maximise their potential (e.g. Délano Alonso & Mylonas, 2019; Koinova & Tsourapas, 2018; Lafleur, 2011). Diasporas, for instance, are considered crucial actors in times of emergencies – whether a conflict or humanitarian crisis, an economic recession or a global pandemic (e.g. Ahmed et al., 2021; Imani Giglou et al., 2017; Mavroudi, 2018). Migrants also engage in 'hostland politics', actively taking part in the political life of their places of destination (e.g. De Sipio, 2012; Vermeulen, 2019), and in 'transnational' political mobilisations (e.g. Guarnizo et al., 2003; Koinova, 2019; Øostergard-Nielsen, 2003).[31] The concept of 'migrant capital' (Erel, 2010, Ryan et al., 2015b) can be helpful in understanding migrants' varying levels of transnational engagement towards a certain cause, be it climate adaptation (Van Praag, 2023), or migration. Indeed, migrants' economic, social and cultural capital (in other words: their financial resources, networks, and educational background) can increase their propensity to engage in such activities.

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[30] Social remittances are "the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities" (Levitt, 1998:1).

[31] See 2.2.2 for a discussion of diaspora-state relations in the Italian, Greek and Turkish contexts.

1.4.3. *Othering*: Moving beyond a binary model of attitudes towards migration

Research on attitudes towards migration has so far heavily relied on a binary model of pro versus anti-immigration attitudes, encouraged by the polarisation of the public debate on migration (Rea et al., 2019) and by the use of quantitative methods (See 3.1.2.1). This contributes to downplaying the complexity of attitude formation. Conversely, some authors have coined the terms of 'anxious middle' (Katwala & Sommerville, 2016) or 'middle segments' (Dixon et al., 2018, Dixon et al., 2019, See 2.1.3) to highlight the fact that the majority of the public does not actively situate themselves at either end of this binary.[32] Moreover, in the European context, xenophobia does not adequately cover the range of negative attitudes towards migrants. Migrant hostility may indeed carry additional layers such as racism, sexism, classism, as well as islamophobia. In line with theories of structural racism and of intersectionality (Lutz, 2019), the concept of *othering* (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011) enables a widening of the scope of analysis of – overt and covert – exclusionary practices affecting migrant populations. powell & Menendian define it as "a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities. Dimensions of othering include, but are not limited to, religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (class), disability, sexual orientation, and skin tone" (2016:17). They identify four processes of othering (See Table 3.) of which the first two (i.e. categorical reasoning and unconscious bias) appear particularly relevant to this thesis.

Table 3. Othering processes identified by powell & Menendian (2016)

Othering processes	Othering dynamic	Practical application in this thesis
Classification schemes and categorical reasoning	Processes of group-identification (and ingroup-favouritism/intergroup conflict) bound in categorical distinctions; group boundaries are fluid and socially constructed	Boundary drawing practices (Chapter 4); Migrant categorisation processes (Chapter 5)
Unconscious bias	Empathy dependent upon perception of in-group belonging	Migrant self-identification and empathy (Chapter 4)

[32] The anxious middle consists of "not the far right or the far left, but people who have concerns about migration without being openly hostile. Crucially, this group makes up the majority of the population in [UNHCR] donor states and is not hardened in its position on migration and refugees. Thus, this group can theoretically be swayed by information that frames migration so as to assuage their fears of its consequences" (Hamlin, 2021:86).

Individual acts of discrimination	Based upon group-based stereotypes, they help explain wider group-based inequalities.	/
Institutional and structural othering	Manifests through restrictive policies and laws, such as those related to spatial segregation	/

Othering, as a comprehensive term, can be helpful in demonstrating the interconnectedness of race, gender, and class dynamics in the discourses and practices of my research participants. Yet, it is necessary to use this term critically, and to be aware of its potential performative effects. Schenk calls for caution as the use of a 'migrant other' frame or category of analysis may become a "slippery slope of othering and re-othering that has normative implications for those excluded and in continual need of re-efranchisement" (2021:404). She further argues that existing scholarship's tendency to focus on a migrant 'Other' instead of a migrant 'Us' runs the risk of replicating the 'Us versus Them' framework that othering is based upon. In order to avoid this pitfall, I will precisely interrogate, deconstruct and complexify the frame of the 'Migrant Us' by paying particular attention to my research participants' migrant self-identification processes and inter-migrant solidarity practices, thus attempting to broaden the scope of who ought to be considered a migrant (See 4.2).

1.4.4. Conceptual framework

My conceptual framework (See Figure 3 below) is articulated around the following interrelated aspects:

Migration perceptions: The central premise of this thesis is to analyse respondents' attitudes towards migration and towards other migrants in both their places of origin and destination. In addition to individual-level determinants (See right hand side of Figure 3; See Chapters 4 and 6), perceptions of migration are shaped by contextual elements (i.e. migration policies and narratives, as well as the overall social, political and economic context (See left hand side of Figure 3; See Chapter 2). Individuals' support or opposition vis-à-vis certain migration policies (whether these are restrictive or supportive), as well as their reactions to dominant migration narratives, is central to gauging migration perceptions (See Chapter 5).

Privileged migration and intersectionality: I further posit that my respondents' unique positionalities as 'privileged migrants' – with high levels of economic, social and cultural capital – can affect their perceptions of migration in general (See Chapters 4 through 6). This thesis thus contributes to linking privilege theory to migration studies, through the study of privileged migration, highlighting the double standards in migranticisation processes which are bound in race, citizenship and class considerations. In this process, I show the usefulness of adopting an intersectional framework, highlighting the embeddedness of social identities and of power structures (particularly those linked to class and race).

Transnationalism: My analysis is undertaken within a broader transnational perspective, emphasising, in turn, perceptions of migration in places of origin and destination, as well as the potential transformative role of emigrants through social and political remittances. This thesis will explore the extent to which Italian, Greek and Turkish citizens living abroad have taken part in social and political actions related to immigration in general, both in their countries of origin and of destination. Indeed, their lived migration experiences and ongoing ties with their place of origin may affect their perceptions of migration, as well as their migrant othering and solidarity practices (See Chapters 4 through 6).

Migrant othering and solidarity practices: Othering and solidarity can be conceived as being situated along a *continuum* (Chapter 6). Figure 4 below provides a tentative (and non-exhaustive) overview of migrant othering and solidarity practices, envisioned as a spectrum of practices situated along a double axis. On the horizontal axis, I advance the existence of a range of shifting migrant othering and solidarity practices, implying a number of in-between or ambiguous stances along the two ends of the spectrum. On the vertical axis, I highlight the equal relevance of material and immaterial practices of migrant othering and solidarity, which complement each other instead of cancelling each other out. Although this thesis will primarily focus on individual othering and solidarity practices rather than on institutional practices, the latter will remain pertinent in my analysis (See 5.2). Drawing from the 'value-action gap' concept developed in environmental research to argue that pro-environmental values do not necessarily lead to concrete pro-environmental behaviour (Peetie, 2010), I do not presume that pro-/anti-immigration views necessarily result in pro-/anti-immigration behaviour. Therefore, I will seek to equally understand the *presence* as well as the *absence* of migrant othering and solidarity practices amongst my respondents (Chapter 6).

Figure 3. Conceptual framework.
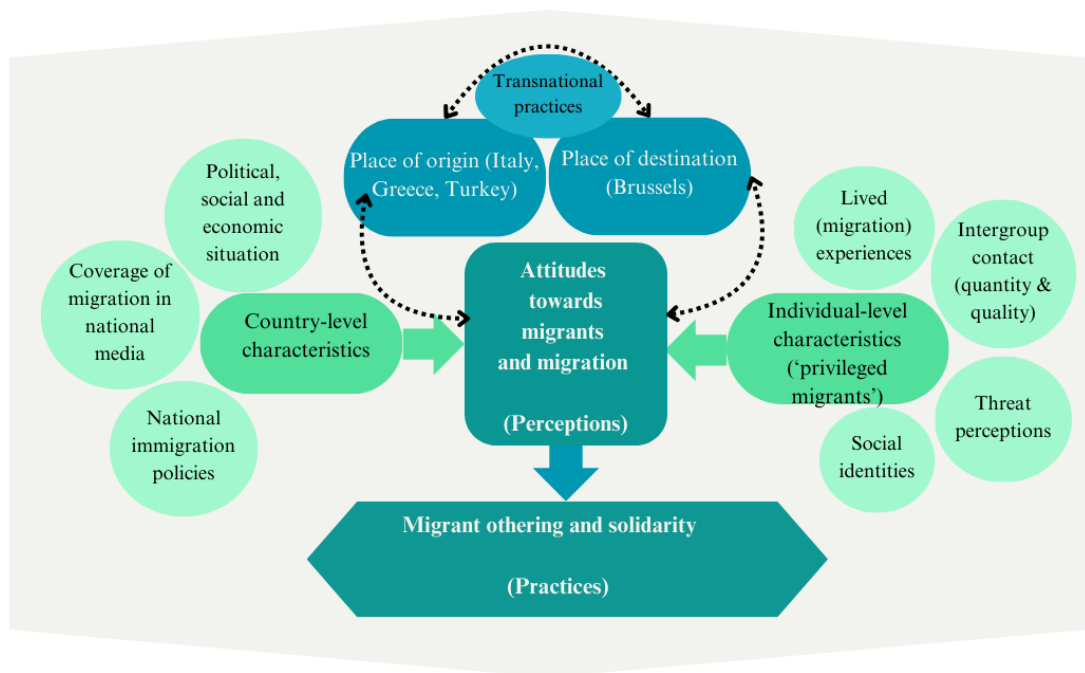
Figure 4. Tentative overview of migrant othering and solidarity practices

	Othering practices	Solidarity practices
Material practices (political, legal and individual practices)	**Hostile public opinion** (support to restrictive immigration and integration policies)	**Favourable public opinion** (support to inclusive immigration and integration policies
	Anti-immigration social/political activism (protests, advocacy and lobbying for policy change)	**Pro-immigration social/political activism** (e.g. protests, volunteering, advocacy and lobbying for policy change)
	Overt discriminations (i.e. in the employment, health, housing sectors)	**Social/professional activities focused on migrant inclusion and other related social justice issues** (e.g. volunteering, entrepreneurship)
		Direct assistance (e.g. material/financial donations)
	Intergroup relations (negative – or absence of meaningful – contact; conflict)	**Intergroup relations** (e.g. friendships, family formation)
Immaterial practices (discursive practices)	**Discursive othering** (reproduction of threat discourses, crisis discourses)	**Discursive solidarity** (reproduction of humanitarian/hospitality, inclusive discourses)
	Media consumption practices (e.g. resonance of security/cultural/economic threat framing)	**Media consumption practices** (e.g. resonance of humanitarian framing)
	Hate speech (relative to e.g. racism, islamophobia)	**Reflexivity/empathy**
	Social/political remittances	**Social/political remittances**

1.5. Conclusion

Because of the heightened mediatisation and politicisation of migration since the early 2000s, studies focusing on attitudes towards migration have gained crucial importance. Understanding people's subjective perceptions about migration and migrants can, in turn, serve as a basis for a better appreciation of objective phenomena such as migration policies and discourses, as well as tangible migrant othering and solidarity practices. Yet, representations of attitudes towards migration are too often articulated around a simplistic opposition between seemingly 'pro' and 'anti' migration attitudes. In this thesis, I argue that the reality is far more complex. By drawing on intergroup contact theory and integrated threat theory – which have been central in explaining prejudice and conflict between so-called 'ingroups' and 'outgroups', as well as social identity theory and intersectionality (with a particular focus on race and class considerations), I seek to address an existing gap in the literature on attitudes towards migration, namely the exclusion of the migrants' perspective. As individuals primarily affected by this phenomenon, migrants have the potential to bring distinct insights on migration, contribute to its normalisation and to the deconstruction of harmful narratives around it. They may also play a transformational role through migration-related social and/or political engagement. Yet, assuming that migrants are more likely to support immigrants and immigration due to shared experience and a potential sense of belonging to the same ingroup can be misleading (Just & Anderson, 2015). Migrants are not a monolith and their identities, experiences, perceptions and resulting solidarity and othering practices vis-à-vis other migrants may vary considerably. In order to shed light on this phenomenon, this thesis will explore the perceptions of 'privileged migrants' from Italy, Greece and Turkey living in Brussels, to unpack how symbolic elements of privilege (e.g. nationality, class, race/ethnicity), as well as lived experiences in diverse contexts affect their perceptions and practices towards other migrants in both places of origin and destination.

Chapter 2: Research Context

Image 3. Mural in Brussels

This mural by Belgian cartoonist Philippe Geluck compares Brussels to a "European-flavoured" pizza, composed of specialties from various European countries.
Photo: Elodie Hut.

2.0. Introduction

The present chapter introduces the contextual aspects of my research, justifying the scientific relevance of my focus on the perceptions and practices of Italian, Greek and Turkish emigrants living in Brussels, further allowing me to set the scene for the presentation of my research question and empirical findings in subsequent chapters. I provide selected elements of context regarding Italy's, Greece's and Turkey's dual positions as both countries of immigration (2.1) and of emigration, with a particular focus on Brussels as a place of destination (2.2), and discuss attitudes towards migration in these three national contexts (2.3).[33]

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[33] This chapter offers a broad understanding of the migration context in Italy, Greece and Turkey. It constitutes a partial and selective contextual overview rather than a comprehensive historical analysis that fully appreciates the rich and complex histories of these three countries.

2.1. Italy, Greece and Turkey as countries of immigration

Due to their singular geographic position at the external borders of the European Union, Italy, Greece and Turkey have often been described as 'gateways to Europe'.[34] They have long served as reception spaces for diverse immigrant populations (2.1.1). Recent events – such as the 2015-2016 migrant arrivals and their aftermath, or the COVID-19 global pandemic – have demonstrated that these frontiers have been highly contested in practice, calling into question the apparent permeability and openness of so-called 'host' spaces (2.1.2). This longstanding presence – whether permanent or temporary – of immigrants can have important consequences on attitudes towards migrants and migration (2.1.3; See also 1.1).

2.1.1. Immigration trends in Italy, Greece and Turkey

In October 2021, the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea – mainly those situated on its Northern shore – hosted 15% of the total international migrant population whilst totalling a little below 7% of the world population (Baby-Collin et al., 2021:14). This is not a new trend, as the Mediterranean space has long been an important migration hub and crossroads for exchanges (Wihtol de Wenden, 2022; Baby-Collin et al., 2021). International trade, the advent of modern capitalism in the 16th century, and the acceleration of globalisation in the 20th century played a major role in increasing and sustaining systems of exchanges of people and goods across the Mediterranean and beyond, to a point where human mobility has unquestionably become "a historical defining marker of the Mediterranean" (Wolff & Hadj-Abdou, 2017:383).

Whilst Italy, Greece and Turkey have a long emigration tradition (See 2.2), they experienced a migration 'turnaround' in the 1970s which saw them operate a shift from being countries of *emigration* to countries of *immigration* (King, 2000; Samuk & Papuççular, 2018). Italy and Greece first registered a positive migration balance in 1972 and 1975 respectively (Wolff &

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[34] See for instance the *Porta d'Europa* ("Gateway to Europe") memorial in Lampedusa, designed by Mimmo Paladino as a tribute to the migrants who perished at sea, but also the repeated threats by President Erdoğan to "open the gates" of Europe to refugees (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2018) which culminated in the 2020 Greek-Turkish border crisis (See 2.1.2).

Hadj-Abdou, 2017),[35] while in Turkey, this reversal in migration tendencies took place in the 2000s (Düvell, 2014). According to King (2000), "mass immigration" to Southern Europe can be explained by the fact that the sub-region has become the "waiting room" for more traditional immigration countries, particularly in Northern and Western Europe; an advantageous geography, facilitating access to its territory; the relatively open nature of Southern European economies; the history and the role of colonialism;[36] the economic transformation experienced by the sub-region since the 1970s; the nature of its economic development, which relies heavily on tertiary employment and seasonal work; the fact that external immigrants progressively replaced former internal migrants in the jobs they used to perform; and low fertility rates providing grounds for labour migration.

In 2020, the global international migrant stock[37] totalled 280.6 million (compared to 153 million in 1990).[38] That year, most international migrants were found in the United States, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russia and the United Kingdom. The total international migrant stock in Italy, Greece, and Turkey has progressively increased in the past thirty years, with a migrant population totalling approximately 10% of each country's total population (See Table 4). This migrant population is balanced in terms of gender and is mostly of working age. Out of the three countries, Turkey hosts the biggest share of migrants aged 19 and below.

Table 4. Key immigration figures in Italy, Greece and Turkey

MIGRANT STOCK	Italy	Greece	Turkey
Total number of international migrants (1990)	1.4 million	618.1 thousand	1.2 million
Total number of international migrants (mid-year 2020)	6.4 million	1.3 million	6.1 million
Total population (mid-year 2020)	60.5 million	10.4 million	84.3 million

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[35] The migration balance – or net migration rate – corresponds to the difference between the number of people entering and leaving a given territory in a year. A positive migration rate means that there were more immigrants than emigrants that year.

[36] For instance, the Italian colonial empire covered present-day Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, Ethiopia, the Dodecanese islands, Albania (initially a protectorate) and the concession of Tianjin in China. It lasted from the second half of the 19th century until the 1960s.

[37] International migration is calculated in stock and flows. The international migrant stock corresponds to the number of international migrants staying in a given country at a given point in time, while international migrant flows relate to the number of international migrants entering (or leaving) a given country over a time period.

[38] See IOM's Migration Data Portal, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/ (last accessed on 06/10/2021). These figures are based on statistics from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). I refer here to the UN definition of a long-term international migrant, "a person who moves to a country other than that of his/her usual residence for a period of at least a year [...] so that the country of destination effectively becomes his/her new country of usual residence".

International migrant stock as a percentage of the total population (mid-year 2020)	10.6%	12.9%	7.2%
Share of: ● female migrants ● migrants 19 years and younger ● migrants 65 years and older residing in the country in the international migrant stock (mid-year 2020)	53.6% 8.4% 7.1%	52.1% 9% 10.9%	48.4% 23.2% 5.9%

Source: IOM Migration Data Portal (consulted on 06/10/2021)

While immigrants in the 1970s-1980s mainly originated from Africa and Asia, the fall of the Iron Wall in the early 1990s led to unprecedented arrivals from Central and Eastern European countries – such as Albania and Poland (King, 2000) – into Southern Europe (See 5.1.3 and 6.1.2.2). Italy observed a first peak in 1993-1997 as a result of the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia, with many Albanian refugees fleeing to Italy. After a brief slowdown, immigration (notably from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle-East and North Africa region) increased steadily throughout the 2000s and peaked during the 2010-2020 decade, following the Arab Spring and the start of the Syrian civil war. In Greece and Turkey, the total number of refugees remained relatively low until it started rising sharply from 2012 onward, due to the Syrian conflict. Greece also experienced large migration flows from Albania following the fall of the communist regime in 1991 (Cavounidis, 2015; Dimitriadis, 2020). Thirty years later, Albanians (and their descendants) are still considered the largest immigrant group in Greece. As for Turkey, it has been the largest refugee-hosting country in the world for the past decade, with nearly 4 million Syrians under temporary protection since 2011 (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024). Although Syrians are overly visible in the contemporary Turkish context, the country has a long immigration tradition and other national or ethnic groups have sought refuge and/or labour opportunities in Turkey over the years. These include – amongst others – people leaving former Ottoman territories in Balkan countries during the Cold War, Eastern Europeans fleeing Communism, Iraqi Kurds fleeing the 1990-1991 Gulf War, resettled 'ethnic Turks' from Bulgaria following the fall of the Soviet Union, as well Iranians fleeing the consequences of the Islamic revolution (Muftuler-Baç, 2020).

2.1.2. Recent migration developments (2015-2022)

Although immigration is largely considered a matter of national sovereignty, the EU has gradually sought to harmonise its approach on migration and asylum.[39] Whilst the EU construction process has progressively reduced internal borders within the EU, notably through the 1985 Schengen Treaty which allows EU citizens to move freely across Member States (see 2.2.1),[40] its external borders were reinforced through a series of measures targeting third country nationals seeking international protection within the EU, leading to the bolstering of what some have called "Fortress Europe" (Equinox, 2022; King et al., 2000). The Common European Asylum System (CEAS), a set of common rules that apply to people seeking international protection in the territory of the EU, was established in 1999. Its most notorious instrument is the 2013 Dublin Regulation, which establishes conditions for determining which Member State is responsible for examining asylum claims. More specifically, it considers that this responsibility falls within the country of migrants' first entry, leading Southern European countries – including Italy and Greece – to criticise the asymmetry of intra-EU solidarity and lack of "burden sharing" in dealing with arrivals (Bauböck, 2018; Dimitriadi & Sarantaki, 2018; Guiraudon, 2013; Karolewski & Benedikter, 2018; Trauner, 2016; See 5.2.2).

According to Wolff & Hadj-Abdou, EU migration policies in the Mediterranean region can be characterised by a growing trend of "irregularity, securitisation and externalisation" (2017:383). First, migration trends can be described through the lens of *irregularity* due to the absence – or inadequacy – of regular labour migration pathways and the weight of the informal economy in Southern European countries. Although the 2007 economic recession sparked a new wave of emigration from these countries (See 2.2.1.2), immigration continued unabated due to the persistence of labour needs (Ambrosini, 2018). Second, immigration became further associated with terrorist threat, notably after the 9/11 attacks in New York in 2001, accelerating the shift towards *securitisation*. This resulted in an increased militarisation of Europe's external borders in the Mediterranean through, for instance, the building of increasingly sophisticated

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[39] Although reviewing the migration and asylum governance instruments at play in Italy, Greece and Turkey goes beyond the scope of this thesis, one must acknowledge their complex, multi-level (global, regional, national, local) and multi-sectoral nature (e.g. asylum, immigration, border control, emigration, integration, citizenship) (See Muftuler-Baç (2020), Ambrosetti & Paparusso (2018), Holloway et al. (2021), Bailey-Morley & Lowe, 2023 for an overview and analysis of the main Turkish, Italian and Greek migration governance instruments).

[40] As of 01 July 2024, the Schengen area covers 29 countries. Although some EU member states (i.e. Ireland, Cyprus) are not currently part of Schengen, some non-EU member states (i.e. Switzerland, Norway, Iceland) are.

physical fences,[41] violent immigration detention practices (Mainwaring & Silverman, 2017), the creation of the EU's Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) in 2005, as well as the dissemination of discourses depicting migration as a security threat (See 1.1.1 and 5.1.1.3). Human rights defenders and critical migration scholars have long denounced the heavy human cost of this securitarian approach, arguing that rather than discouraging irregular border crossings, it pushes people to undertake even riskier and deadlier journeys (Rea et al., 2018). The IOM's Missing Migrants Project, which documents the number of migrants who have died or gone missing during their migration journey worldwide since 2014, has recorded almost 30,000 migrant deaths and disappearances as of July 2024 in the Mediterranean Sea, the deadliest migration route being the Central Mediterranean route.[42] Third, EU migration governance can be characterised by *externalisation*, in the sense that EU countries increasingly rely on third countries to implement immigration control mechanisms and prevent further arrivals on EU soil (Wolff & Hadj-Abdou, 2017). This can be illustrated by the signature of contested agreements between Italy and Libya, Italy and Tunisia, as well as between the EU and Turkey (Martini & Megerisi, 2023; See 5.2.2).

The 2015-2016 migrant arrivals in Europe

The perceived inadequacy of asylum and migration policies designed at the EU level paved the way for the European "long summer of migration" (Hess et al., 2016) or "refugee reception crisis" (Rea et al., 2019) which unfolded in 2015. The sharp increase in migrant arrivals experienced by member states located at the EU's external borders in 2015, exacerbated the structural challenges they were already facing in hosting large numbers of migrants. This further underlined their limited logistical capacities. As they constitute crucial stops in migrants' routes and have become spaces in which "border effects become crystallised" (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2015:4),[43] the islands of Sicily and of the Aegean Sea, such as Lampedusa in Italy and Lesvos in Greece, were at the forefront of these arrivals. The so-called 'migration crisis' was characterised by a series of highly-publicised arrivals of people on the move onto EU territory, which partly resulted from wider geopolitical trends (e.g. the Syrian

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[41] Greece notably built a fence at its land border with Turkey in 2012 to dissuade incoming migration, while Turkey has built a wall with Syria in 2015, and with Iran in 2021, following influxes of Afghan asylum seekers.
[42] See Missing Migrants Project's website (last accessed on 01/07/2024: https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean. The Central Mediterranean route refers to the sea crossing from North Africa to Italy or Malta. The route from Turkey to Europe via Greece is referred to as the Eastern Mediterranean route, while the route from North Africa to Spain is referred to as the Western Mediterranean route.
[43] Author's own translation from French.

conflict, the Arab Spring) (Crawley, 2016). The multiplication of human tragedies (such as deadly shipwrecks) contributed to the framing of a 'migration' or 'refugee crisis' by politicians, journalists, scholars, and the general public alike (Cantat et al., 2023; Collyer & King, 2016). This crisis narrative became predominant in EU countries, including in Italy (Ambrosini, 2019; Dimitriadis et al., 2020) and in Greece (Christodoulou et al., 2016), as well as in countries located at its external borders, notably in Turkey (Apaydin & Muftuler-Baç, 2021; Kivilcim, 2019). As a result, countless "battles over words" (Cantat, 2020:25) appeared, with academics, journalists, politicians and activists in sharp disagreement with each other regarding how incoming people should be qualified (e.g. refugees, migrants?) and whether the situation should be dubbed a crisis (and if so, a crisis of what?).[44] Such terminological debates sometimes amounted to 'categorical fetishism' (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018), illustrating 'politics of naming' (Sigona, 2017) and confirming the othering effects of migrant categories (See 1.2.3.2 and 5.1.3).

The situation was first and foremost characterised as a 'crisis of numbers', as arrivals were largely described as 'massive' and 'unprecedented' by national and supra-national government officials. Critical migration scholars argue that the notion of 'migration crisis' contributed to overinflating the importance of numbers over the more structural shortcomings of the asylum system at both the EU and national levels. Pallister-Wilkins, for instance, considers the term 'crisis' as an:

> (…) analytical and practical plaster that staunches or, worse, conceals much deeper, systemic wounds (…) [which] include but are not limited to, European border controls, making safe and legal routes impossible for those fleeing conflict and poverty and a concomitant industry made up of smuggling networks and border controls that have developed alongside each other to circumvent and enforce such restrictions (Pallister-Wilkins, 2016:1-2).

Cantat et al. further suggest that migration crisis narratives are "made and unmade" (2020:6) through the production of data on migration, which carry important performative effects, as they help decision-makers justify and execute a wide range of crisis-related policies and programmes. Although arrivals surpassed one million in 2015, it is quite telling to note that the crisis narrative subsided long after the drop in arrivals in 2016 and 2017, following reactive

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[44] See for instance the editorial disagreement between BBC News and Al Jazeera English, whereby the former broadcaster opted for the use of the all-encompassing term 'migrants' to better represent the diversity of border-crossers' situations while the latter referred to them as 'refugees' to avoid dehumanising them.

measures taken at the EU level, such as the signature of the EU-Turkey statement. The Eurocentric coverage of the crisis must also be nuanced since Syria's neighbouring countries – Turkey and Lebanon – actually hosted more Syrian refugees than any other EU country (Rea et al., 2019).

Other observers favoured a humanitarian framing – as opposed to a securitarian one – qualifying the situation as a "refugee reception crisis" (Rea et al., 2019), or as a "crisis of solidarity" towards both people on the move (Takle, 2018) and frontline EU Member States who were effectively penalised by the Dublin system (ECRE 2023; Marin, 2019; Marin et al., 2020). This served to acknowledge the failure of the EU and of its Member States to meet their responsibilities and obligations towards the fundamental human rights of people on the move, and their unwillingness to implement a fair redistribution mechanism at the EU level, in line with the values that it promotes.[45] In parallel to the intensification of anti-immigrant rhetoric, a diversity of micro-level solidarity initiatives flourished to support people on the move (See 1.3.2, 5.1.4, and 6.2.1). Often led by NGOs, concerned citizens and/or local-level public authorities, such actions included, amongst others, citizens defying the law to host migrants in their own homes, or NGO ships organising Search and Rescue operations in the Mediterranean that were largely initiated to counteract the inaction or inefficiency of public authorities (Ambrosini, 2019; Cantat, 2016; Feischmidt et al., 2019; Fouskas, 2019; Rea et al., 2019). Conversely, in Turkey, this 'duty of solidarity' was initiated by the central government, who implemented an open door policy towards Syrian refugees at the onset of the Syrian conflict in 2011 (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024; Carpi & Şenoğuz, 2019; See 5.2.2).

The situation was also branded as a "policy crisis" (Collett & Le Coz, 2018). Indeed, in response to this sudden spike in arrivals, national and supranational authorities implemented various reactive, short-term, policy responses, which, in turn, exacerbated perceptions of migration as a crisis (MAGYC, 2023).[46] Such measures included the establishment of 'hotspots' in Italy and Greece, return operations for asylum seekers not deemed in clear need of international protection, and measures aimed at dismantling smuggling and trafficking

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[45] Article 2 of the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, which governs the European Union notably asserts that: "The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail" (European Union, 2007).

[46] The 'migration as crisis' framework posits that subjective and objective elements of crisis (i.e. migration discourses and migration flows) both shape and are shaped by migration policies (MAGYC, 2023).

networks including a temporary relocation scheme (which Poland and Hungary notably refused to apply). Although the hotspot approach consisted in setting up dedicated areas to "swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants" (European Commission, 2015),[47] critical migration scholars – amongst other observers – promptly criticised their ethical and human rights consequences. They analysed them, in turn, as an ambiguous way of "selecting migrants" (Basilien-Gainche, 2017), of "creating liminal EU territory" and disconnecting "territory from rights" (Papoutsi et al., 2018), and of "controlling or interrupting people's mobility" (Pallister-Wilkins, 2017:2). Often dubbed "prison islands" (Iliadou, 2017), most studies, NGO reports and essays focused on the hotspots established in the Greek islands, and more specifically on the infamous Moria camp,[48] in the Greek island of Lesvos (Iliadou, 2017; Tsoni, 2016; Ziegler, 2020). NGO and media reports raised awareness on the deleterious living conditions in the hotspots, documenting – amongst others – overcrowding, human rights abuses, safety and public health concerns (Matevžič, 2019). The closure of the Western Balkan route in Spring 2016 and the subsequent signing of the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016 marked an important shift as Greece effectively turned from a country of transit into one of "prolonged destination" (Dimitriadi & Sarantaki, 2018:20). Two main provisions of the EU-Turkey statement included returning to Turkey all 'irregular' migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands, and resettling one Syrian refugee from Turkey to the EU for every Syrian being returned to Turkey from the Greek islands. These were agreed upon in exchange for the lifting of EU visa requirements for Turkish citizens, renewed accession negotiations and a financial package of 6 billion euros, based on the recognition of Turkey as a 'safe third country' (Muftuler-Baç, 2020). The EU-Turkey statement can thus be considered a prime example of 'migration diplomacy' as defined by Adamson & Tsourapas, illustrating "interstate bargaining around migration issues" (2018:6), at the expense of migrants who are used as 'bargaining chips' by states of transit and destination (See 5.2.2). Scholars argue that these highly securitised policies have built upon and exacerbated pre-existing practices of externalisation and deterrence (Cobarubbias et al., 2023; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019; Rodier, 2018; Silverman, 2018),[49] of containment (Dimitriadi, 2018; Pillant & Tassin, 2015; Tazzioli, 2018) as well as

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[47] Nine hotspots were established in Italy and Greece (Lampedusa, Pozzallo, Messina and Taranto in Sicily, Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos in the Aegean Sea).

[48] The Moria camp in Lesvos was destroyed by a fire in early September 2020. Since then, migrants who await processed have been moved to a camp located on former military grounds.

[49] See for instance the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Libya, as well as the signature of a bilateral deal between Italy and Tunisia in 2017 (Martini & Megerisi, 2023).

of criminalisation of migrant solidarity (Vosyliūtė & Conte, 2019) at the EU's internal and external borders.

The post-2016 period

At the time of writing these lines, almost ten years after the 2015-2016 peak in arrivals, efforts to reform asylum and immigration management at the global and EU levels have reached a standstill. New sporadic 'crises' have erupted, pointing once again to the structural limitations of supra-national and national migration policies,[50] as well as to the persistence of deadly migration journeys, with more than 17,000 people who have either disappeared or died in the Central Mediterranean between 2013 and 2020 (Camili & Paynter, 2021). Some notable examples include the designation of Matteo Salvini as Interior Minister in 2018, which resulted in the adoption of restrictive asylum and immigration policies, such as the so-called 'Salvini Decree' (ECRE, 2018). Salvini's stance notably led to highly publicised cases of the criminalisation of acts of migrant solidarity. One prominent example was that of Carolina Rackete, the Captain of the Sea-Watch 3 rescue ship, who defied the 29 June 2019 ban on rescue ships by entering the port of Lampedusa with 52 rescued persons aboard (Esposito & Zottola, 2023). In Greece, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis (from the liberal-conservative New Democracy party) embarked on a series of restrictive asylum measures upon acceding to power in 2019, facilitating returns of irregular migrants and tightening Greece's border with Turkey (Lipold, 2023). Following the signature of the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, migrants continued to be used as bargaining chips in Turkey-EU relations. President Erdoğan's repeated threats to "open the gates" for Syrian refugees to come to Europe – should EU leaders not support Turkey's military intervention in northern Syria – culminated in late February 2020 with the opening of Turkey's border with Greece, also known as the 'Edirne events' (Karadağ & Üstübici, 2021) or the 'Turkish-Greek border crisis' (Oztig, 2020; See 5.2.2).

Another key development consisted in the advent of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which swiftly hit the world and strongly impacted migration governance dynamics. In addition to mobility restrictions having played a central role in the response to the pandemic, COVID-19 was largely framed as a 'crisis'. The pandemic resulted in a reinforcement of both physical and

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[50] In May 2024, the New European Pact on Migration was adopted after four years of negotiation. Observers are concerned that the Pact will exacerbate previous patterns of externalisation and criminalisation of migration, and insufficiently address the needs of countries that are penalised by the Dublin system (Russo, 2024; PICUM, 2024).

symbolic borders, through the closure of physical crossing points between states and other spatial entities as well as the proliferation of xenophobic rhetoric constructing migrants as a health threat (Benker et al., 2020, Esses & Hamilton, 2021; Freitag & Hofstetter, 2022; Hut et al., 2021; Politi et al., 2021). In practice, the pandemic exacerbated the immobilisation of migrants who were already highly marginalised or perceived as undeserving. While Italy repurposed cruise ships into 'quarantine boats' aimed at incoming migrants (Giacomelli & Walker, 2022), Greece, amongst other countries, partially suspended its asylum procedure (ECRE, 2020). Asylum seekers who were staying in overcrowded reception centres were disproportionately affected by lockdown measures as it became nearly impossible to observe physical distancing and as services were considerably reduced. COVID-19 thus reactivated previous concerns regarding the inadequate living and reception conditions of asylum seekers in the hotspots (Pallister-Wilkins et al., 2020). In Turkey, pandemic-related measures impacted immigrants' access to legal protection, healthcare and shelter (Elçi et al., 2021; Karadağ & Üstübici, 2021).

2.1.3. Public attitudes towards migrants in Italy, Greece and Turkey

The 2015-2016 arrivals exacerbated the negative media coverage and politicisation of migration (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018), negatively impacting attitudes towards migrants and refugees in Italy, Greece and Turkey (Bailey-Morley & Lowe, 2023; Holloway et al., 2021). Scholars have notably shown that the excessive media coverage and over-politicisation of the issue had heightened negative 'crisis' and (economic, cultural and security) 'threat' discourses (e.g. Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2018; Colombo, 2018; Eberl et al., 2018; Lee & Nerghes, 2018). Fear-based narratives strongly impacted the post-2015 European political landscape, notably by facilitating the rise of nationalist leaders with strong anti-immigration stances (such as Matteo Salvini in Italy in 2018 and Giorgia Meloni in 2022). Additionally, they have durably impacted public opinion. Analyses of recent polls and surveys of reference (i.e. Eurobarometer, European Social Survey) conducted in Italy, Greece and Turkey confirmed that immigration had become a key issue of concern for its citizens. These studies also show a steady increase in negative attitudes towards migration in these countries, although the salience of immigration as an issue of concern may vary over time.[51] For instance, in 2018, 51,4% and 43% of the

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[51] For instance, Eurobarometer data shows the salience of immigration as a key issue of concern was highest in Italy between 2015-2017 due to the important number of arrivals at sea, while Eurobarometer data shows that, in

Greek and Italian population respectively thought that immigrants made their country "a worse place to live" (Bailey-Morley & Lowe, 2023; Holloway et al., 2021). Another indicator of negative attitudes towards immigration consists of the population's over-estimation of the number of immigrants in their country. According to the Special Eurobarometer 469 (European Commission, 2018), out of all EU countries, the gap between the actual/perceived immigrant population size in 2017 was highest in Italy, ranging from 7,1% (actual immigrant population percentage) to 24,6% (perceived percentage). The error rate was almost similar in Greece (ranging from 8% to 20%) (See 5.1.2). In Greece, Bailey-Morley & Lowe (2023) confirmed the better perception of refugees over permanent immigrants (See 1.1.2 and 5.1.3). This is in line with findings from a recent report by Banulescu-Bogdan et al. (2024), who compared three instances of 'compassion fatigue' that followed three experiences of large-scale displacement and ensuing solidarity: the reception of Syrians in Turkey, of Venezuelans in Colombia, and of Ukrainians in Europe. They identified several factors to explain the erosion of public support for displaced populations over time; notably perceptions of unfairness and of being left behind, uncertainty about the future of displaced populations, a perceived lack of control over migration, and a sense of existential threat linked to cultural and/or demographic concerns.

In Turkey, attitudes started shifting negatively once the displacement crisis became protracted and the status of Syrians started shifting from "temporary guests" to "more-permanent residents" (2024:26). This is also confirmed by the latest Syrians Barometer study (Erdoğan, 2022),[52] which notes a major decrease in the social acceptance of Syrian refugees over time, who are increasingly portrayed as "dangerous", as a "burden" and as cultural others by Turkish populations. It is worth emphasising that between 2014 and 2022, Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2024).[53] In a recent experiment seeking to determine Turkish nationals' support to Syrians' social, economic and political integration (measured through support for having refugees as neighbours and for granting them a work permit or citizenship), Getmansky et al. (2024) demonstrated the crucial role of ethnicity over religion in driving attitudes of Turkish nationals, arguing that "theoretical and empirical work on refugee acceptance should consider intra-refugee differences, and not only the difference

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Greece, immigration became particularly concerning as it became an object of political tensions with Turkey in 2019 (Bailey-Morley & Lowe, 2023; Holloway et al., 2021).

[52] The Syrians Barometer is conceived as a comprehensive study on social cohesion in Turkey, which is based on surveys and focus group discussions, and focuses on the attitudes of both Turkish citizens and Syrians under temporary protection.

[53] In 2023, the Islamic Republic of Iran became the country with the largest refugee population (predominantly Afghan refugees).

between the local population and the refugees as a whole" (2014:13; See 1.1.2). They notably showed the existence of an 'ethnic bias' against Syrian Arabs and Syrian Kurds over Syrian Turkomen, disproving the idea that 'co-religiosity' is necessarily a driver of positive attitudes vis-à-vis newcomers. In a similar vein, 82% of Turks surveyed in a recent study notably felt "no cultural commonalities" with Syrians (Kınıklıoğlu, 2020). Banulescu-Bogdan et al. have advanced that, while secular Turks may be concerned about a "threat of Islamification", religious minorities can perceive Sunni Arab Syrians as "a demographic threat that can tip the scale in favour of the ruling party in some regions and further marginalise communities such as the Alevis" (2024:28).[54]

Heath et al. (2020) observed that *cross-country* variation in public attitudes towards migration can be explained by contextual elements, such as information on the immigrant population size, national immigration policies as well as immigration narratives in national media. Additionally, since Italian, Greek and Turkish territories and populations are extremely diverse and affected differently by immigration trends and policies (See also 6.1.1.2), it is crucial to analyse *in-country* attitudinal variations at the sub-national level. For instance, a large-scale survey conducted in 2017 in Greek islands of the Aegean Sea showed that direct exposure of island residents to sudden arrivals had led to "sizable and lasting increases" in their hostility towards immigrants, refugees and Muslim minorities, as well as to increased political support for restrictive asylum and immigration policies (Hangartner et al., 2019). The latest Syrians Barometer also shows that Turks living in cities along the border with Syria – which host significant numbers of Syrians – tend to be more hostile compared to Turks living in other regions (Erdoğan, 2022). Getmansky et al. (2018) have similarly shown that Turkish locals reporting a higher exposure to refugees display higher treat perceptions.

Although the polarisation of opinion has been the centre of attention in the context of the recent 'refugee reception crisis' in Europe (Rea et al., 2019), researchers have highlighted the more mixed and moderate 'in-between' opinions (cf. Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024; Dixon et al., 2018; 2019). In two distinct reports focused on Italy and Greece respectively (Dixon et al., 2018; 2019), researchers from *More in Common* identified different population segments which correspond to a typology of attitudes towards national identity, immigration and refugee

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[54] When referring to Syrian refugees, my Turkish respondents never explicitly stressed the inherent diversity of this population, tending instead to categorise them as 'Arabs' and 'Muslims' by default (see 5.1.1.2).

issues, further developing their key attributes and concerns. Such attitudes are placed on a spectrum of values ranging from 'open' to 'closed' (See Table 5).[55]

Table 5. Italian and Greek population segments identified by Dixon et al. (2018; 2019)

	Open segments	Middle segments		Closed segments
Italy	Italian Cosmopolitans (12%)	**Disengaged Moderates (19%)**		Cultural Defenders (17%)
	Catholic Humanitarians (16%)	Left Behind (17%)		Hostile Nationalists (7%)
		Security Concerned (12%)		
Greece	Greek Multiculturals (20%)	**Moderate Humanitarians (28%)**		Nationalists Opponents (15%)
		Instinctive Pragmatists (19%)		Alarmed Opponents (3%)
		Detached Traditionalists (15%)		

Figure 5 further demonstrates the clear over-representation of the 'middle' segments in both countries (representing 48% and 62% of the population in Italy and Greece respectively), nuancing common representations of attitudes towards migration and migrants as a binary opposition of 'pro-' versus 'anti-' immigration attitudes.

Figure 5. 'Open', 'middle' and 'closed' population segments in Italy and Greece.
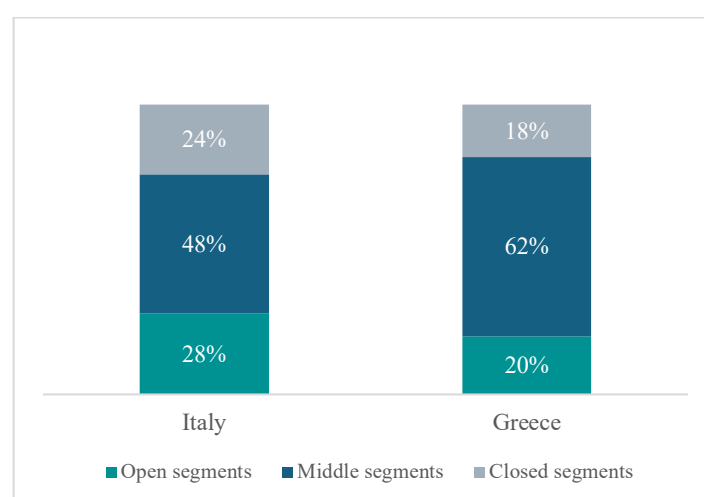
Source: Dixon et al., 2018; 2019.

Indeed, although populations classified as 'open' are slightly more numerous than those identified as 'closed', both extremes are far outnumbered by middle segments. Analysing the

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[55] This ambitious mixed methods research relied on a population clustering segmentation analysis, a large-scale survey, as well as focus group discussions, allowing for representative and nuanced sampling of the population. Some of these population segments are briefly discussed in 4.2.2.5 and 5.1.4).

(unequal) levels of legal and social acceptance amongst different migrant groups is also key to a more nuanced understanding of public attitudes towards migration in our three countries of focus (See also 1.2.3.2 and 5.1.3). Focusing on Italy and Southern Europe, Ambrosini (2016) has notably developed a dynamic typology (See Table 6) to explain the interactions between the social recognition (and acceptance) of migrants on the one hand, and their formal (legal) authorisation on the other, identifying four situational ideal types at the intersection of these two dimensions.

Table 6. Typology of migrants' acceptance as per Ambrosini (2016)

	Social recognition	No social recognition
Formal authorisation	Integration (++)	Stigmatisation (+-)
No formal authorisation	Tolerance (-+)	Exclusion (--)

While *exclusion* results from the lack of both formal authorisation and social recognition and affects individuals who are commonly referred to as "illegal" migrants, *integration* is understood as the combined presence of both these criteria and concerns socially accepted "regular" migrants. Along the two ends of this spectrum, migrants who are formally authorised on the territory but lack social recognition face *stigmatisation* (e.g. asylum seekers or "socially undesirable minorities" (2016:146), such as Roma people), while those who are socially accepted despite a lack of formal recognition are met with *tolerance* (e.g. "irregular 'deserving' workers" (2016:146) employed in the agricultural or domestic care sectors). These illustrate the diversity of othering and solidarity reactions which different categories of migrants can meet depending on their perceived level of (un)deservingness (see 5.1.3 and 6.3).

2.2. Italy, Greece and Turkey as countries of emigration: Focus on the Belgian context

In addition to having become key immigration countries, Italy, Greece and Turkey have a long tradition of emigration (2.2.1). From the early 20th century to this day, Italian, Greek and Turkish migrants have been instrumental in shaping representations of Belgium – and more specifically of Brussels – as a land of immigration, contributing significantly to the kingdom's economic, cultural and political life (Jacobs et al., 2007; Morelli, 1992; Vandecandelaere,

2014). Yet, emigration does not necessarily mean cutting ties with one's country of origin. On the contrary, many Italian, Greek and Turkish émigrés maintain strong relations with their homeland through a range of transnational practices (2.2.2).

2.2.1. Italian, Greek and Turkish emigration over the years

2.2.1.1.   From labour migration to permanent immigration

In 1945, immigration in Belgium reached a turning point as its coal industry was hard hit by the economic consequences of World War II.[56] In order to fill this labour gap and contribute more generally to reconstruction efforts, the Belgian state actively recruited foreign workers through entering bilateral agreements with less industrialised states which agreed to trade "men for coal".[57] A first agreement was signed in 1946 between Belgium and Italy, whereby Italy initially agreed to send 50,000 workers in exchange for 200 kilos of coal per miner per day, paid in full (Martiniello & Rea, 2013). Belgium later entered similar agreements with other labour-sending countries, including Greece and Turkey, in 1957 and 1964 respectively.[58] Workers were initially hired to work in the country's main coal mining basins, but many were also redirected into the construction, metallurgy, or transport sectors. This quota-based, highly organised, labour migration became the cornerstone of Belgium's immigration policy until the economic recession of the early 1970s. Turks have formed one of the biggest contingents of foreign guestworkers in Northern Europe – particularly in Germany (Yanaşmayan, 2019). In 1957, the signature of the Rome Treaty instituting the European Community[59] constituted another crucial moment in the (re)definition of Belgium's immigration policy. It allowed nationals of the 'founding six' members (Belgium, France, Luxemburg, *Italy*, Netherlands, and West-Germany) to circulate across their respective borders for touristic reasons and to access the labour market, without needing an entry visa, nor a work permit. Access to rights by foreign workers therefore became dependent upon their country joining the European Union, rather

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[56] Between the early 1950s and the mid-1970s, around 10 million Southern Europeans and North Africans joined North European countries to contribute to post-war reconstruction efforts (King, 2000).
[57] These bilateral agreements were known in French as *accords hommes contre charbon* ("men for coal").
[58] Such agreements were signed with Spain in 1956, Greece in 1957, Morocco and Turkey in 1964, Tunisia in 1969, Algeria and Yugoslavia in 1970. Most Turkish guestworkers originated from rural provinces in Central Anatolia (e.g. Afyon, Eskişehir and Kayseri). Certain towns, such as the town of Emirdağ, in Afyon province, are particularly famous for outmigration to Belgium (See Timmerman et al., 2018.)
[59] The European *Community* later became the European *Union* through the 1992 Maastricht Treaty.

than upon their length of stay in Belgium.[60] By 1968, EU nationals represented 62% of the foreign workforce in Belgium (Martiniello & Rea, 2013). The early 1970s were marked by a period of economic recession and mass unemployment, which led to immigration restrictions and brought bilateral labour agreements to an end. Despite these restrictions, Belgium remained a major settlement destination for an increasingly diverse number of foreigners, including international students, as well as highly skilled university graduates and professionals from third countries. From then on, family reunification became the single most important immigration pathway in Belgium, gradually allowing foreigners, their children, and their spouses to perceive the country as a place of definitive settlement, rather than of temporary stay. Legal reforms to Belgian Nationality Law simplified the naturalisation process in Belgium, allowing hundreds of thousands of foreigners to obtain Belgian nationality, while retaining their first nationality in many cases (Martiniello & Rea, 2013).

2.2.1.2. 'New' Italian, Greek and Turkish emigration

The 2008 European debt crisis disproportionately affected Southern European economies and reinforced a more recent wave of emigration from Italy and Greece into Northern European countries, which fared comparatively better economically-speaking, such as the United Kingdom and Germany, as well as Belgium (Labrianidis & Pratsinakis, 2016; Lafleur & Stanek, 2017a; Van Mol, 2016).[61] Contrary to post-war emigration in the mid-20th Century, which was largely organised by states through quotas-based bilateral agreements, current emigration from Southern Europe takes place in the framework of free movement. This individualisation of mobility trajectories makes it more difficult to draw systematic conclusions about the drivers of this 'new' emigration, highlighting instead the complexity and *mixed* nature of migration aspirations (Franceschelli, 2022; Yanaşmayan, 2019). The limits of existing data sources at the home state level also makes it difficult to quantify these outflows. Statistics from the Registry of Italian Citizens Residing Abroad (AIRE), the Italian National Institute of Statistics and the Italian ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs, for instance, are believed to underestimate the actual flows of 'new' Italian migrants in Northern Europe

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[60] These rights were extended according to the different EU accession waves, in 1986 (marking the joining of *Greece*, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, United Kingdom, Denmark) and 2007.

[61] Given the geographical focus of this thesis, I concentrate here on 'old' and 'new' emigration in the European context. In the case of Greece, two European cities feature in the top ten of cities with the biggest concentration of Greek nationals: London (ranked 3rd in the overall ranking, with 280,000 Greeks), and Munich (ranked 10th, with 30,000 Greeks). The rest are located in the United States (i.e. New York, Chicago, Boston), Australia (Melbourne and Sydney), Canada (Toronto), and Chile (Santiago) (Karavasili, 2021)

(Tintori & Romei, 2017).[62] In Greece, data produced at the domestic level is also misleading, as the National Statistical Agency does not include Greek citizens in its emigration data, focusing instead on outflows of third country nationals. As such, the sharp rise in emigration figures in the wake of the 2008 crisis can be essentially attributed to Albanians (the main immigrant group in Greece) returning to their home country (Mavrodi & Moutselos, 2017).[63] Therefore, it appears crucial to also refer to data produced by destination states to get a more comprehensive picture of this new emigrant population. As of January 1st, 2023, the foreign population in the Brussels-Capital Region amounted to 37% of the total population of the city[64] and represented a total of 181 nationalities, with EU nationals representing 63% of the total foreign population and 23% of the total population (IBSA, 2024).[65] As of January 1st, 2023, Italians and Greeks represented 7,8% and 2,2% of the total foreign population in the Brussels-Capital Region, appearing amongst the top 10 foreign nationalities (IBSA, 2024). The number of Italians in Brussels has remained relatively stable between 2000 and 2021, increasing from 28,951 to 34,879 (See Appendix 1a). In 2023, they were the third most numerous national group in Brussels after the French and the Romanians.[66] The number of Turkish nationals, however, has dropped from 19,398 to 8,952 between 2000 and 2014, the year in which they disappeared from the ranking altogether.[67] As for Greek nationals, their number has always remained under the ten thousand-mark. Greeks did not reappear in the ranking until 2017. As of January 1st, 2021, they occupied the tenth (and last) place of the ranking, with an estimated 9,581 individuals. If we consider the main nationalities *at birth* in Brussels, encompassing nationals who were born a certain nationality and have since obtained Belgian nationality, Moroccans outnumber by far all other nationalities present in Brussels. They are then followed by the French, although their numbers remain far behind. Italians and Turks occupied the third and fourth place of this ranking in 2021, with 39,695 and 32,598 nationals respectively. Greeks remained in the ranking until 2007, but were then consistently surpassed by nationals of Eastern European countries who joined the EU in the first decade of 2000, as well as other historical immigrant groups in Belgium (e.g. the Congolese, the Spanish and the Portuguese) (See

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[62] For instance, the lack of incentive for Italians residing abroad to register at their consulates, and therefore at the AIRE, leads to cases of "undetected emigration" (Tintori & Romei, 2017:53).

[63] In Greece, emigration started outnumbering immigration in 2008.

[64] 458,152 foreign nationals out of a total population of 1,241,175.

[65] These figures do not include foreign nationals who also hold the Belgian nationality.

[66] These two national groups have overtaken Moroccans as the most numerous national group in the capital (the French occupy the first place since 2005, Romanians the second place since 2015).

[67] Although Turks no longer appear in the Brussels' ranking, they appear in the top-ten ranking of nationalities in the two other Belgian regions, with 20,135 (9th position) and 9,107 nationals (8th position) estimated in Flanders and Wallonia respectively in 2021.

Appendix 1b). These numbers serve as indicators of the 'assimilation' of Italians, Greeks and Turks into Belgian society through naturalisation (Tintori & Romei, 2017). Similarly to 'hyphenated identities' that are frequently used in the United States, expressions such as 'Belgo-Turks/Italians/Greeks' or 'first', 'second' or 'third generation' Italians, Greeks or Turks are commonly used in the Belgian context to refer to immigrants and their descendants.

Recent emigrants' profiles and experiences vary considerably from that of their post-war predecessors. As a result, Greeks, Italians and Turks and Brussels cannot be conceived of as homogeneous groups. As observed by Mavrodi & Moutselos: "an underdeveloped area of research relates to the qualitative characteristics of recent emigrants, such as their skills, professional aspirations, geographic origin, family history and networks, etc." (2017:41). There has been a growing academic interest for describing 'new' migration trends and migrants' profiles in Europe,[68] including new Italian, Greek and Turkish migrants in Belgium –[69] and more specifically in Brussels. In fact, the concept of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007), which highlights increasing numbers as well as a diversification of immigrants' profile (in terms of countries of origin, languages, religions, migration channels and immigration statuses, gender, spaces and places of settlement and concentration as well as transnational practices), has regularly been referenced in studies about Brussels (Crul, 2016; Favell, 2001; 2003; Vertovec, 2019). One challenge lies in the fact that new migrations are no longer solely associated with clear-cut pathways such as family reunification or asylum. In fact, the nature of freedom of movement within the EU means that migration trajectories have become more and more transient and reliant upon individual decisions linked to one's career or education (Favell, 2003; Martiniello et al., 2010).[70] Although the economic crisis and its direct consequences on unemployment may have in many cases played a primary role in explaining out-migration from Southern Europe, scholars have demonstrated how the post-2008 flows cannot be solely explained by conjunctural factors but are rather grounded in a profound aspiration to find more

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[68] See for instance the project "New European Mobilities at times of Crisis: Emigration Aspirations and Practices of Young Greek Adults" (EUMIGRE), which sought to "systematically [assess] the magnitude and dynamics of the new crisis driven emigration and [explore] the motivations and aspirations of the emigrants themselves" through a series of interviews conducted with 'new' Greek migrants in London and Amsterdam. https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/658694

[69] See for instance the 2010 collective volume *New Migrations and New Migrants in Belgium* published by prominent migration scholars from several Belgian universities. Written in both French and Flemish, it highlights the diversity of migration and integration pathways among newcomers, focusing on groups as diverse as Brazilian construction workers or seasonal strawberry pickers in Wallonia.

[70] See for instance the concept of 'Eurostars' coined by Adrian Favell in his ethnographic work *Eurostars and Eurocities,* which refers to highly mobile and transnational "free movers" living in 'Eurocities' such as London, Amsterdam and *Brussels.*

rewarding opportunities and careers abroad (Bartolini et al., 2017; Dimitriadis et al., 2019; Minnecci, 2015). In other words, the crisis and its direct aftermath did not serve as the primary trigger for new Southern European emigration. Instead, the latter should also be understood in the context of structural dynamics (e.g. rising youth unemployment and poverty, increased fragmentation of the labour market and deregulation policies) that primarily affect certain population categories in origin countries, such as women, youth, third country nationals, part-time workers. Post-2008 emigration from Mediterranean countries to Northern economies have been overwhelmingly painted as a 'brain drain' of 'young', 'high-skilled', 'educated' and 'cosmopolitan' promising graduates and professionals from the struggling economies of Southern Europe (Cavounidis, 2015). Triandafyllidou & Gropas describe this phenomenon as "voting with one's feet" (2014), whereby people express their disapproval by seeking greener pastures. Yet, the brain drain narrative only provides a partial image of this new migration in Europe and in Belgium, and has been counterbalanced by several studies. As argued by Tintori & Romei:

> (…) if there is enough evidence to state that the recent rise of emigration – especially that undetected by Italian official data – was significantly composed of young people, there are no solid proofs that they bring the 'brain' too with them, as they are not necessarily skilled or they don't necessarily end up working in highly-skilled sectors (2017:58-59).

In their study of new Italian migration in Australia, Baldassar & Pyke further observe that "[t]his polarisation [between 'high-skilled' and 'unskilled' migration] contributes to the perception that there are two classes of the globally mobile – one that is privileged, "frictionless" and transnational, the other being highly disadvantaged and vulnerable to social exclusion due to ethnicity and race" (2013:13). Yet, although new EU emigrants may be privileged by virtue of their EU citizenship, which affords them greater freedom of movement, their privilege can sometimes be nuanced in light of their daily experiences. Rather than being seen as absolute, privilege should therefore be perceived as relative and ambivalent (See 1.2.3.3 and 4.1.3.3). For instance, many young EU migrants experience 'precarious citizenship' in Brussels as their social rights and freedom of movement are restricted through temporary and informal legal statuses and work arrangements (Simola, 2018). Lafleur & Stanek (2017b) also provided similar evidence that new Southern European migrants in Belgium were facing restrictions regarding their access to social protection. Likewise, a 2020 study by the Casi-Uo, an association that focuses on supporting Italian newcomers in Brussels, describes the precarious conditions faced by many Italians conducting undeclared work in Brussels'

'Horeca' (Hotels, Restaurants and Cafes) sector (Bonomo, 2017; Casi-Uo, 2020). In certain cases, young Southern Europeans may also experience 'deskilling' (downward socioeconomic mobility) in their country of destination (Dimitriadis et al., 2019), leading to 'brain waste' (Minneci, 2015; Financial Times, 2024). Other scholars argue that the outflows of young and skilled migrants (out of crisis-stricken economies) is over-reported, comparatively to that of third country nationals, as well as of seasonal and/or low-skilled migrants (Casi-Uo, 2020; Dubucs et al., 2017a; Mavrodi & Moutselos, 2017; Tintori & Romei, 2017).

The profile of third country nationals who migrate to Belgium is equally diverse, although their lack of EU citizenship (for those who are not dual citizens) usually affords them less agency in the migration decision and choice of immigration pathway. Ever since the end of bilateral agreements in the 1970s, family reunification has been the main immigration pathway from non-EU countries, including from Turkey. 'New' Turkish migrants (those who do not hold Belgian citizenship) still mainly join Belgium through family formation or reunification procedures (Timmerman, 2006). Other regular immigration pathways include work and study permits and, to a lesser extent, politically-motivated asylum.[71] From the late 1990s until the 2013 Gezi Park protests (which represent a crucial turning point in the deterioration of relations between President Erdoğan and EU leaders),[72] a number of legal frameworks and policies were used to promote the mobility of high-skilled workers and students from Turkey, amongst other third countries (Sánchez-Montijano et al., 2018).[73]

2.2.1.3. Migrant othering in Belgium

Far from being frictionless, immigrants' longstanding presence in Belgium has also raised concerns about the economic and cultural impacts of migration, putting into perspective the image of Belgium – and Brussels – as a multicultural 'melting pot' (See 4.3). This has led to the development of migrant othering discourses targeting EU nationals as well as third country

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[71] Following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, President Erdoğan initiated a crackdown against his political opponents, including (real or alleged) followers of the Gülenist movement (Taş, 2019). The long-standing repression against the Kurdish minority, has more recently extended to academics, journalists, as well as pro-Kurdish, and pro-LGBTQI+ activists (Alan et al., 2019).

[72] The demonstrations began on 28 May 2013 to protest an urban development plan for Gezi Park in Taksim, Istanbul. The violent repression of protesters by the police sparked an unprecedented wave of civil unrest across the country.

[73] These include the European Commission's Europe 2020 Strategy, EU directives (e.g. the Blue Card Directive 2009/50/EC, the Single Permit Directive, the Intra-Corporate Transfer Directive), Erasmus programmes, scholarship and research programmes (e.g. Marie Curie fellowships, Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme).

nationals. One such example of othering concerns the hierarchisation of migrants in the Belgian (and EU) context. Indeed, the European construction process effectively

> divided immigrants into two categories: those who were incorporated into the supranational political adventure known as Europe, and those coming from "third countries" (non-EU Member countries). The first category benefits from many provisions that seek to encourage an equality of treatment between Belgians and nationals of other states belonging to the European Community, whilst the second category experiences more legal discrimination as they are not protected by European law (Martiniello & Rea, 2013:18).[74]

The framing of intra-European migrations as 'mobility' (Bauböck, 2021; Piccoli et al., 2024) resulted in the creation of a new set of rights based on the type of permit or visa required to visit or settle in EU countries, as well as of a new category of 'desirable' foreigners, that of EU citizens, opposed to third country nationals. As observed by Bauböck: "Such a distinction between migration and mobility is fully embraced in official documents and discourses within the EU where a strict terminological line is drawn between third country nationals, who are called migrants, and nationals of member states taking up residence or employment in another member state, who are called mobile EU citizens" (2021:174; See 1.2.3.1 and 4.2.1). As noted by Martiniello & Rea: "this legal change also implied an identity change, as they started to be perceived as Europeans rather than as immigrants" (2013:20).[75] As the different waves of EU accession unfolded, more and more countries and their citizens gradually benefitted from these changing representations, Greek citizens as of 1981 (Venturas, 2001a). A certain idea of the common set of social and cultural values, norms, beliefs and a sense of shared history that make up the so-called 'European identity' (See 1.2.1 and 4.1.2.2), supported the idea that Europeans (and other 'Westerners') are culturally similar to Belgians, further reducing the pressure and expectations to integrate (See 4.1.3). As suggested by Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels:

> North-North migrants are, for the most part, presented as non-migrants; as such, their integration is also often perceived as a separate phenomenon from that of "migrants". Here, too, we notice a distinction between highly-skilled migrants from the Global North and from the Global South. Those from the Global North seem to be exempt from the expectation of integration, with, indeed, self-segregation rather seen as being the norm (2020:2-3).

Conversely, third country nationals who had been in Belgium since the post-war period – such as Turks and Moroccans – became increasingly othered and stigmatised, often racialised as

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[74] Author's own translation from French.
[75] Author's own translation from French.

Muslims (See 1.3.1.2) accused of communitarianism and painted as a cultural threat (Fadil & Martiniello, 2020; Imani Giglou et al., 2019; Timmerman, 2006; Wets, 2006). Although the Turkish diaspora (and society) is in practice highly divided, notably along a religious/secular divide, the representation of Turkey as a Muslim country and of its people as Muslims is widespread and fuelled by the Turkish State and its different institutions, such as *Diyanet* (Çitak, 2018). As such, Turkish emigrants can be subjected to overt Islamophobic actions and discourses and overall discriminations in the fields of housing, employment, education, access to justice (Easat-Daas, 2019), including 'microaggressions' (Colak et al., 2020). The idea of cultural and religious 'otherness' has been used to explain Europeans' resistance to Turkey's attempts to join the European Union (Kroet, 2017; Lindgaard, 2018). As noted by Özerim & Öner: "right-wing populist actors in Europe resort to the use of Turkish migrants and Turkey (in particular, its EU membership process) as an "othering" element and culturally polarising issue within European societies, by employing the theme of cultural security" (2020:78).

EU migrants are also subjected to othering discourses, albeit to a much lesser extent. For instance, some have been portrayed as economic burdens or 'welfare shoppers' in the aftermath of the 2008 economic recession, leading, in the case of Belgium, to the expulsion of EU citizens who were believed to abuse their social rights (Lafleur & Stanek, 2017b). Additionally, an internal hierarchisation of EU citizens themselves is notable, with Central and Eastern Europeans typically regarded as less desirable, or valued, than Northern, Western and Southern Europeans (See quote by Paola in 4.2.2.4). For instance, based on qualitative research conducted among international secondary school students, Drewski et al. (2018) illustrated the existence of a 'status hierarchy' (based on national and linguistic criteria) even within the cosmopolitan microcosm of a Brussels-based European school, thus demonstrating the persistence of 'symbolic boundaries' between North-Western Europeans and Eastern Europeans. In Brussels, natives also criticise the presence of so-called 'expats' – who despite being constructed as 'desirable migrants' can also be seen as distant and uninvested in local life due to the perceived temporary nature of their stay (Favell, 2008:49) and as reproducing a "cosmopolitan *entre-soi*" (Foret, 2022:5). Highly-skilled EU migrants are also blamed for contributing to rising costs and to the growing gentrification of certain neighbourhoods (Casier & Decroly, 2022). In an article aimed at describing the common characteristics of Brussels' 'Expats', Gatti recognises:

Many Bruxellois see Expats as privileged and high-salaried people. They are annoyed by the urban architectural transformations to create the physical spaces that host the EU institutions and are worried by the increase in real estate prices due to the Expats' growing demand (Bernard, 2008). Regarding their social status at least, Expats are often seen as a separate community (Gatti, 2009: 3).

Another concern targets emigrant groups that have maintained a strong connection with their country of origin. They are often accused of "importing [domestic] conflicts" into their places of destination (Alan et al., 2018; Venturas, 2001b). For instance, the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey led to violent attacks between pro-Erdoğan supporters and alleged supporters of the Gülen movement (and opponents of AKP more generally) throughout Belgium (Alan, 2018). Imani Giglou et al. (2017) also documented how Turkish diaspora members in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands reacted to the 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations, highlighting more active support to the protests from respondents who had spent less time in EU countries (and therefore felt more directly affected by the protests), comparatively to those who exhibited more direct and durable links with their country of destination. This example illustrates the inherent heterogeneity of diasporas. Diasporic mobilisations and dissensions also touch upon longstanding internal conflicts and struggles, such as the so-called 'Kurdish question'. The Kurdish diaspora is particularly active in transnational and EU lobbying, through the presence of Brussels-based Kurdish organisations aimed at advocating the cause of the Kurdish people (Berkowitz & Mügge, 2014). Claims in favour of the recognition of the genocides of the early 19th century against Armenians, Alevis, Assyrian, and other religious minorities in addition to Kurdish groups – constitute yet another example of "contentious politics" (Adamson, 2019:211) that result in political engagement on the part of diasporas with ancestral ties to Turkey (Dinç, 2020), and sometimes to coalition-building among different diaspora groups advocating for genocide recognition (Koinova, 2019). Scholars also focused on the reproduction of ancient and contemporary bilateral conflicts in places of destination. Seraïdari (2011) has for instance analysed how Turks and Greeks in Brussels interact regardless of the tense relations between their respective countries, distinguishing three types of behaviours (i.e. hostility, cooperation and indifference) which can affect the nature of their social relations.

2.2.2. Relations between migrants and their home state

The physical distance separating diasporas from their homeland is often counter-balanced by a symbolic and emotional attachment of the former to the latter.[76] The persistence of a strong sense of shared identity urges many emigrants to claim and showcase their ancestral ethnicity in their place of destination. Globalisation has made both communication and mobility easier and faster, further erasing physical boundaries, and allowing emigrants to maintain strong ties with their home country through various transnational practices (See 4.3.1). As observed by Timmerman: "Nowadays, Turkish migration can no longer be seen as a fixed move from one point to the other. Instead, it is more a process of ongoing movement and interactions between several locations across different countries" (2006: 28).

2.2.2.1. State-led diaspora engagement strategies

The Italian, Greek and Turkish states have long been involved in diasporic affairs (Adamson, 2019; Tsourapas, 2020; Venturas, 2001b; Yanaşmayan & Kaslı 2019).[77] Their motivations for doing so range from tapping into emigrants' economic and commercial potential (through sending remittances and investing back home, or by serving as ambassadors of their domestic industries and products), to leveraging their political and cultural role (as potential voters and party supporters, as well as representatives or champions of the national language and traditions) (Bruneau, 2001; Tintori & Romei 2017; Venturas, 2001b), turning them into a source of soft power for their respective states. Indeed, "diasporas are considered to be bridges or mediators between their home and their host countries, or even as actors who expand the definition of domestic politics to include not only politics inside the homeland state but also inside the 'imagined community' of the nation" (Vogli, 2011:14).

Italy, Greece and Turkey have all put in place formal mechanisms and/or institutions to officialise relations between the state and its residents abroad. In Italy, these relations are mediated by governmental departments such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

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[76] As a social and political construct, the term 'diaspora' is a contested one (Adamson, 2019). I will use it here as a 'category of practice' and acknowledge how this subjective notion is used to (re)produce a certain representation of the national "imagined community".

[77] See Adamson (2019) for a comprehensive overview of the evolution of Turkish diaspora policies, from the founding of Modern Turkey to the first two decades of the 21st century. See Venturas (2001b) for a historical overview of Greek diaspora politics from the 1950s to the mid-1970s.

International Cooperation, as well as by local and regional administrations and public agencies. Additionally, Italian citizens abroad are legally required to register in the Registry of Italian Citizens Residing Abroad (AIRE) at the consulate should they intend to stay in their country of destination for over a year (Tintori & Romei, 2017). Turkey has established an Office for the Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*) in April 2010, which respectively targets Turkish citizens living abroad, "co-ethnics and related communities" (i.e. populations with Turkish ancestry living in the Balkans and the former USSR), and prospective incoming students from developing countries (Adamson, 2019). In Greece, diaspora affairs appeared in the political agenda in the 1950s (following the Greek civil war) as the state sought to tap into its most populous and prosperous diaspora members (particularly Greek-Americans) and avoid their total assimilation into their countries of settlement to garner both political and economic support (Bruneau, 2001). The restoration of democracy in 1975 constituted a major turning point for diaspora politics, seeing the creation of several public organisations such as the Secretariat of Greeks Abroad (*Geniki Grammatea Apodimou Ellinismou*) and the Council of Greeks Abroad (*Symvoulio Apodimou Ellinismou*) in 1983 and 1995 respectively.[78]

Citizenship policies – particularly those affording citizenship by descent or allowing dual citizenship – are also instrumental in allowing bonds to be sustained across generations and continents. Italy, Greece and Turkey all recognise and apply the *jus sanguinis* principle, allowing anyone who can prove their Italian, Greek or Turkish ancestry to claim citizenship, even without having been born, nor having ever lived in these countries (Vogli, 2011; See 6.3.2.). In the Greek context, the notion of Hellenism has been instrumental in shaping both the Greek identity and 'imagined community' across both time and space.[79]

Another indication of the weight afforded by states to their emigrants lies in allowing external voting, which can be "understood not only as an electoral procedure that allows some citizens to cast their vote outside the national territory but also as an acknowledgement that an emigrant

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[78] Relations between the Greek state and its diaspora are defined in article 108 of the 1975 Greek Constitution, which asserts that "The State must take care of expatriate Greeks and of the maintenance of their ties with the Fatherland. The State shall also attend to the education, the social and professional achievement of Greeks working outside the State".

[79] This ancient concept extends national belonging to people located outside the immediate borders of the Greek Nation-State. 'Hellenes' include both Greek emigrants (and their descendants) who have settled abroad, as well as populations located in ancestral Greek territories – sometimes referred to as 'co-ethnics' or 'ethnic Greeks', notably in Cyprus, in parts of certain Balkan countries, and in the Turkish islands of Imbros and Tenedos (known as Gökçeada and Bozcaada in Turkish), amongst others (Bruneau, 2001).

status is compatible with polity membership" (Lafleur, 2011). Italians residing abroad can elect eight Members of Parliament and four senators. This right was first exercised during the 2006 general elections, and reiterated during all subsequent elections in 2008, 2013, 2018 and 2022. The Turkish State also engages its diasporas through allowing overseas voting, and the latest elections (whether constitutional referendums, or Parliamentary and Presidential Elections) have been characterised by a significant turnout by Turkish citizens abroad (Adamson, 2019). The composition of the Turkish diaspora in Belgium reflects Turkey's internal political divisions, with a significant proportion of Belgo-Turkish citizens being AKP supporters (Khoojinian & Özgüden, 2018). Comparatively to Italy and Turkey, Greece lags behind in terms of external voting provisions. Indeed, despite the constitutional provisions allowing external voting, the Greek diaspora is facing limitations in exercising these rights (Vogli, 2011; See 6.2.2.3), leading to proposals to improve the current system (e.g. Kapetopoulos, 2019; Poula, 2019).

The question of emigrants' return (or repatriation) has returned under the spotlight in Italy and Greece as a result of the post-2008 economic recovery efforts. In particular, several observers criticise the lack – or inadequacy – of current return incentives targeting emigrants abroad (Cacciaguerra, 2019, Cavounidis, 2015). Yet, this is not a recent question. In fact, Greece's shift from a country of emigration to a country of immigration in the mid 1970s can partly be explained by the return of Greeks (counted as 'immigrants') from countries that put a halt to bilateral agreements following the economic recession, such as Germany, France or Belgium. Another wave of repatriation consisted in the return of 200,000 to 300,000 Pontian Greeks from the ex-USSR between 1989 and 1995 (Bruneau, 2001). In Italy, the idea that the brain drain (*fuga dei cervelli*) is stripping the country off its 'brilliant minds' has notably prompted local, national and regional authorities to put in place economic incentives targeting "the return of individuals with improved human and social capital" (Tintori & Romei, 2017:60).[80]

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[80] One example is Law 238 passed in 2010 under Berlusconi. Although it targets skilled EU citizens who wish to start a business in Italy or be hired permanently by an Italian employer, Law 238 is in practice aimed primarily at Italian citizens, offering them fiscal incentives, a more advantageous access to public housing and pension benefits, as well as facilitated application procedures (Tintori & Romei, 2017).

2.2.2.2. Migrant-led transnational engagement

Diaspora studies have long focused on the central role of financial remittances in the strategies of both migrant-sending states and households. The economic weight of Italian, Greek and Turkish emigrants – through sending back money to their relatives back home or making investments to support the economic development of their homeland – is significant. According to the most recent World Bank data, Turkey had for instance received 868,000,000 US$ in remittances in 2022. In addition to playing an economic role, Italian, Greek and Turkish immigrants in Brussels engage with their home states and co-citizens in ways that showcase their social and political influence, highlighting their transformative potential. Amongst others, emigrants can participate in political activities and/or gain political influence in both their places of origin and destination, a phenomenon which has been conceptualised as 'immigrant political transnationalism' (Martiniello & Lafleur, 2008; See 1.4.2). Similarly, through acquiring social and cultural capital in the place of destination, emigrants can contribute to the development and transfer of innovative ideas, skills or behaviour ('social remittances') in their places of origin (Levitt, 1998; See 1.4.2 and 6.2). These practices are often mediated through organisations aimed at creating bridges between the governments and populations of both the migrant-sending and receiving states (representing and promoting its state, culture, and or economy); at fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging to the same national or regional group (reducing emotional distance with the homeland, in spite of the physical distance); and/or at supporting emigrants in the place of destination through acting as a solidarity network and promoting "intra-diaspora knowledge transfers" (Baldassar & Pyke, 2013). There is a strong and diverse network of Italian, Greek and Turkish organisations in Brussels, which include official public institutions (such as diplomatic representations) as well as (in)formal diaspora solidarity networks. This illustrates the strong ongoing links between Italian, Greek and Turkish emigrants in Brussels and their home country. As a first step to finding respondents for the present thesis (See 3.2.), I conducted a (non-exhaustive) mapping of such organisations in Brussels (See Appendix 2), which I classified under three main categories: public, commercial and cultural diplomacy actors; independent migrant networks and associations; and community-based and professional networks. The first category of institutions consists of diplomatic representations, such as embassies and consulates, permanent (national and regional) representations to the European Union and to NATO, EU representations of national political parties, as well as Greek and Italian Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). It also includes chambers of commerce and other commercial organisations (e.g. business

confederations or associations) involved in supporting the interests of the Italian, Greek and Turkish private sector, as well as state-sponsored cultural institutes tasked with promoting Italian, Greek and/or Turkish language and culture in Belgium. Emigrant communities also set up their own networks, associations or businesses which are particularly active in the cultural realm.[81] Cultural associations seek to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the country or region of origin, whether linked to language, food, arts, and other traditions and customs. Other examples include private think tanks or research-related institutes that combine a strong focus on EU affairs and a deep commitment to homeland politics, alternative media created by diaspora members, international schools targeting Italian, Greek and Turkish pupils, as well as Churches and Mosques. Lastly, formal and informal networks have been developed – both physically and online – to sustain a sense of intra-community solidarity, mostly aimed at sharing advice on life in Brussels and/or Belgium or to provide a networking platform for like-minded individuals and professionals. These networks have developed alongside more traditional solidarity organisations such as Italian *patronati* (trade unions) and permanent education centres which were initially set up to protect the rights of Italian guest workers and their families.

2.3. Conclusion

In recent years, Italy, Greece and Turkey have been at the forefront of migration-related public debates due to their unique localisation along the main Mediterranean migration routes. The 2015-2016 arrivals, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, have reactivated deep-seated concerns about migration as a 'crisis' or as a 'threat', negatively affecting overall attitudes towards migration in these countries. Importantly, in addition to being considered key immigration countries, they share a long tradition of emigration, as exemplified by the Great Transatlantic Emigration of the late 19th century, the post-war 'guestworker' era, or the post-2008 'new' emigration from Southern Europe. For the purpose of my analysis, I have focused here on the particular immigration context of Brussels, which is sometimes referred to as "the second most cosmopolitan city in the world after Dubai" (IOM 2015; Jackson et al., 2019; Kapadia, 2016;

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[81] Oxford University's SEESOX Diaspora Project, which brings together researchers focusing on "the relationship between Greece and its diaspora in the current context of economic crisis and beyond" put together an interactive 'Greek Diaspora Map' which compiles data on diaspora organisations registered across the world. This map is available on: http://seesoxdiaspora.org/the-greek-diaspora-map.

Lyons, 2022) due to the longstanding presence of foreign nationals on its territory. Embracing these contextual elements is key to understanding possible cross-country and in-country variation in attitudes towards migration, even though this needs to be complemented with individual-level determinants (Heath et al., 2020). Italy, Greece and Turkey's dual positionality as countries of immigration *and* emigration brings us to several unanswered questions. Namely, do Italians, Greeks and Turks abroad more easily identify, relate to and express solidarity with other migrants – whether in their country of origin or destination? If so, under which conditions? If not, how do they set themselves apart from other migrant groups? Moving from the macro- to the micro-level of analysis, I will demonstrate whether my research participants self-identify and are perceived as representative of this 'new' Italian, Greek, and Turkish emigration (See Chapter 4), and how these perceptions of their own identity, as well as their personal experiences of migration, shape their views, discourses and othering/solidarity behaviour about migration (See Chapters 5 and 6).

Chapter 3: Methodological Considerations and Research Design

3.0. Introduction

Having previously introduced my conceptual framework and research context, I now turn to presenting my research design, including my methodological choices and the rationale that shaped them, as well as some of the practical challenges that occurred along the way and required some flexibility on my part. After presenting my overall research question, approach, sampling strategy, methods, and positionality (3.1), I will describe the data collection and analysis processes, providing an overview of my research participants' characteristics, and introducing some of the challenges encountered throughout the research process (3.2). This final introductory chapter will then give way to the second part of this dissertation, dedicated to the analysis of my empirical material.

3.1. Research approach and design

3.1.1. Research questions

Considering my initial reflections around my research topic, my personal interests, and the literature that I engaged with, I eventually crafted the following central question that I will seek to answer through this dissertation:

How do the migration experiences and perceptions of privileged migrants in the multicultural city of Brussels affect their othering-solidarity practices towards other migrant populations?

In other words, this thesis seeks to tease out the complex relationship between migration experiences, positions of privilege and attitudes towards migration, by focusing specifically on the perspectives and experiences of 'privileged migrants' (See 1.2.3.3). I understand privileged migrants as migrants who have accumulated material (income) and/or symbolic capital (e.g. citizenship, socio-economic status, cultural capital), placing them in a dominant and desirable position before, during and after their move. Through a case study of privileged migrants

originating from Italy, Greece and Turkey residing in the diverse city of Brussels, I seek to explore the ways in which being a socio-economically advantaged migrant in a cosmopolitan city positively or negatively affect empathy and solidarity towards migrants in respondents' places of origin and destination.

In order to answer my main research question, I will address four underlying sub-questions, which broadly correspond to the different empirical chapters of this thesis:

1. How does respondents' migrant self-identification (or lack thereof) influence their attitudes towards other migrants in general? How does acknowledging their own privileged situation further shapes such dynamics? (Chapter 4)

2. How does living in a cosmopolitan and diverse context transform respondents' perceptions of migration in general? (Chapter 4)

3. How does the growing (political and mediatic) salience of migration-related debates in Italy, Greece and Turkey influence respondents' perceptions of migration back home and in general? (Chapter 5)

4. What key migrant othering and solidarity practices (both material and immaterial) are pursued and/or resisted by respondents, and how? (Chapter 6)

3.1.2. Research design

3.1.2.1. A qualitative approach

This study advances that attitudes towards people on the move are multidimensional, ever evolving and sometimes ambiguous, and hints at the structural and intersectional nature of prejudice and discrimination. In light of the intricacy of the research question I sought to answer – and of the nature of the research methods I was most familiar with (i.e. interviewing techniques) – a qualitative approach seemed the most appropriate. Indeed, as I sought to analyse – and to a certain extent, compare – individual perceptions, experiences, and practices, which are by nature singular and unique, my aim was to uncover a range of dynamics rather than to identify specific profiles or to produce statistical evidence. Unlike quantitative methods, which strive for representativity and replicability of findings, qualitative research seeks to highlight the diversity of social dynamics (e.g. relations, practices, attitudes). According to Morawska, qualitative research in social sciences and in migration studies seeks to "reconstruct

people's everyday experience, both the inner and outer aspects of it, with the meanings those social actors attach to their situations and pursuits" (2018:113).

Importantly, studies investigating attitudes towards migrants rely overwhelmingly on quantitative methods (e.g., surveys, regression analyses, cluster segmentation analyses, media salience analyses; See 1.1.2 and 2.1.3). Although quantitative methods are instrumental in identifying general trends and key determinants of attitudes towards migration, the questions that respondents are asked often fail to offer fully context-dependent answers. As remarked by Jacobs, "[i]n the worst-case scenario for migration studies, [the rigidity of quantitative analysis] leads to oversimplification, essentialisation and culturalism" (2018:133). Furthermore, polling methods show inherent limitations, as they draw on various methodologies and can lead to biases in terms of how people get to answer and how results are interpreted by non-expert audiences and further disseminated (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024; Dempster & Hargrave, 2017). For instance, social desirability biases are a common limitation of studies focused on sensitive topics, such as migration (De Coninck et al., 2020a; Dennison & Dražanová, 2018).[82] In order to better understand the complexities and subjectivities within attitude formation, it is necessary to complement such quantitative studies with qualitative insights into the individual experiences of respondents. Building upon previous quantitative findings and theories of intergroup contact and intergroup conflict (See 1.1.1.), I therefore use qualitative interview data to bring nuance and complexify our understanding of migrant othering and solidarity patterns.

Another methodological limitation of past studies on attitudes towards migration is the failure of much of intergroup contact research to investigate intergroup behaviour in realistic settings, over-relying instead on self-report questionnaires or lab experiments (Fell & Hewstone, 2019; Dixon et al., 2005). This has led to calls for "a greater application of qualitative, observation-based measures of intergroup behaviour to assess the 'true' effects of contact (…). [C]ontact theory today includes a wide range of dependent variables, but there is certainly a need for more *in situ* behavioural data to address the outstanding question of self-driven contact behaviour" (Fell & Hewstone, 2019:288-289). This thesis seeks to address this limitation by adopting a qualitative approach and asking respondents to describe the nature of both their ingroup contacts (with their own co-nationals) and outgroup contacts (with Belgians as well as

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[82] Social desirability biases may encourage respondents to conceal their true opinions should they deem them controversial.

with other foreign nationals) in the highly diverse context of Brussels (See 2.2, 4.1.3 and 4.3). Although these contacts are self-reported (rather than directly observed), the open-ended nature of my questions enabled respondents to elaborate on the quality and the quantity of these contacts, allowing more nuanced and genuine insights into the true nature of their interactions with ingroup and outgroup members (and whether they are interpreted as positive or negative contact experiences).

3.1.2.2. An iterative research design

Rather than following a hypothetico-deductive approach, I have chosen to follow an iterative research design, in line with grounded-theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Indeed, given the singularity of the research questions and the scarcity of comparable and similar research, I 'entered the field' with very few expectations and preconceived ideas of what would come out of the interviews. Consequently, I thought of my research as more of an exploratory project which could serve as a basis for future mixed-methods research projects, and pave the way to later providing a more systematic analysis, which would include more population samples (in terms of national origin, socio-economic status, or migration statuses) and could be replicated in other cosmopolitan cities (e.g. London, Amsterdam, Geneva, New York, Washington D.C., Dubai…). Instead of guiding my work from the onset, my conceptual framework (See 1.4.4) was therefore built and refined throughout the research process. The data collection process itself enabled me to finetune my use of concepts and choose the most appropriate ones along the way. For instance, going into this research project, I was initially set on using the notions of *hospitality* and *hostility* as guiding concepts, before realising that these were conceptually limited. I found the more comprehensive notions of *othering* and *solidarity* more useful in my analysis, as they cover a wider range of positive and negative reactions (e.g. attitudes, discourses and practices) towards migration and migrants. The concept of othering, for instance, is more aligned with an intersectional lens as it highlights the interconnectedness of different grounds for discrimination (e.g. race, gender, class, religion) affecting migranticised groups (See 1.4.3). The fact that several respondents spontaneously described themselves as 'privileged migrants' also confirmed the relevance of this concept for my research. My initial reference to Vertovec's concept of super-diversity in the interviews, on the other hand, felt a bit artificial – and therefore superfluous – as my respondents would usually interpret it as a mere synonym of 'diversity' or 'cosmopolitanism'. Importantly, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic also justifies my iterative approach, as both my research

methods and sampling strategy had to be adjusted in accordance with the changing research context (See 3.2.6).

3.1.2.3. Comparative insights

In addition to being qualitative, my approach strives to be comparative, albeit not in a strict, systematic way. As this case study is based on three national sub-samples, comparability criteria drove both my sampling strategy and data analysis. Yet, in order not to essentialise these groups based on their national or ethnic origin and, thus, to avoid the pitfalls of 'methodological nationalism' (Amelina & Faist, 2012) and of the 'ethnic lens' (Barglowski, 2018; Dahinden et al., 2020), nationality or ethnicity did not form the sole unit of analysis, as findings were also meant to be interpreted through the lens of the respondents' condition as privileged migrants, of their experiences, as well as of individual-level characteristics, amongst others. I have strived to highlight commonalities as much as differences both across and within the three national groups, and to find other units of comparison to shift the focus away from the country of origin variable. Indeed, my analysis is mainly based on their shared belonging to a particular 'category of analysis' (Brubaker, 2013; Kunz, 2016) – that of privileged migrants. As a result, I strive to see my respondents first as privileged migrants and secondly as Italian, Greeks or Turkish migrants. As demonstrated by my sampling strategy and sample composition (See 3.1.3 and 3.2.3), other individual-level characteristics (e.g. age, gender, length of stay, place of residence, level of educational attainment, type of affiliation) allowed me to make comparisons across and within national groups in my analysis. The comparative component of this thesis therefore focuses on identifying and analysing similarities and differences in perceptions, attitudes and practices *within* each national group (Italians, Greeks and Turks) living in Brussels and *across* these three migrant groups – based on variables that go beyond their country of origin – in order to detect possible trends. However, this comparative approach will not be as systematic as it would have been in the case of a quantitative study. Considering that this research does not rely on random and maximum variation sampling, my final sample is not meant to be representative. Therefore, the final goal of the research is not to statistically demonstrate – for instance – whether women, or younger respondents are more tolerant towards migrants than men, or older respondents – or to establish a ranking of the most 'migrant-friendly' nationals out of the three study countries. Rather, the goal is to highlight and explore potential determinants of othering and solidarity practices towards migrants amongst privileged migrant groups.

3.1.3. Sampling strategy and criteria

As explained above, my choice to focus on Italian, Greek and Turkish migrants can be primarily explained by the salience of migration-related debates in their country of origin, as well as by their numerical significance in Brussels (See 2.2). Conversely, my focus on privileged migrants resulted from a less straightforward process, in line with my iterative research design (See 3.1.2.2), and was influenced by both theoretical and practical considerations. Although the research design and sampling processes are meant to be driven by clear conceptual and theoretical choices, they can evolve according to the practical circumstances and overall context in which the research takes place. In my case, the COVID-19 crisis served as a prime example of this, as my initial plans evolved as a result of the pandemic. After having initially hoped to target Italians, Greeks and Turks in Brussels representing a wide range of generations, occupations and socio-economic backgrounds, I had to narrow down my sample to certain clearly identifiable groups, which I could feasibly target. I therefore eventually narrowed my focus down to migrants from a specific socio-economic profile (privileged migrants) to ensure that my comparative approach was more methodologically sound. This category of people on the move transcends nationality and has long remained under-researched despite its relevance for the study of transnationalism and public attitudes towards immigration. Because privileged migrants are perceived as unproblematic and benefiting from multiple advantages, they can be perceived as less socially and policy-relevant, and thus less worthy of scholarly attention. Yet, as observed in the first chapter, "vulnerability and privilege are two sides of the same coin". As such, it can be highly valuable to study them simultaneously (Cranston & Duplan, 2022). According to Chancer (2019), studying 'up' has been less common than studying 'down' and sociologists have largely focused on researching the experiences and practices of the "poor and marginalised" as opposed to those of "the rich and the powerful" (2019:238). This gap "calls for theoretical and empirical exploration rather than overlooking and dismissal" (2019:239).[83] Studying privileged mobility can be used "as a way to better highlight the nature and implications of global inequality" (Croucher, 2012:2), particularly inequalities produced by global migration regimes, which have multiple impacts (whether economic, cultural and/or political) on both countries of origin and destination.

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[83] Chancer identifies four benefits of "studying up", namely: a better understanding of class relations; of variations among the practices of different 'elites'; of the implications of transiting from a previous position of marginalisation to a position of power; and increased reflexivity among researchers who are thus encouraged to examine their own positionality.

My sampling therefore initially targeted Italians, Greeks and Turks working at national diplomatic missions – such as embassies, consulates, and permanent representations to the European Union and to NATO.[84] This approach however soon appeared limiting as many potential interviewees – especially from Turkey – either ignored my requests to participate, or declined to participate in interviews for a variety of reasons. Turkish contacts of mine had previously warned me that public officials were likely to self-censor and avoid talking to researchers about sensitive topics such as migration. I thus decided to widen my interpretation of the diplomatic field by extending it to commercial and cultural diplomacy. This allowed me to target people working in chambers of commerce, business organisations, think tanks, and cultural centres, amongst others. In an attempt to further operationalise the concept of privilege and ensure homogeneity within my sample, I thus decided to articulate this notion around the symbolic and material capital and/or advantages (e.g. prestige and resources) that can be associated with working in public/commercial/cultural affairs, in the specific context of the EU capital. As a result, research participants were (at the time of interview) working for or affiliated to an Italian, Greek or Turkish organisation in the field of public, commercial or cultural diplomacy/affairs (See 3.2.1). Although I deliberately avoided targeting EU civil servants from the outset as this would have created a sampling bias against Turkish respondents, many respondents had a strong connection with the European institutions (through previous work experience or a strong EU focus in their day-to-day tasks). A minority of respondents, whom were only approached in the later phases of data collection, were affiliated to the EU institutions (working for Members of the European Parliament or for EU institutions and agencies). It soon appeared that all my respondents evolved in traditional diplomatic circles and shared similar characteristics (in terms of educational background, residential choices, practices, etc.), making comparisons easier and pertinent (See 4.1). Importantly, the large majority of studies on privileged migration tend to focus on North-South or North-North migration, with relatively less attention being paid to South-North, South-South privileged migration patterns. This contributes to reproducing the association of privileged migration with Western, often White, migrants, originating from affluent countries, rather than to expand this

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[84] I initially aimed to target diplomats given their numerical significance in Brussels. Brussels hosted the most diplomatic missions in the world in 2023 (Neelam & Sato, 2024). I expected that their numerical significance, clearly discernible profession and relative homogeneity as a group (in terms of socio-economic status, privilege and prestige, albeit not necessarily in terms of income or career advancement) would have facilitated the identification of respondents (through targeted sampling), as well as comparisons across the different national groups selected for this study.

category of analysis to a wider (global) migrant population. Although my sample does include European migrants, the inclusion of Turkish respondents (whose 'Westernness' is often contested, and who often happen to be racialised as Muslims in the European context (See 1.3.1.2) addresses this gap.

I initially intended to conduct 90 interviews (30 per nationality group, 15 women and 15 men per sub-group, each sub-divided according to their career advancement level/age (See Figure 6).[85]

Figure 6. Initial Sample Construction.
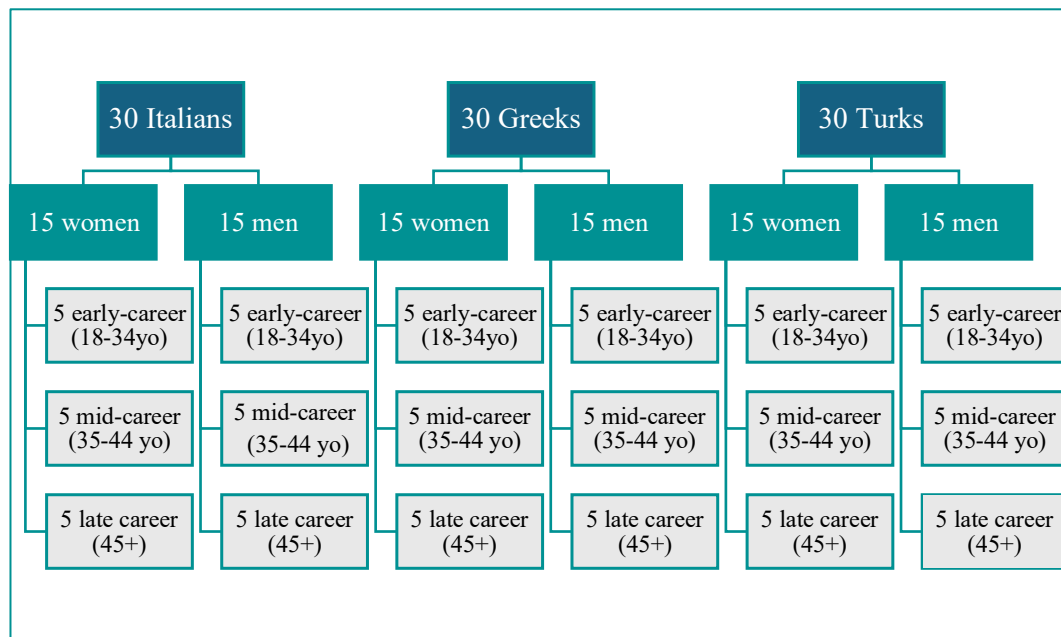
Ultimately, my final sample evolved due to practical considerations and limitations that naturally arose from the data collection process. I eventually interviewed 54 respondents. This number was sufficient as it allowed me to reach saturation in the data. After about 50 interviews, and as I was coding my data, it became clear that new interviews rarely brought up new themes.

In contrast to quantitative research's focus on *statistical* representativeness, qualitative research aims for *social* representativeness within the research, generalising its results through the identification of general patterns or typologies (Barglowski, 2018). Considering the series of methodological and conceptual choices surrounding my research questions – which required

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[85] This sample follows Robertson's (2017) typology of age/career advancement, which defines early career as 20–34 years of age (which I extended to 18-34), mid-career as 35–44, and late-career as 45 years and over.

targeting comparable migrant sub-groups while exploring potential areas of contrast – I decided that the most appropriate approach consisted in using a non-probabilistic, purposive sampling strategy (with maximum variation across certain categories), complemented by snowball sampling. Both methods allowed for targeted and flexible sampling, in line with my iterative research design.

Sampling criteria for respondents included:

1. Residing in one of the 19 *communes* (municipalities) of the Brussels-Capital region (See Figure 11 below), or being strongly involved in its day-to-day life e.g. through commuting there for work;

2. Being an Italian, Greek or Turkish citizen and 'first-generation' migrant to Belgium. The sample did not target any specific areas of origin in Italy, Greece or Turkey. I did not exclude foreign-born nationals who had obtained permanent residence or citizenship in Belgium.

3. Being affiliated to an Italian, Greek or Turkish organisation or network active in the field of public, commercial or cultural diplomacy (through work or as a side activity). Examples of such organisations or networks include permanent representations to the EU/NATO, consulates and embassies, regional delegations, chambers of commerce, national trade associations, professional or social networks, cultural centres, and others (See Appendix 2).

In addition to these three criteria, I sought to apply maximum variation across sub-categories of gender, age, length of stay and type of affiliation, in order to avoid creating homogeneous national samples and to allow for some comparative insights (See 3.1.2.3).

3.1.4. Research methods

Primary data was collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews with Italian, Greek and Turkish migrants living in Brussels. The choice of interviews as a method was determined by my previous research and professional experience in interviewing migrants from various backgrounds (such as Sub-Saharan African asylum seekers in South Africa, Congolese and Moroccan first and second-generation migrants in Belgium). Interviews also appeared suitable in light of the qualitative nature of my research question. They are indeed recommended to obtain subjective insights which can complement quantitative data. Commenting on the state

of the research on public attitudes on immigration, Fetzer for instance, recommends conducting "open-ended, extended in-person interviews with thirty to fifty carefully chosen members of the mass public as a way to unpack certain findings from the quantitative literature" (2012:12). According to him:

> Such interviews might help explain, for example, exactly how education attenuates xenophobia. Do interviewees recall altering their immigration-relevant views in response to a certain peer or instructor, all at once or gradually, or via a particular education-related experience (e.g., internship, first job, student club, course on ethnic relations, etc.)? (2012:12).

Similarly, in a case study documenting stigma management processes amongst second-generation Greek and Italian women who have emigrated back to Greece and Italy from the United States, Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou argued that the narrative-biographic analysis method, focused on individual life stories, can help "explore nuances of complex social processes" (2017:2793) and see the "hidden, subtle meanings people assign to their life experiences" (Czarniawska 2004, 24; cited by Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou, 2017:2793). Although I did not conduct biographical interviews *per se*, parts of my interview guide were inspired by this method, and the open-ended nature of the questions encouraged respondents to elaborate on their personal experiences and life stories when they felt comfortable doing so. Lastly, the research context at the time of data collection played a crucial role in the final choice of research methods. Having started my research amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (See 3.2.6), interviews appeared as the most adequate method. Indeed, they allowed a certain flexibility in my fieldwork, as they could be conducted online and thus enabled me to circumvent social distancing measures in place at the height of the pandemic – between April 2020 and April 2021.

My interview guide was structured along three main sections (See Appendix 3). The first section focused on the self-identification process and experiences of respondents as foreign nationals living in Brussels and on their ongoing relation to their home country. The second section investigated their perceptions of the migration situation in their home country while the third and last section explored migrants' life abroad as a potentially transformative experience that could influence attitudes towards migration and migrants. Each section contained questions common to all respondents as well as optional follow-up questions that I asked depending on their relevance in the discussion. This approach was meant to ensure flexibility during the interview, while allowing for some comparability across interviews. I also captured

some biographical information through a short questionnaire (See Appendix 4) that respondents filled out at the end of the interview. The interview guide underwent several drafting rounds, with colleagues specialised in migration studies and qualitative research carefully reviewing each draft to ensure that the questions were formulated in a clear and appropriate manner. I then translated the interview questions into French and tested them during the first five interviews. These pilot interviews did not raise the need for any changes, as most questions appeared to be well understood by the first five respondents. Additionally, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed me to tailor the questions according to the responses of my interviewees, as well as to merge or skip them whenever necessary.

I sought to complement the primary data obtained through interviews, with secondary data obtained through an extensive literature review of both academic and grey literature (e.g. NGO reports, institutional sources, press articles). This literature review spanned three broad themes, namely: public opinion and intergroup relations (with a particular focus on attitudes towards migration); diaspora studies and transnationalism (paying attention to the experiences and practices of emigrants); and migration governance and border regimes (with a particular focus on the Euro-Mediterranean region and recent migration trends from the 2000s onward). As such, the reviewed scholarship varied extensively in terms of disciplines, methods, geographical scope, and epistemological approaches, amongst others. This enabled me to gain varied and crosscutting insights into concepts and previous findings that could prove useful in the context of my research question (See Chapters 1 and 2).

3.1.5. Reflexivity and researcher's positionality

Knowledge production, particularly in the social sciences, is a clear arena in which we can observe power relations between the researcher and the researched. These must therefore be acknowledged, deconstructed and ultimately reduced. In the field of migration studies, reflections around researchers' positionality (as insiders or outsiders *vis-à-vis* the population studied, or as individuals whose own overlapping identities can influence their views on the research topic) have called for a 'reflexive turn' (Amelina, 2021). Indeed, the biases and the gaze of the researcher may (un)intentionally reproduce normative assumptions, legitimising existing social representations and hierarchies. Amelina argues that the reflexive turn helps shift the focus towards two particularly under-researched questions, namely: "how the social practice of moving from one locality to another becomes socially transformed into 'migration',

and how mobile (and some immobile) individuals become turned into 'migrants'" (2021:2; See 1.2.3). Since my research focuses on disentangling contested concepts – such as privilege, identity, migration – and better understanding migrant categorisation processes, some introspection about my own positionality as a researcher and reflexivity regarding my research questions is essential. Indeed, my life story and international migration experience are undeniable factors that explain the importance that this topic and research question hold for me. I strongly believe that my transnational experience and lifestyle deeply conditioned my personality, views, and attitudes, and notably my interest in migration issues. I have always been interested in knowing whether other migrants had gone through a similar thought process. I have also been intrigued by how migrants explain their views and attitudes towards other migrants and minorities.

On a personal level, I have long identified as a migrant – and more specifically as a privileged migrant, due to having lived abroad since birth and having never faced any discrimination based on my nationality or ethnicity. Instead, I have always felt welcome and treated as a 'desirable' and 'deserving' foreigner. This journey started with my parents, two French nationals who met in the United States and have, as yet, never returned to France. Therefore, the focus of this research strongly resonates with my own personal experience and interrogations as a privileged migrant who has resided abroad for most of my life. As a Franco-American citizen living abroad (in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Senegal, South Africa and, lastly, Belgium), I have always remained attached to my home country through, for instance, having attended French schools abroad, visiting or being in regular contact with friends and family back home, following French news and programmes, voting from abroad, and supporting the French team at international sports competitions. Despite having obtained US citizenship by birth, I however do not strongly identify as American. While living abroad – and particularly in countries that are considered to form part of the so-called Global South – I witnessed the extreme diversity in attitudes of foreigners towards locals and towards each other. Around my high school years, I realised that living abroad and experiencing migration first-hand did not necessarily equate with tolerance. Some privileged migrants (who would often self-identify and be labelled as 'expats') could counter-intuitively hold nationalist, xenophobic and racist views, leading to the othering of certain populations (particularly Muslims, blacks and/or low-skilled foreign workers depending on the particular context), often leading to exclusionary and/or exploitative practices. This building of social and/or ethnic hierarchies was often based on the perceived alterity and

(un)deservingness of a certain 'other'. In the Gulf countries, this 'other' was often represented by non-Western foreign migrant workers.[86] In South Africa, I was often made to reflect upon my privileged position as a white European woman who could easily enter and remain in the country on a tourist visa, while nationals of African and Asian countries were constantly discriminated against and even subjected to xenophobic attacks. Once again, this indicated a strong hierarchisation of migrants in the country. Speaking to my parents in Dubai, where they still live at the time of writing, I remember my astonishment upon learning that Marine Le Pen (from the *Rassemblement National* party) had gained close to 1,000 votes from French residents of the UAE during the second round of the 2017 presidential elections. Another striking example is that of my own grandmother. Despite being born in Italy and having faced pressure to integrate upon arriving in France as a child – notably by preferring to be called by the more French-sounding *Antoinette*, instead of her given name, *Antonia* – she occasionally voiced hostile remarks about recent waves of immigrants in France, exhibiting a form of gatekeeping. Similarly, many of my former schoolmates who had a similar international upbringing to my own, shared completely opposite views when it came to migration and diversity in general. This further demonstrated how much having been an 'expat' or 'third-culture kid' (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) did not necessarily lead to a more open viewpoint.

All these examples illustrate what I personally perceive as a major contradiction. This led me to reflect on the processes that make certain immigrants prejudiced against (or, on the contrary, open towards) other immigrants. Having, in my personal view, benefited from this rich experience abroad, while being aware of this constituting a privilege, I am convinced that everyone should be offered the opportunity to live, work and/or study abroad, and that this stimulating experience could inspire and transform them somehow. Throughout my PhD journey, I have had passionate conversations with friends, colleagues and respondents who have had similar experiences about where we are *really* from; about whether it was right for us to be able to vote in a country in which we did not live; about constantly feeling 'in-between', and having a skewed sense of identity due to our transnational condition (being 'neither here nor there'), amongst many other things. I have therefore sought to capture these personal and collective reflections throughout the chapters of this thesis.

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[86] Many years after having witnessed these dynamics firsthand, I realised that a lot of research had focused on the racial hierarchisation of migrant workers in Gulf countries, and particularly on the privileged situation of Western 'expats' in the UAE (see research conducted by Saba. A. Le Renard and Claire Cosquer) as opposed to so-called 'migrant workers' from the 'Global South'.

Migration scholars have encouraged their peers to reflect upon their 'multiple positionalities' in an attempt to move beyond the potentially limiting 'insider/outsider' binary that is often used to categorise the relationship between a researcher and their respondents. Such positionalities, according to Fedyuk & Zentai, "may be found through reflecting upon gender, age/generation, parental status and migratory experiences, as well as the intersections of these, for both the interviewer and the interviewees" (2018:179). Reflecting on these positionalities can indeed help identify power dynamics that shape the relations between the former and the latter. However, it may also encourage going against the widespread academic urge to "separate ourselves and what we research" (Cranston & Duplan, 2022). In my case, my migration experience often strongly resonated with that of many of my respondents. This helped to build rapport with them and turn the interview process into a conversation, during which we were able to reflect upon and compare our own experiences. Being a privileged migrant myself also helped overcome the fact that I was neither an Italian, Greek or Turkish migrant. Respondents often stressed symbolic and material elements of privilege that we had in common (having attended *Sciences Po*, having studied international affairs, speaking multiple languages, being Francophone (or, *at minima*, a Francophile), having a European passport or dual citizenship, having done or doing a PhD, having travelled extensively – whether for work, studies or leisure – relying upon a strong professional network, pursuing an international career, etc.). In those cases, our shared privilege eclipsed our differences in terms of national belonging. Being a woman did not have any explicit bearing on my relations with the interviewees. On the other hand, being in my early thirties certainly helped in connecting with respondents under 35, with whom I sometimes shared a similar educational and professional background or aspirations. Although many of the youngest respondents (in their early twenties) initially thought I was only slightly older than them, our intra-generational differences were made clear on a number of occasions. These included when some said that they were only 15 or 16 during the 2015/2016 migrant arrivals in Europe (while I was already in my mid-twenties then), when they made use of particular slang, or when they were describing experiences corresponding to a different life stage than mine (studying or having roommates, for example). My multiple positionalities thus enabled me to constantly move along the insider-outsider spectrum vis-à-vis my respondents, pushing me to perceive the data collection process as situational, dynamic, and an extremely enriching process from both a personal and academic perspective.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

3.2.1. Accessing the field and research participants

Ahead of contacting potential interviewees, I sought to better understand the general landscape of the Italian, Greek and Turkish communities in Brussels, and started listing and researching organisations that could help me gain access to respondents (See 2.2 and Appendix 2). This stakeholder mapping exercise led me to identify four broad categories of stakeholders, which later influenced my purposive sampling strategy:

1. Public diplomacy actors (embassies, consulates, permanent representations to the European Union and to NATO, offices of Italian and Greek Members of the European Parliament, Italian regional delegations to the EU…)
2. Economic and commercial diplomacy actors (chambers of commerce, business associations and networks, business federations, trade associations and agencies, etc.)
3. Cultural diplomacy actors (cultural institutes, think tanks, research agencies)
4. Other types of national stakeholders (social and professional networks, political parties and workers' organisations).

After trying to contact most of these organisations by email – and receiving limited responses – I turned to LinkedIn to find and contact individuals who worked in those organisations and to invite them to take part in an interview. In fact, 34 out of the 54 persons I have interviewed were identified and contacted through LinkedIn. A total of 200 direct messages/interview requests were sent via this platform to potential interviewees who appeared to meet the three main sampling criteria (See 3.1.3). The message template that I used to contact prospective interviewees was refined along the way to better anticipate the questions and concerns arising over time. Many individuals who were contacted never responded or declined to participate, citing a lack of time, interest, or limited insights into the topic, or because they no longer met the criteria (some had for instance moved out of Brussels). Some participants agreed to be involved after a brief call to clarify the objectives of my research and specify the kinds of questions to be expected and themes to be covered. The remaining 20 respondents were identified and contacted using my personal networks and contacts, by emailing organisations identified through the stakeholder mapping, posting calls for participation on Facebook groups,

creating and sharing a contact information form,[87] as well as snowball sampling (some respondents referred me to friends/colleagues with similar profiles or agreed to share my call through platforms they were involved in). Overall, these strategies proved less successful than securing participants through LinkedIn. In addition, due to difficulties linked to the pandemic, it was more difficult than anticipated to attend networking events (for example, cultural events and conferences) which would have helped me to identify additional research participants.

3.2.2. Conducting the interviews

I conducted a total of 54 interviews between November 2020 and April 2022. After a first online contact that aimed to present the objectives of the research and agree on the time, date and format – online or in person – of the interview, the interviews started with a short introduction. This enabled me to read the consent form aloud and obtain a verbal approval to record, introduce the three sections of the interview guide, and answer any questions the interviewee had before starting the interview. Out of the 54 interviews, 39 were conducted online (via Zoom or WhatsApp), and 15 took place in person (in a place chosen by the respondent – either in bars/cafes in Brussels or at their offices). Interviews were conducted in English (n=46) and in French (n=8), depending on the preference of the participant. Although my lack of language skills in either Italian, Greek or Turkish prevented me from conducting the interviews in the respondents' native language, their near-to-perfect command of either English or French prevented the need for a translator or interpreter. The interviews lasted between 25 minutes and two hours, with most being completed in about an hour. All interviews were recorded (after having obtained respondents' consent), transcribed *verbatim*, and allocated an interview number and a pseudonym in order to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. Although I conducted all 54 interviews myself, I relied on the invaluable help of four research assistants (Augustin Bourleaud, Claire Iceaga, Gauthier Mertens and Eloïse Goffart) to transcribe 15 of these interviews.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the respondents to speak freely and for as long as they wanted about any of the topics discussed. It also enabled me to tailor the follow-up questions in a smooth manner and to turn the formal interview process into a more casual discussion. Many respondents expressed their interest in the topic, or commended my topic

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[87] The contact form can be accessed at the following link: https://shorturl.at/BddyE

choice, describing it as a "difficult" but "necessary" conversation. Some welcomed the interview as an opportunity to reflect on questions that they perceived to be important yet often overlooked, as exemplified by the following interview quote:

> For me it was really very nice Elodie, and I really appreciated your open questions, your direct questions... it was really an occasion for me to reflect on some points which are not usually part of my daily routine (Silvio, 52)

Some respondents were particularly eager to share their migration experience and to voice their concerns regarding the policies of either their home or host states, as exemplified by the following email conversation which preceded a two-hour in-person interview:

> (…) I'm a Greek of Greek-American origin, born and raised in Greece among the Greek-American community there, by repatriated Greeks on my father's side, gone to US schools in Greece, and then back to the US for graduate study and work, whence I 'emigrated' to Belgium in 2005 (from Washington DC), with my German wife, whom I met in the US. You can imagine why I'm interested in migration and its perceptions and I'm frustrated by the failure of the Greek state to put in place a rationalised policy to the benefit of both Greek emigrants and society in Greece, despite the centuries-long history of out-migration among Greeks (…) (Email conversation prior to interview, July 2021).

Similarly, a Turkish respondent shared that she hoped the interview would help raise awareness about the administrative challenges faced by Turkish youth who aspired to work in Belgium. Regretting that most Turkish youth could only enter Belgium through short-term visa schemes (namely through Erasmus+ student-trainee exchange programmes), which rarely allowed them to stay for periods exceeding three months, she concluded (See also quote in 4.1.3.3):

> (…) I would be happy if somehow you found a part [in the thesis] where you could mention this, I would really appreciate it because this is a big problem, and we are vocal about this to [Belgian] authorities, but unfortunately, I haven't seen any progress yet. I hope that one day, Turkish students will have easier access. But I'm not very hopeful, to be honest (Ayça, 31).

After each interview, I sent a follow-up email or message to participants, thanking them for their participation and reminding or inviting them to sign, fill and send back a digital copy of the consent form and biographic information form. Overall, respondents were very receptive to the interview process, and eager to stay informed about the outcomes of the research. Many offered to put me in touch with friends and colleagues who met my sampling criteria, and were crucial in helping me identify new leads and secure more respondents.

3.2.3. Sample description

My final sample was composed of 21 Italians, 20 Greeks and 13 Turks. Table 7 below provides a general overview of my 54 research participants, broken down per nationality, gender and age group.[88] Each national sample was almost equally balanced in terms of gender. The Italian sample was composed of 52 % men and 48 % women while the Greek one totalled 55% men and 45% women. The Turkish sample was relatively less balanced, with 61,5% men and 38,5% women.[89] Most respondents were between 18 and 35 (n=22), followed by those over 50 (n=16). The remaining were between 36 and 49 years-old (n=14). Two (Greek) respondents did not disclose their age, but were over 35.

Table 7. Sample overview broken down by nationality, gender and age group.

Nationality		Gender		Age group			
		Male	Female	18-35	36-49	50+	N/A
Italians	**21**	11	10	10	7	4	0
Greeks	**20**	11	9	9	1	8	2
Turks	**13**	8	5	3	6	4	0
Total	*54*	*30*	*24*	*22*	*14*	*16*	*2*

Figure 7 below shows that the age distribution of the Italian sample was rather balanced (despite an overrepresentation of the younger age group), and that Greek respondents were almost equally distributed across the two opposite age groups (35 and under, and 50 and over). Conversely, the Turkish sample counted more representatives from the intermediate age group (36 to 49).

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[88] See Appendix 6 for a full overview of respondents indicating their nationality, gender, age, year of arrival and type of national affiliation.
[89] This can be explained by my overall difficulty to find more Turkish women to interview (see 3.2.6 below).

Figure 7. Respondents' age breakdown (by nationality)
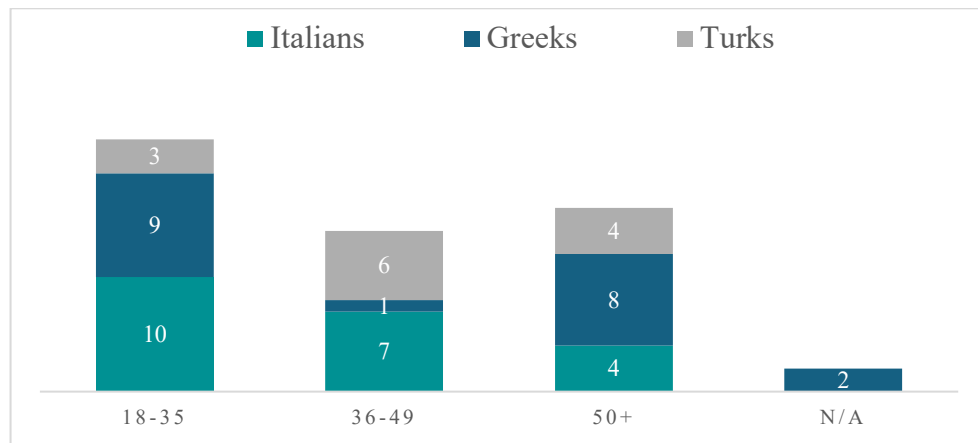
The age breakdown per gender indicates a strong overrepresentation of Italian and Greek women under 35 (n=13), and of men over 50 (n=12), particularly in the Greek sample (See Figure 8).

Figure 8. Respondents' age breakdown (by gender)
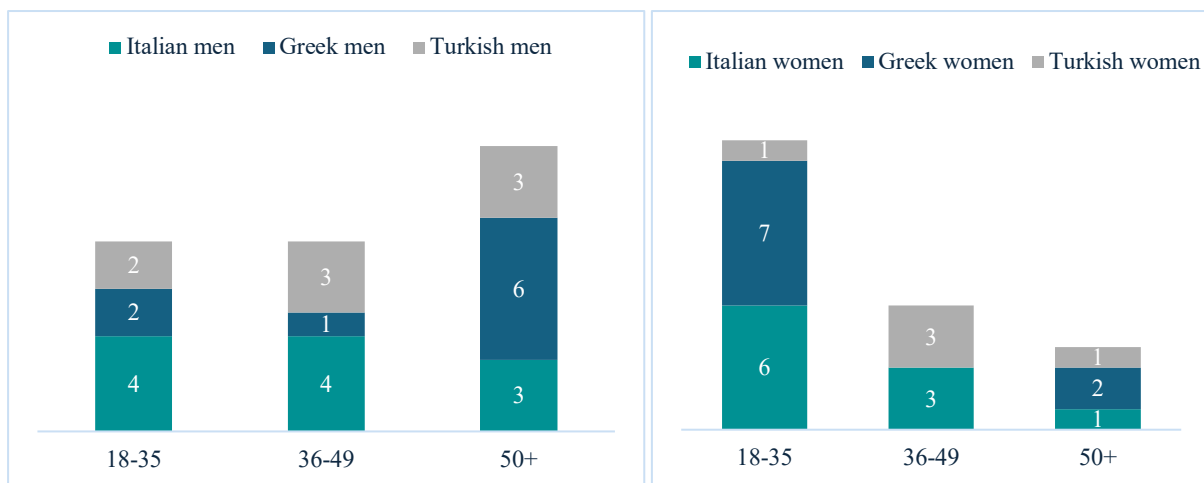
Regardless of nationality, the sample was almost equally balanced across those who have been in Brussels for 5 years or less (46 %, n=25) and those who have been there for 10 years or more (43 %, n=23). A minority (11 %, n=6) belongs to the in-between category, with a stay ranging between six and nine years (See Figure 9 below). The shortest stay was 3 months (with an arrival in 2022), whilst the longest was 38 years (arrival in 1983).

Figure 9. Respondents' length of stay.
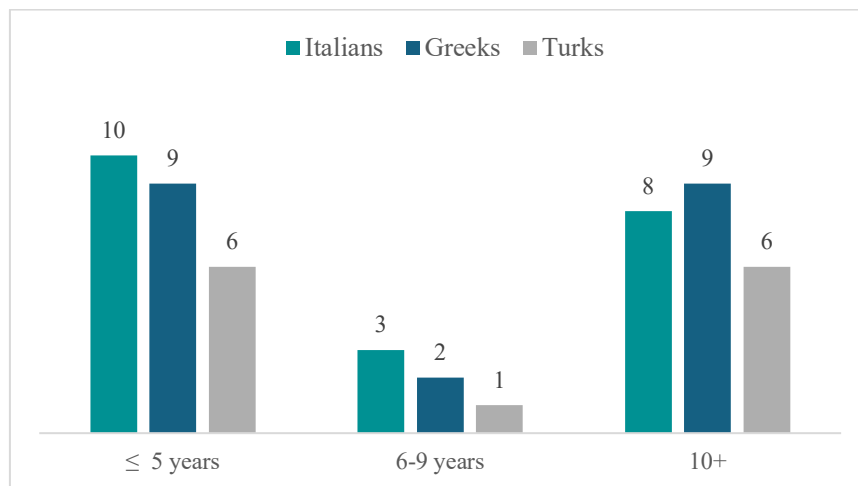
Most respondents (n=14) reside in the *commune* (municipality) of Ixelles, one of the most international communes in the Brussels-Capital region (See Figures 10, 11 below; and Appendix 6). The other communes cited correspond to similarly international and wealthy neighbourhoods (e.g. Woluwe-Saint-Lambert, Woluwe-Saint-Pierre, Etterbeek, Uccle, Auderghem, Forest) or to middle-class yet sought-after municipalities (Bruxelles 1000, Saint-Gilles). Only two were based in communes that belong to Brussels' *croissant pauvre* (Saint-Josse, Jette).[90] Seven respondents did not disclose their place of residence. Six respondents lived outside of the Brussels-Capital Region but commuted there for work (indicated as "other" in Figure 10), one resided in Liège (Wallonia province), and five in Flemish municipalities in the direct vicinity of Brussels (namely Kraineem, Overijse, Sint-Pieters-Leeuw and Zaventem).

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[90] The 'croissant pauvre' refers to the crescent-shaped area corresponding to the neighbourhoods with the lowest incomes.

Figure 10. Respondents' place of residence in Brussels/Belgium.
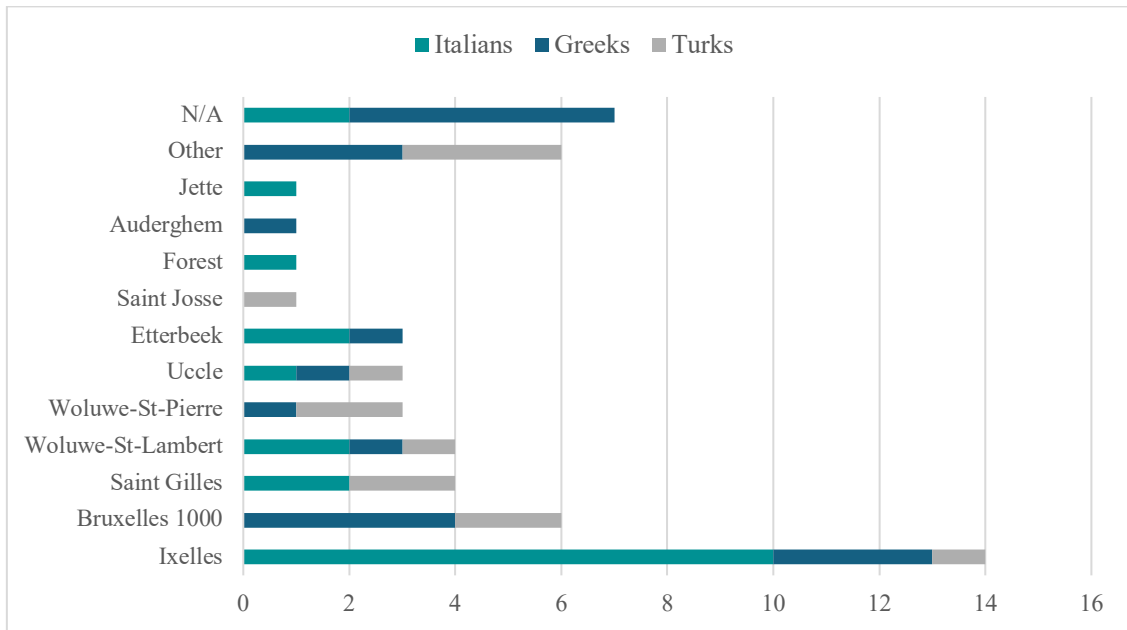
Figure 11. The 19 communes of the Brussels-Capital Region.
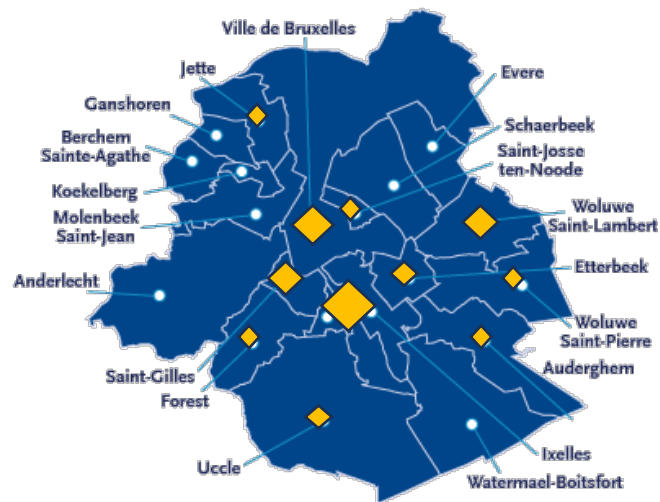
Most respondents came from large urban centres situated in the Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna regions (Italy), the Ankara province (Turkey), and the Central Macedonia and Attica regions (Greece) (See Figure 12 below).

Figure 12. Respondents' place of origin.
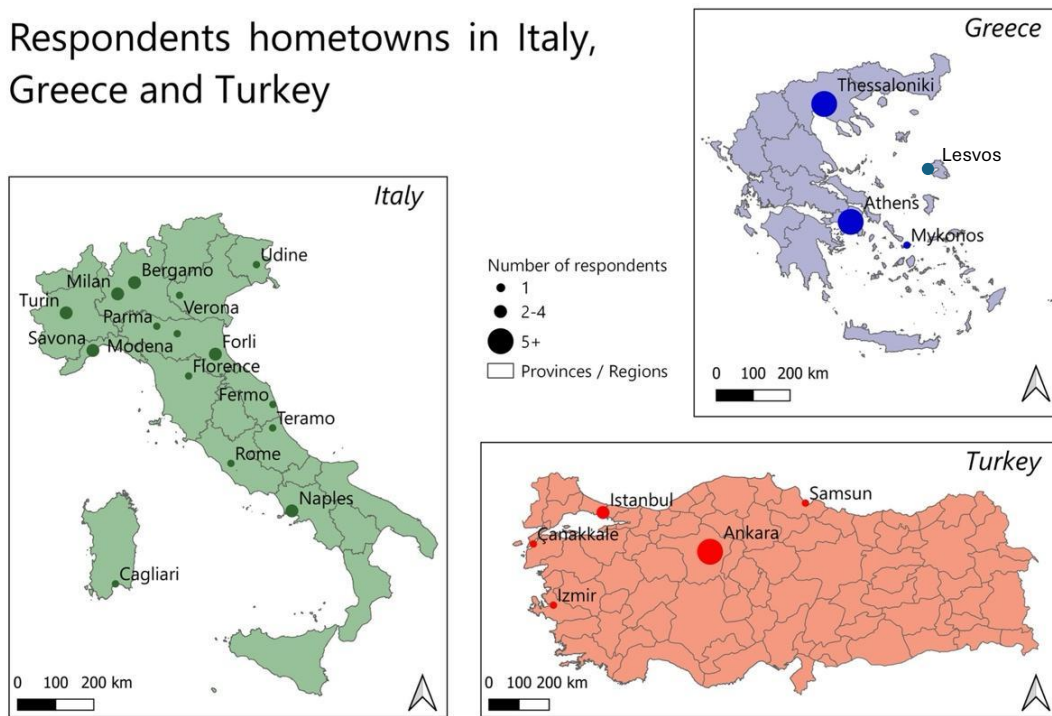
(Map elaborated by Eloïse Goffart)

The overwhelming majority of respondents had a tertiary diploma, with 66% (n=36) holding a Master's degree (See Figure 13), confirming their high levels of cultural capital (See 4.1)

Figure 13. Respondents' level of educational attainment.
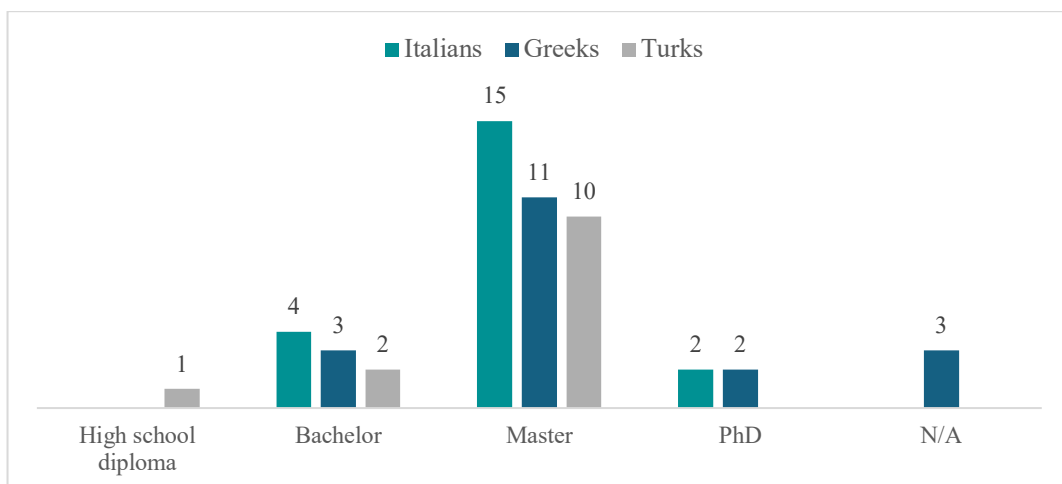
Lastly, most respondents (n=36, nearly 70% of the total sample) were affiliated to commercial organisations, followed by those affiliated to national/regional representations (n=13), EU institutions/bodies (n=7), other organisations (n=4), and cultural organisations (n=3).[91] Turkish respondents were exclusively represented in commercial organisations and other types of networks, while most Greek interviewees were affiliated to national/regional representations and EU institutions/bodies (n=12). Italians were predominantly represented in national and regional representations as well as in commercial organisations (n=17) (See Figure 14).

Figure 14. Respondents' type of national affiliation.
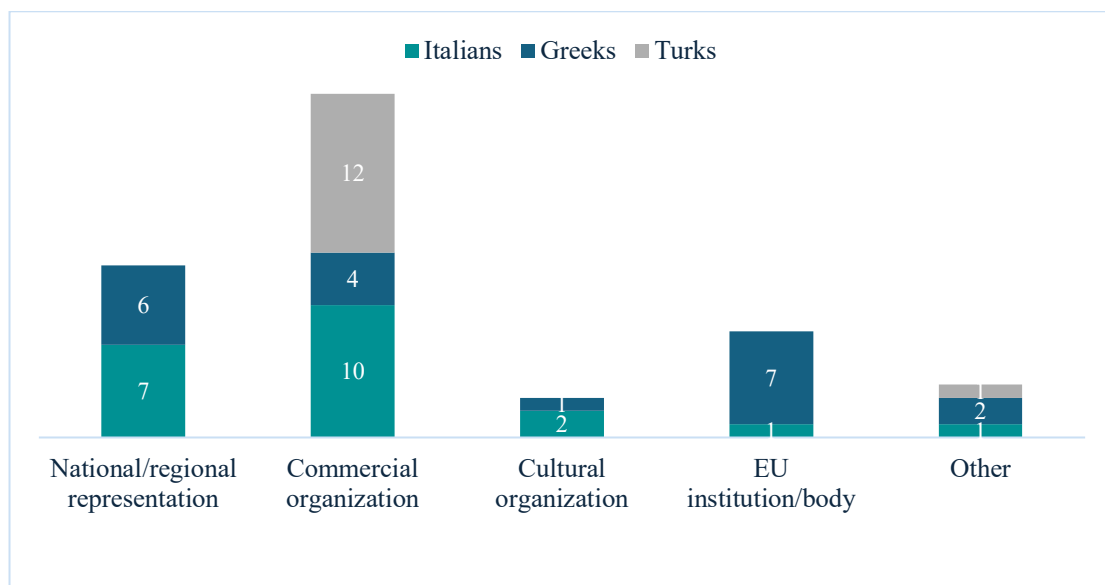
3.2.4. Coding and analysing the data

The analysis of my data followed an iterative process, involving many refinements of the codes and themes used to make sense of my interview material. I initially started organising my data into an Excel spreadsheet, allowing me to quickly identify and compare main trends arising across my different national samples. At the same time, I coded my interview data manually (directly on printed transcripts). Rather than using pre-conceived themes and codes, I decided to use inductive coding to allow themes to emerge directly from the data. As I quickly got

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[91] 'National/regional representations; refers to embassies, consulates, or permanent representations to the EU or to NATO, or regional governments' delegations, and 'commercial organisations' to national business or trade federations/unions, chambers of commerce, financial institutions, business networks, etc. 'EU institutions/bodies' corresponds to EU institutions (e.g. European Parliament, European Commission), agencies and bodies. Lastly, 'cultural organisations' include national cultural institutes, think tanks and research institutions, while 'other organisations' refer to any other type of national social network or association (See Appendix 2).

overwhelmed by the quantity of interview material, I later decided to use the NVivo software to code my data in a more systematic and organised fashion. The organisation of my data into codes enabled me to generate a tentative outline for my dissertation. Figure 15 below shows the main codes that I have used to organise my interview data and guide my analysis.[92] The three main sections of my interview guide (See 3.1.4 and Appendix 3) informed the identification of the three main themes (lived experiences of privileged migrants in diverse Brussels; perceptions of migration in the place of origin; transnational migrant solidarity practices) which I further narrowed down into codes.

Figure 15. Overview of main codes used for data analysis.

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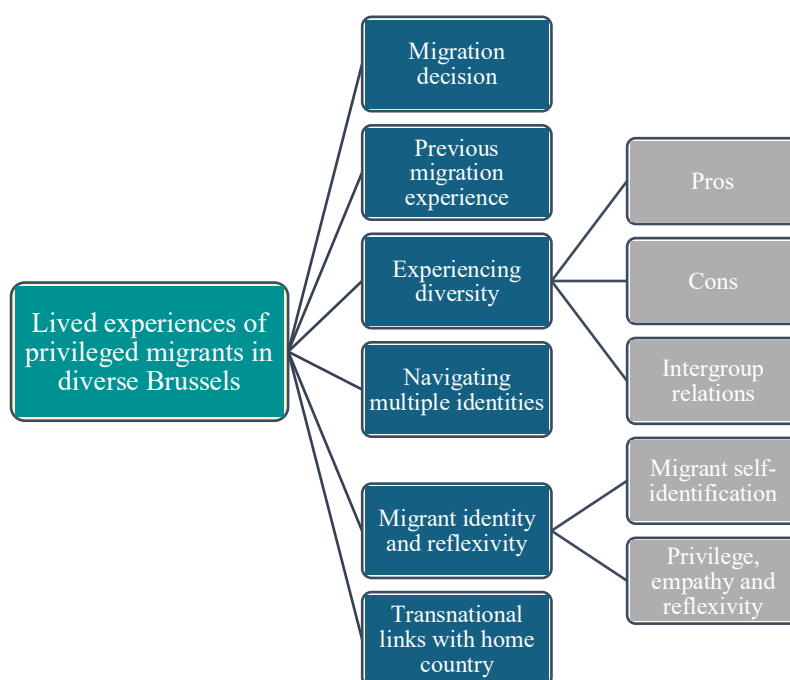
[92] This is a simplified and non-exhaustive overview of the codes used to analyse my interview data.
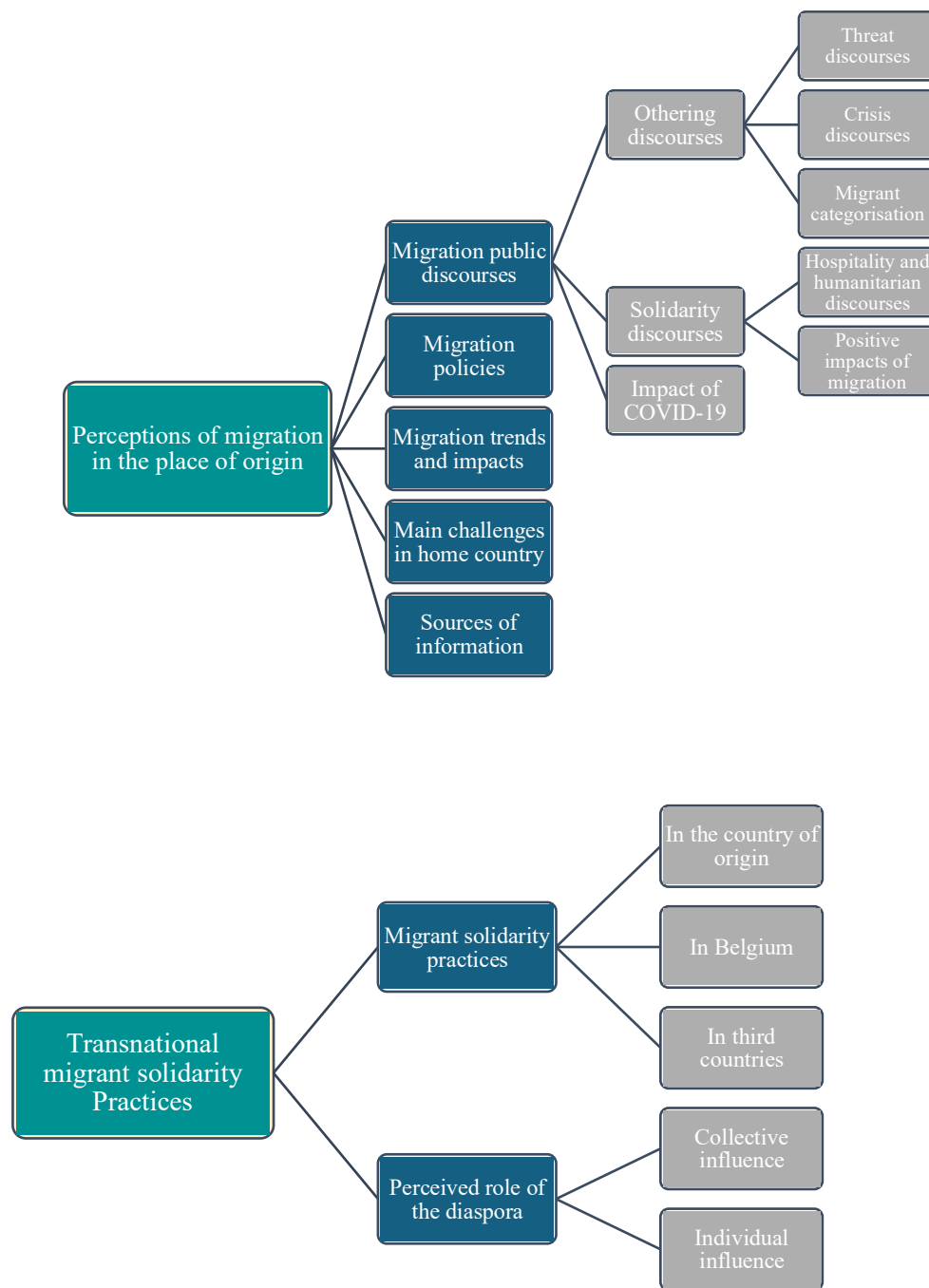
3.2.5. Ethical considerations

As a crucial first step before gathering data, I obtained an ethical clearance from the University of Liège's Social Sciences Ethics Committee (See Appendix 7). This entailed submitting an official request and demonstrating how I would seek to guarantee the rights of the research subjects, notably in terms of protecting their confidentiality, anonymity, and personal data. This also entailed sharing my research proposal with the ethics committee and a copy of my data

collection instruments. All research participants signed a consent form in which they agreed to participate in a research interview with me (See Appendix 8). This form informed them that their participation was voluntary and could be interrupted at any time, that they could refuse to answer any questions or ask for clarifications if necessary, that the information collected through the interview was anonymous and confidential, that none of their personal data would be published, that their responses would be anonymised when processed, and that their name and contact information would solely be used for communication purposes between me and them. Respondents were also informed that their personal data would be stored on the University of Liège's secure server (DoX) until completion of the project, and that they could withdraw their data from the project at any time by contacting me. Participants were informed that they could request a digital copy of the PhD dissertation upon completion. Finally, all participants agreed that the interview be audio-recorded to facilitate the transcription and data analysis process.

In order to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of my data, I assigned pseudonyms to all respondents and ensured they could not be traced back to their occupation or workplace. Because the research focused on a very specific population (Italian, Greek and Turkish migrants working in the public, commercial and cultural diplomacy fields) working in specific institutions and potentially forming a close-knit community, I therefore put the utmost care in leaving out any detail which could help identify a respondent by name and lead to a breach of confidentiality. Indeed, respondents sometimes knew or worked together, which may potentially lead respondents to recognise each other.

Concerning the issue of data storage, files containing sensitive data (interview recordings, transcripts, signed consent forms, filled biographic information forms) were assigned a code (composed of the number of the interview, the first two letters of the respondents' country of origin – IT, GR, or TU – and their reported gender: M or F) and saved on a specific folder saved on DoX (the University of Liège's secure server), to which only I had access. All my data was treated and saved on a password-protected laptop. Copies of the interview recordings were saved in a Dropbox folder and on a password-protected hard drive folder for extra security and will be deleted upon completion of my thesis.

3.2.6. Challenges and limitations

My research design naturally faced some challenges and limitations, which I sought to adjust to as much as possible. As the beginning of my PhD project coincided with the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, my main challenge consisted in conducting research whilst adapting to ever-evolving social distancing measures and a morose context shaped by collective anxiety and 'online fatigue'. Even though I am writing these pages several years past the height of the pandemic in 2020/2021, I vividly remember how it transformed our relations and practices, particularly in the field of social science research, which places a lot of emphasis on in-person interactions and direct observations. Although the COVID-19 pandemic constituted a major challenge for social scientists (Jowett, 2020), it also served as an opportunity to learn how to bring more flexibility, creativity, and spontaneity in our work. In my case, the need to adapt to the overall context of the pandemic largely explains the iterative nature of my research design (See 3.1.2.2) particularly with regards to my methodological and sampling choices. As I initially believed that the outbreak would be curbed in a matter of months and was set on conducting in-person interviews, I first delayed the interview process, focusing instead on the collection of secondary data, the mapping of potential stakeholders, and the refinement of my research design. By the end of 2020, with no durable improvement of the situation in sight, I decided to adjust my methodology and conduct online interviews, at least until the situation allowed me to conduct them in-person. This eventually paid off, as several of my (earlier) respondents had taken advantage of the teleworking measures implemented by their employer to go back to Italy, Greece or Turkey, conducting the interview from their home country. The pandemic also impacted the scope of my enquiry. Indeed, my initial plan was to find interviewees from a variety of emigrant profiles – including small to medium business owners or workers. Indeed, Brussels is known for its abundance of Italian, Greek and Turkish 'ethnic businesses' (e.g. restaurants, cafés, market stalls, and grocery stores), which could have served as natural sources of respondents and/or potential sites for participant observation. Yet, due to the lockdown and other measures affecting the HORECA (hotels, restaurants and cafes) sector in Belgium, such professionals became difficult to identify. Concerns around feasibility and access partly explain why my sampling strategy and focus shifted towards privileged migrants. Indeed, in an online research context, this population had the advantage of being clearly identifiable through their workplace and therefore easier to contact by email or through professional social networks, such as LinkedIn (See 3.2.1).

Other limitations of my research are inherent to the nature of my research topic and to qualitative methods. For instance, a key limitation of research methods such as interviews lies in response biases that may arise from respondents' apprehension to talk openly about their personal views regarding a topic as sensitive and politicised as migration. This might explain why individuals who held a clear political role (i.e. career diplomats) were more likely to decline participating in an interview, or to observe a more reserved stance than people working in commercial affairs, for instance. Social desirability biases might also explain why no respondent explicitly formulated hateful speech nor condoned hostile practices towards migrants (such as anti-immigration protests and voting for an anti-immigration party). Yet, as demonstrated in the following chapters, respondents did not necessarily hold back when expressing their views about immigration. Neither did they seem too concerned about how I would react to their remarks, probably because they perceived me as 'an insider' (Driezen et al., 2022; See 3.1.5). Conducting the interviews therefore eased my initial concerns regarding biases and self-censorship, as my interview data reflects contrasted and strong opinions. Moreover, social desirability biases are inherent to any research project focused on perceptions, regardless of the methodology used, and cannot be totally avoided (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024; Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018).

Another challenge that was addressed through adopting a flexible approach in the interview process consisted in the constant evolution of the socio-political situation at both the European and global levels, and its impact on attitudes towards migration (See 5.2). For example, the COVID-19 pandemic (and its perceived impacts on immigration or the situation of migrants in respondents' country of origin), featured prominently in the interviews conducted throughout 2020 and 2021. Migration-related events that took place in the aftermath of the 2015/2016 migrant arrivals (the initial focus of this project) – such as the Greece-Turkey border crisis (in February 2020), the burning of the Moria Camp in Lesvos (in September 2020), the Afghan refugee crisis (in August 2021), and, since February 2022, the Ukrainian refugee crisis – resulted in particularly up-to-date insights into respondents' perceptions of migration. The open-ended nature of the interview guide allowed respondents to touch upon such events freely and enabled me to capture a variety of subjective migration experiences and representations.

Another challenge related to sampling biases resulted from difficulties to access certain subcategories of respondents and ensure a perfectly balanced sample in terms of gender, age, nationality, and type of affiliation. In particular, Turkish respondents were mainly men working

in commercial organisations (with relatively few women), and no respondent working in national representations. Although the Italian and Greek samples were relatively more balanced in terms of gender and affiliation type, they were characterised by an overrepresentation of young women on the one hand, and of older men on the other (See 3.2.3). Several reasons can explain these access difficulties, including self-censorship on the part of diplomatic personnel, and of women more generally. It is worth mentioning that, amongst people who declined participating, women often did so because of a perceived lack of insight into the research topic, while men often used pretexts unrelated to their expertise or legitimacy, suggesting the presence of a gender-based 'confidence gap' (Kay & Shipman, 2014). Furthermore, women who agreed to participate more often apologised for their lack of expertise than their male counterparts, exhibiting a form of 'imposter's syndrome'.[93]

3.3. Conclusion

Throughout the first three chapters of this thesis, I sought to demonstrate the academic value of investigating perceptions of migration in a given country through the eyes of its emigrants, engaging with relevant literature and introducing my conceptual framework (Chapter 1). I further presented contextual elements that were crucial in order to 'set the scene' and justify my focus on Italians, Greeks and Turkish privileged migrants living in Brussels (Chapter 2). Before delving into the presentation of my research findings, it was essential to outline and justify the methodological decisions (e.g. research questions, methods, sampling strategy) that drove my data collection and analysis processes. I opted for a qualitative, iterative – and to a lesser extent, comparative – research approach, which allowed me to document the complex ways in which attitudes towards migration are shaped amongst people who are migrants themselves. Conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed me to obtain rich and unique insights into respondents' perceptions and practices of migrant othering and solidarity, as I will demonstrate throughout the next three chapters. Importantly, I acknowledged some of the conceptual limitations and practical challenges encountered throughout the research process, such as navigating a pandemic, which required a flexible approach from the research design phase to the data collection and analysis phases.

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[93] These objections were voiced although I had explained to all potential and actual participants that the interviews did not aim to collect expert or official opinions, but rather to explore personal insights and viewpoints.

Chapter 4: Experiencing privileged migration in diverse contexts: What effects on migrant othering and solidarity?

"The migration situation should not only be seen in Greece, in Turkey or in Italy, you know. (…) as EU citizens – as citizens in general – we should just understand that at some point in our life, us, ourselves, or friends of ours, or a family member, someone, is going to be a migrant at some point. It's something that you can't avoid." (Rhea, 26)

4.0. Introduction

The relationship between migrant self-identification and intra-migrant solidarity is neither linear nor straightforward.[94] Anna Triandafyllidou aptly observed that "Neither the Mediterranean tradition of hospitality, nor the previous experience of Greeks and Italians themselves as immigrants, have prevented the rise of xenophobic attitudes and behaviour" (2000:187). Similarly, Just & Anderson (2015) argue that immigrants may display 'dual allegiances', towards other migrants but also towards their destination states, suggesting that they may very well hold negative attitudes towards other immigrant groups, particularly after having acquired the nationality of their country of settlement. More specifically, they demonstrate that "citizenship aligns the attitudes of natives and newcomers, making foreign-born citizens less enthusiastic about immigration than foreigners who have not acquired citizenship in their host country" (2015:190). Similarly, Sarrasin et al. stress the importance of considering migrants' "identification with the country of origin as well as normative pressure to assimilate and "act as a native" (2018:9) when evaluating migrants' attitudes towards other migrants.[95] Although there is relatively little research on immigrants' attitudes towards immigration in the European context compared to the American one, a handful of (qualitative) studies have sought to understand what can explain these othering dynamics amongst migrants (e.g. Fox et al., 2015; Jaskulowski & Pawlak; Kunz, 2020). Such research – and research on attitudes towards migration more generally – is often grounded in social psychology research, and more specifically in two interrelated theories: intergroup contact theory and intergroup

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[94] This chapter partly builds from a forthcoming book chapter (Hut, 2024), as well as two working papers that have been presented at academic conferences. The first one focuses on the self-identification process of privileged migrants, and the second one on perceptions of super-diversity in Brussels. (See: https://orbi.uliege.be/handle/2268/290119 and https://orbi.uliege.be/handle/2268/290117).
[95] See also Becker, 2019; Politi et al., 2020b; Ramos et al., 2019 (See 1.4.1

conflict theory (See 1.1.1). Intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954) suggests that the quantity and quality of contact between 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' can reduce prejudice against the outgroup. Due to the variety of migration experiences that co-exist in Brussels, a city which can easily illustrate the concept of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007; see 1.2.1 and 2.2.1), it could be assumed that migrant out-groups develop mutual interests based on relatively similar experiences of migration, fostering a sense of identification with its diverse population base. Yet, intergroup conflict theory (Blumer, 1958) also suggests that realistic and symbolic threats (which can be linked to economic competition, feelings of insecurity and/or to the perceived loss of one's cultural or religious identity) may disrupt the cohabitation of various social groups – including migrant groups.

Seeking to build upon this previous research through a more qualitative angle, this thesis' first empirical chapter will address my two first research sub-questions, namely:

1. How does respondents' migrant self-identification (or lack thereof) influence their attitudes towards other migrants in general? How does acknowledging their own privileged situation further shape such dynamics?
2. How does living in a cosmopolitan and diverse context transform respondents' perceptions of migration in general?

Consequently, the following sections aim to explore the different ways in which the self-identification process and lived experiences of Italian, Greek and Turkish privileged migrants evolving in Brussels' culturally diverse context affect their solidarity and othering discourses towards other migrant groups.

4.1. 'Privileged migrants'? From moving with the right resources to developing a strong sense of belonging at destination

Albeit relatively under-researched, privileged mobilities have received growing attention (See 1.2.3.3). Analyses in this sub-field of migration studies contribute to upending mainstream representations and narratives about migration in both popular and academic discourses, which

tend to essentialise migrants as marginalised individuals (Cranston & Duplan, 2022).[96] In the context of my thesis, I define privileged migrants as migrants who have accumulated economic – or material – capital (e.g. income) and/or symbolic capital (e.g. citizenship, socio-economic status, cultural capital), placing them in a dominant and desirable position *before*, *during* and/or *after* their move. Whether through their nationality, ethnicity, professional background, educational attainment and the nature of their migration background and experience – and often a combination of several of these aspects – my 54 research participants shared several characteristics that can help us recognise them as 'privileged migrants'. Rather than establishing an archetype of privileged migrants in Brussels or an exhaustive list of their defining characteristics,[97] the following section highlights four main elements of privilege that emerged through the interviews (See Figure 16). Moving beyond the usual focus on elites' *financial capital*, I will focus here on advantages that are related to the possession of *symbolic resources*.

Figure 16. Elements of symbolic privilege and their consequences.
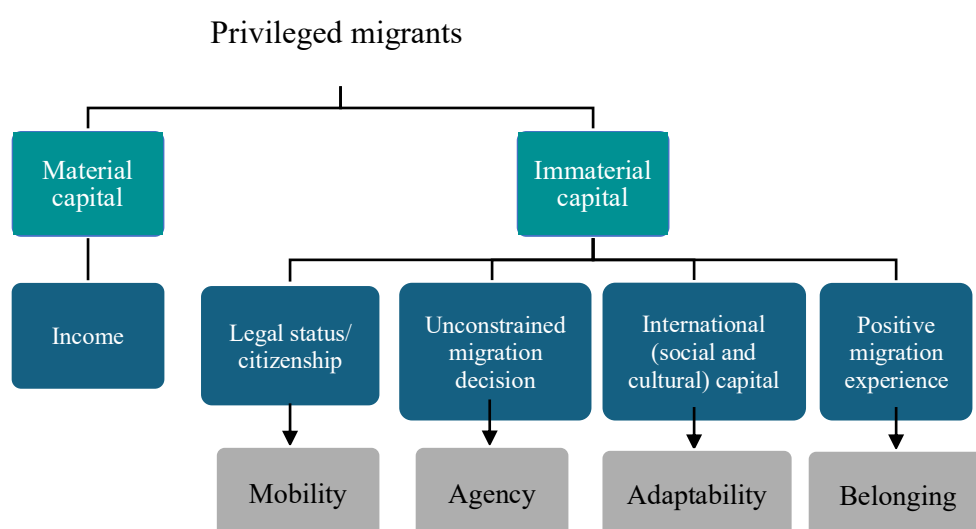
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[97] Although I seek to steer clear from using the term 'Expat', it is often used in both public and academic discourses to refer to privileged migrants. In a previous attempt to "define the Expat" in the context of Brussels, Gatti came to the following conclusions: "The Expat community is formed by highly skilled, highly educated migrants, of a middle or good social level, who are professionally oriented. They are perceived to be quite young on the average, and they usually stay in Brussels for a limited period, even though a minority of them, normally the most mature ones, have decided to settle in the city on a permanent basis. They are thought to hold important professional positions and receive high wages, but this perception is an effect of the incorrect correlation between EU institution officers and Expats" (2009:13).

4.1.1. Moving without (or with limited) constraints

Nationality and, more specifically, mobility-related rights tied to EU citizenship, are a first criterion of privilege that can be identified for the 41 Italian and Greek respondents of my sample. The 2023 ranking of the Henley Passport Index – which classifies national passports based on the number of countries they allow people to travel to without a visa – ranks Italy, Greece and Turkey, at the 2nd, 7th and 51st place respectively, confirming that Italians and Greeks enjoy less mobility restrictions than Turks (See 4.1.3.3). Furthermore, due to Italy and Greece being EU Member States and signatories of the Schengen Agreements, their nationals are allowed to travel, work and live in any EU country without being subject to border checks nor needing any sort of visa or permit. As such, research participants often used this element to justify why they *did not* identify as migrants (See 4.2.1), often comparing their move to internal migration, or to a form of effortless travel or commute. While Nikos (29) claimed that his move felt more like "moving within [his] country", Pietro (27) described the ease with which he could move back and forth between his hometown and Brussels as follows:

> (…) Europe is small and, before COVID let's say, for me it was very easy to go back to Milan because there were like literally eight or nine flights a day from Brussels Zaventem to Milan. So for me, it was literally like taking a flying bus, you see (…) I think that since I feel European, I know that I'm a migrant, but somehow I'm a migrant within Europe. It's not the same for me. It's a lower form of migration to some extent, you see. It's just like a person from Texas going to work in New York or in Washington, D.C – it's not really the same, but it's getting closer to that, in my opinion.

In addition to symbolic privilege implied by Italians' and Greeks' EU citizenship in the context of the European free mobility regime, respondents displayed a high level of *agency* over their decision to migrate (and remain) in Brussels. This was made clear as they answered the opening question of my interview guide, which consisted in explaining what had brought them to Brussels in the first place. The majority (n=40) came to Brussels to pursue a job opportunity, while a smaller group (n=11) primarily moved in the context of their studies. The rest (n=3) had either come to Brussels at an early age together with their family or had been born in Belgium. There were no significant differences in responses according to respondents' age, gender or nationality, apart from an over-representation of Italians amongst the group that had

initially migrated for their studies.[98] Importantly, the vast majority had chosen to come *to Brussels specifically* to fulfil their aspiration to work in international or European affairs, implying that – for the most part – their migration was used strategically to advance their career and professional outcomes (See 2.2.1.2). This is not surprising given the informal status of Brussels as EU capital and considering that my sample was largely made up of people working at the EU representations of national or regional institutions, studying, or (in)directly working in international/European affairs (See Figure 14). Although migration aspirations were in few cases influenced by a profound dissatisfaction with the economic and/or political situation in their home country, respondents often acknowledged that their move resulted from the alignment between both their *desire* and *capacity* to move and/or to stay in Brussels.[99] This explains why respondents often defined migrants as individuals moving out of financial necessity or forcibly displaced by conflict and did not always identify as such (See 4.2.1). Research participants also exhibited a high level of educational attainment, most of them (n=36) having master's degrees (or currently pursuing one) (See Figure 13). Having faced few administrative obstacles to enter the job market (through having the right to work, diplomas recognised at the EU/Belgian level, and skills in demand) enabled them to move in privilege, and to gain even more privilege as they became 'highly skilled', and thus 'desirable' migrants, with the ability to integrate both economically and culturally (See 2.2.1.3).

European respondents also faced advantages related to their ethnicity/race, and particularly to their white privilege (McIntosh, 1989), in the Belgian context.[100] Carla (32), for instance, admitted that, despite encountering some difficulties at first, it had been relatively easy for her to find a job "because [she is] white, European, and because [they] have the possibility to move without any problem since 1992 [signature of the Maastricht Agreements]".[101]

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[98] Importantly, amongst those who had initially come to study, some were also working or conducting an internship simultaneously, putting them in both the first and second category of respondents (I however counted them as having come to study as this was their primary occupation. Moreover, amongst this second group, many eventually transitioned from their studies to a professional activity (internship and/or job). Apart from such scenarios, respondents had rarely moved to Brussels for a mix of reasons.

[99] In the few cases where people described their move to Brussels as "accidental" (when joining a partner who had been posted in Brussels for instance) it had always been very easy for them to find a job and adapt to their environment. This smooth transition allowed them to perceive their move positively, even when they did not necessarily choose their destination.

[100] Despite my efforts to try to interview racialised respondents and highlight potential differences in perceptions amongst respondents based on their ethnicity, all research participants were white. A few Turkish respondents however referred to instances of racism they had faced as they were perceived as non-white (See 4.1.3.3).

[101] Quote translated from French.

4.1.2. Acquiring international capital

Previous exposure to an international environment has the potential to condition future migration experiences, notably through affording migrants with certain skills that make them more adaptable in the place of destination. This has been referred to as 'cosmopolitan capital', a form of cultural and/or social capital, which Bühlmann has defined as "the capacity to 'feel at home', even in places which are geographically distant" (2020:243).

4.1.2.1.   Previous migration experience

A majority of respondents (n=36, 14 Greeks, 13 Italians and 9 Turks, across all age groups) had previously lived abroad, whether for work, studies, or both,[102] 20 of whom having had more than one experience abroad prior to moving to Brussels (12 Greeks, 6 Italians and 2 Turks).[103] Figure 17 below shows that the United Kingdom and France were by far the most popular destinations,[104] with other relatively sought-after destinations including the United States, Germany and Turkey.[105]

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[102] I understand 'experience abroad', or 'international migration experience', to mean stays of over three months in a foreign country, other than for touristic purposes.

[103] Conversely, 18 respondents (8 Italians, 6 Greeks, 4 Turks) had no prior international migration experience before moving to Brussels. Their profile was extremely diverse (e.g. students or young professionals who were having a first professional experience abroad, young professionals who had eventually decided to remain in Brussels after a first internship, a 31-year-old Greek woman who had moved to Brussels as a child together with her parents, respondents aged between 40 and 69 who had moved to Brussels quite early on in their adult life to study and/or work and had stayed on. Importantly, these respondents' extended stay in Brussels had afforded them sufficient international exposure to bridge the gap between them and respondents who may have moved more extensively. Some explained that although they had not lived abroad before, they had travelled for touristic purposes, or had held a job in international relations.

[104] Other countries not included in the graph but cited by one respondent each included Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Luxemburg, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Switzerland.

[105] These results are consistent with previous research by Tintori & Romei (2017) which showed that Germany, Switzerland, the UK and France had become preferred destination countries by new Italian emigrants following the economic crisis. Similarly, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden became important countries of destination for Greek emigrants over the same period (Mavrodi & Moutselos, 2017). According to 2021 estimates by the General Secretariat of Hellenes Abroad (GSHA), London and Munich were respectively ranked third and tenth in terms of cities hosting the largest Greek populations outside of Greece (Karavasili, 2021).

Figure 17. Respondents' emigration destinations prior to moving to Brussels.
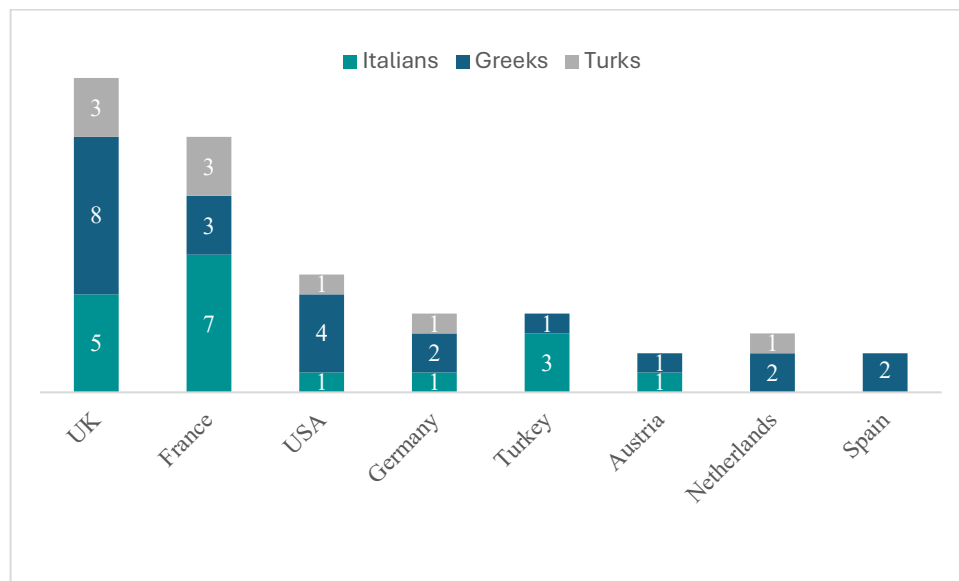
When asked in which context they had moved internationally prior to moving to Brussels, research participants predominantly cited reasons related to their studies (n=19) – overwhelmingly in the framework of an Erasmus student exchange (n=15) – to their work (n=17) or an internship (n=9). Other reasons included following a language course or family reasons (i.e., joining a partner). Apart from family reunification, these previous migration experiences were directly linked to the acquisition of social or cultural capital, thus paving the way for an easier socio-economic and cultural integration into Brussels' international environment. Many respondents were multilingual for instance, being fluent in English and/or French in addition to their native language. Marco (43) is the textbook example of how individual career plans translate into specific migration aspirations, and eventually take shape through the addition of (privileged) migration experiences. Having lived abroad ever since leaving Italy in 2001 to pursue an Erasmus exchange at Sciences Po Bordeaux, he recounts how every step in his journey went "according to plan". Having benefited from multiple scholarships, speaking multiple languages, having developed an international network, and obtained prestigious diplomas – amongst other things – opened doors that would have remained shut had Marco remained in his native village of the Aosta Valley in Italy:

> Immediately [after graduating] I started looking for opportunities and (…) had a lot of opportunities because at the time, not many people were able to speak French. I was really trilingual. (…) And then I already had a plan in my mind, which was: go to Ireland with a scholarship. Which I did. It was the Leonardo [da Vinci] scholarship, now it's called Erasmus+. And then get a job in an American company, and then move to the US and do an MBA, and then work for the European Commission. This was my plan. Everything was planned. And it

worked out! So I had my scholarship, I went to Ireland, after the three-month internship I was hired by [famous American multinational technology company]. And then after 11 months they sent me to California (…). But then finally we had to go back to Dublin, and so we went back to Dublin and immediately I felt the need to continue with my plans, so I started to apply for scholarships for colleges, and I got accepted into the College of Europe, in Bruges. Because out of my personal research, I read about the "Bruges Mafia", which is basically, if you go to the College, you're guaranteed to find a job in the EU! (laughs).

Furthermore, about half of the research participants (n=26, 16 Italians, 6 Turks and 3 Greeks) had previously moved *within* their home country, exposing them to upward social mobility in a national context characterised by high internal disparities. This had indeed been the case for several Italian respondents,[106] as well as for Turkish respondents who had moved from peripheral or small or mid-sized cities to Istanbul or Ankara for their studies or for work. In addition to Greek respondents being less internally mobile than their Italian and Turkish counterparts – most of them being from the country's two metropolises (Athens and Thessaloniki), thus having access to more educational and professional opportunities – the few ones who had moved internally had moved from one of these two cities to the other. As seen previously, Greek respondents had more often moved internationally than internally, and were the most internationally mobile group out of the three.[107]

4.1.2.2. Identifying as an 'international' or 'European'

This acquisition of international capital can be further exemplified through the testimonies of some respondents, who fully embraced and put forward their international background and identity; openly labelling themselves as "internationals" (Luigi, 44), "cosmopolitans" (Anastasia, 55), and/or "world citizens" (Alexandros, 62; Yusuf, 68). In doing so, respondents, such as Yusuf (68), alluded to their eagerness to be mobile and ability to adjust to any environment:

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[106] In an attempt at theorising 'new European youth mobilities', and building from the core-periphery framework and Fielding's (1992) 'escalator region' hypothesis, King observed how, similar to international migration to London, interregional and rural-urban migration flows to Italy's two 'cores' (Rome and Milan) could be conceived "as the 'upward social class escalator' for mobile young adults from less dynamic regions who [are] keen to advance their careers, incomes and social status" (2017:5), further acknowledging that "for internal migrants, Milan functions as an escalator city for graduates originating from the Italian Centre and South" (2017:5).

[107] The closing question of the interview guide ("what are, according to you, the three top challenges facing your country today?") also revealed Greek respondents' profound dissatisfaction with the economic and political state of their country, which can further explain their particularly strong aspiration to emigrate.

> (…) I consider myself as a world citizen. I'm not this classic nationalist type: *"I am proud of my nationality"*, no, there's no such thing. Everybody is part of a nationality, but I believe we're all human beings first and... I always trained myself with this thing behind my mind, I always said: *"I will close my eyes, drop me somewhere, in the world, and I'll keep living there – wherever it is"*. The Amazon, Asia, whatever...
> EH: You will adapt.
> Yusuf: I have to adapt. And I always thought like this

Respondents who had spent long periods abroad – or in Brussels – generally perceived Brussels' multinational environment as being the norm. For instance, Angeliki (31), who had moved to Brussels as a young child and attended the European school, reflected on how ordinary it had been for her to grow up alongside children with diverse backgrounds, or to use English to communicate:[108]

> (…) This situation is normal for me. Because I went to the European School, almost everybody was like that. At the European School, in the French-speaking section, I think there was only one *Belge-belge* ['proper native' Belgian]. The rest were all French-speaking but often from France or elsewhere. One of my friends had a Senegalese mother and a Finnish father so… there was everything, really, and that was totally normal for us. We would never ask: 'Where are you from?' (…) because it wasn't really important, we all spoke to each other in English. So yeah, it didn't matter.[109]

Many respondents (n=21) also openly embraced their Europeanness, presenting themselves as devoted Europeans or "federalists" (Iraklis) who believed in the "European dream" (Pietro, 27) and supported the project of a "united Europe" (Markos, 61). Respondents' attachment to a supra-national identity confirms that national identification was far from being the only relevant source of identification amongst them.[110] Importantly, group identification can potentially affect respondents' migration perceptions. For instance, Hasbún López et al. (2019) found that, in Europe, national identification was correlated to beliefs of 'autochthony' and to the intention to initiate collective action (namely protests) against refugees,[111] while global and European identification was found to mediate this effect. As stated by Ayça (31), a strong believer of Turkey's European character and supporter of the EU accession process: "I want

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[108] This echoes with previous research by Driezen et al. which showed that youth attending multicultural schools in Antwerp (Belgium) heavily relied on "a cultural repertoire of commonplace diversity" (2023:11).

[109] Quote translated from French.

[110] Additionally, due to their own personal circumstances (e.g. growing up or living in a foreign country, having learned its language, and/or being bi-national), some respondents also expressed their strong attachment to another national State besides Italy, Greece or Turkey.

[111] They define autochthony as "a belief that the first inhabitants of a territory are more entitled to certain rights than newcomers" (2019:6).

my country to be facing the EU, and nowhere else".[112] Many welcomed the fact that the EU had created a sense of belonging and shared identity amongst Europeans. Others regretted that their co-citizens often took for granted the advantages arising from their country's EU membership.

4.1.3. Feeling 'at home' in Brussels

Respondents' international experience directly impacted their views of diversity in Brussels, which they perceived extremely positively. Living *in Brussels* was considered a distinct experience which contrasted with living in Belgium more broadly, as exemplified by statements such as: "I don't live in Belgium: Brussels is not Belgium" (Marco, 43), with participants stressing the city's unique international character (See 2.2).

4.1.3.1. Exposure to various cultures and nationalities

First, many respondents welcomed the fact that living in a city as international as Brussels had exposed them to a variety of cultures and nationalities, enabling them to widen their horizons (See 1.3.2). Respondents perceived multiculturalism to be strongly reflected in the capital's rich cultural offer when it came to arts, gastronomy, and languages. They often detailed how their social networks (e.g. friends, colleagues, neighbours, roommates, life partners) in Brussels were predominantly composed of people coming from another country than their own (although, importantly, not from Belgium; See 4.3.2.1)[113] and particularly from other EU countries.[114] Dimitra (22), for instance, enthusiastically described her co-living situation:

> Actually, this is one of my favourite parts of my Erasmus experience (…). I decided that I wanted to live the whole experience abroad, so I decided to move into a co-living house, with twelve people from nine different countries. So, we're in a very multicultural environment, with different cultures, different languages, different habits... We have like nine different

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[112] Ayça's pro-EU stance, however, did not necessarily translate into outright immigration support (See 5.1.1.2).
[113] Many respondents maintained equally strong – or sometimes even stronger – relations with their co-nationals in Brussels (See 4.3.1.2).
[114] France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain were regularly cited, along with Eastern European and Northern European nationalities. Respondents also mentioned several non-EU countries (e.g. Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, El Salvador, India, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Morocco, the United Kingdom, the United States).

nationalities: Greece, Spain, France, Tunisia, Lebanon, Brazil, Iran, Slovenia, Romania... And what else? Turkey! That's all. Nine. (…) they're all expats. No one is from Belgium.

Several respondents also reported being in 'mixed' relationships with other European nationals. Many stressed how enriching and intellectually challenging and stimulating having an international network had been for them. For instance, Christos (53) felt that his Belgium-born children were growing up with fewer prejudices than he had. For Iraklis, living in Brussels had been an opportunity to form close friendships with Eastern Europeans, whom he had limited interactions with prior to the 2004 EU enlargement.[115] Deniz (42) also was extremely positive about the advantages of engaging with nationals from countries that are less often talked about:

> (…) I like having friends from different cultures. Sometimes we have potlucks and everyone brings food from their own country or tradition, and it's really enriching. Or you talk about what's going on in their countries, politically, economically. I mean, a country that you never read about in the news, but where something really big has happened recently, and then you say, "*Oh my god, we didn't even hear about it!*". For instance, I have a friend from Kazakhstan, I recently heard that the government had to resign because there were big protests there to demonstrate against the fuel crisis. I had no idea! (…) And I like hearing about different countries because there are so many different realities in the world, sometimes we think that the reality that we hear is the only reality in the world, but it's just a small part of it.

4.1.3.2.   From feeling 'welcome' to developing a sense of belonging

Second, many participants valued the fact that Brussels' international character allowed them to feel "welcome" and to form an integral part of its international community. Luigi (44), for instance, observed: "the fact that [Brussels] is so diverse, if you are a foreigner or a stranger, it makes it easier for you to blend in because you are just one of the many colours that you find here" (Hut, 2024). Similarly, Adriana (39) felt that: "Brussels [is] so diverse that you never feel out of place". Adding: "Because nobody is home, they have to make it home". Tolga (28) felt that as a foreigner in Brussels, "your identity or whatever is even less visible... you know, you're just like everyone else there, your identity is just, like, speaking an additional language in a way". In many cases, this contrasted with respondents' reported experiences in other EU countries, such as France or Germany, where they had often been confronted to a less welcoming environment. Due to Brussels' special position as the capital of the EU, many

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[115] In 2004, the EU witnessed its largest single enlargement, with ten countries joining the EU at once (Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). Romania and Bulgaria later joined the EU in 2007, and Croatia in 2013.

respondents appreciated that they formed an integral part of the diverse 'EU bubble'. Some respondents further described Brussels as "the melting pot of the whole of Europe" (Iraklis) and "the only city where you can really find a European culture" (Pietro, 27).

This overall satisfaction with their lives in Brussels and their positive experience of diversity led research participants to express a strong sense of belonging to and of place attachment in Brussels. This manifested in different ways, such as feeling 'welcome' in Brussels, or calling it 'home' over time, as well as having developed mid-to-long term plans to stay, return or settle in the city. It was also common for respondents who had initially come to Brussels for study purposes to transition into an internship and/or to a job, eventually staying on, whether this was planned or unexpected (See 4.1.1). Other manifestations of place attachment included having acquired – or planning to apply – for Belgian citizenship, owning – or planning to own – property, having established a business or association in Belgium, as well as participating in the local political scene. Having started a relationship and/or a family in Belgium, or having relatives (such as parents, siblings or cousins) living there, was another strong factor of place attachment. Respondents sometimes acknowledged that their life course (getting married, becoming parents) had impacted their perceived belonging over time. This was the case of Christos (53), who explained that having children in Belgium had directly impacted his sense of place attachment:

> (…) when we first came, we thought that Belgium was a great start, but we didn't think that we'd stay in Belgium forever, or for very long, (…) but progressively we set some roots here, especially our children. Our children, and the new relationships that they created here, the schooling, the sports that they do together with Belgian children, they are major channels that bind us to Belgium, to such an extent that, even when we had, for instance, a couple of relatively good offers to go abroad (…) we said no, because essentially our children said no! (…) and I guess this also shows that Brussels can win you over. As I said, we thought that Brussels was going to be okay, it's an international environment, but we were not necessarily married to it forever. But now we find ourselves not even wanting to necessarily move away...
> EH: Yeah, it's your home now!
> Christos: ... Because it's our home! It has become our home, yes.

4.1.3.3. The ambivalence of privilege

We should not be deceived by the above-mentioned characteristics into picturing privileged migrants as forming a homogeneous bloc. Indeed, the experiences of certain respondents were not always devoid of challenges, demonstrating the ambivalence of the notion of privilege.

Rather than being permanent and absolute, privilege is unstable and highly contextual (See 1.2.3.3). Such challenges were related to language barriers which respondents felt limited their integration prospects, and to visa and other documentation issues affecting Turkish respondents compared to their Italian and Greek counterparts. These examples show that, in spite of their advantageous social standing linked to their high levels of educational attainment and the professional reasons behind their stay, they could still face disadvantages – and, in some rare cases, discrimination and racism – on the basis of their national background. The adoption of an intersectional framework highlights the articulation of several aspects of privilege (whether related to nationality, gender, age, race/ethnicity, and others) which can become more or less salient according to a given social context.

A dozen of research participants – essentially women –[116] mentioned facing – or having previously faced – integration-related challenges related to language barriers (i.e. a lack of or insufficient French – and to a lesser extent Flemish – speaking skills). Respondents recognised that learning their destination country's language was a prerequisite for feeling more comfortable and integrated. Indeed, not speaking French made their daily lives more difficult, especially in terms of liaising with Belgian administrations (e.g. seeking medical assistance, dealing with banks or taxation issues). However, respondents were aware that speaking English could help them circumvent this issue. Dimitra (22) expected that moving to Brussels would give her the opportunity to practise her French, but instead realised that "if you don't want to, you're not forced to speak French in Belgium because everyone speaks English!". Furthermore, the isolation felt by some due to their lack of French speaking skills, usually led them to attend French classes, eventually improving their communication abilities and integration prospects. Such disadvantages were therefore largely seen as temporary. In addition to this, and quite unsurprisingly, Turkish respondents – in particular those who did not have Belgian citizenship – did not always enjoy the same ease of movement or administrative rights than their Italian and Greek counterparts. These difficulties were related to obtaining a visa or residence permit, allowing them to access or remain on Belgian soil. Ayça (31), for instance, narrated the extreme difficulties faced by Turkish youth in getting to Belgium to study and work:

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[116] A potential explanation for this over-reporting of integration problems by female respondents could be found in previous research by Tedstone Doherty and Kartalova-O'Doherty (2010) who have shown that women are more likely to report mental, nervous or emotional problems and seek help than men, due to traditional gender norms and ideas around masculinity and public stigma surrounding mental health.

(…) unfortunately, the only way for most of the young people in Turkey to make it to Europe is the Erasmus+ student trainee exchange programme. (…) And most of them can only stay up to three months. And this has to do with the fact that, as you know, the short-term visa is up to three months, and it's easier to get the short-term visa. And also (…) with the green passport you can also stay up to three months. I am underlining this, because, unfortunately, especially with Belgium, the visa issue is a *huge* problem, and it gets bigger and bigger each day. Especially after the pandemic, this is even a bigger problem. So, even when the reason to come to Belgium is Erasmus+, which is an EU programme, Belgium unfortunately rejects the applications. I'm not saying all, but a good number of applications. And I personally had a trainee, and we faced this problem, she could not get a visa, but thankfully she had a green passport, so she could come up to three months, but the initial plan was nine months. So, she had to change her plans. And she's not the only example, I can easily say that. (…) this is a big problem, and we even are vocal about this to authorities, but unfortunately, I haven't seen any progress yet. I hope that one day, Turkish students will have easier access. But I'm not very hopeful, to be honest.

Other respondents also mentioned difficulties in navigating daily administrative procedures. Meltem (50) for instance felt that she did not "have exactly the same rights as Belgian citizens", explaining that she had failed to obtain a credit from her bank to buy a house, since she only had temporary residence documents. Zeynep (36), also felt that Belgian administrations treated Turkish nationals unfairly, considering them like the previous wave of Turkish guestworkers and their descendants:

> But when it comes to (…) relations [with the public administration], they don't consider you as a citizen of Belgium, they just see that you are Turkish, and they categorise you like the people in Schaerbeek. They might be right, but… this is not fair, I don't feel that's right.

In one instance, a Turkish respondent reported being confronted by casual acts of racism, as he was perceived differently than the majority population. Owning a side business in addition to his main activity, he explained that he regularly faced some hostility on the part of prospective Belgian clients:

> (…) For example, when, in my business, I'm visiting some Belgian people to introduce our materials, sell something... when they see that you are not speaking French, and your hair is not blonde, initially it is very hard to [keep their] attention. (…) And name also, [he says his full name], it's a funny name, like a Russian name. I mean, I can see, in the business especially, I can feel that, and immediately they are like "no, no, no we don't need it". Without further hearing. Something like this. When you call also. (Samet, 59)

4.1.4. Conclusions

Having introduced the overall profile of my respondents, I demonstrated that they could be considered privileged migrants in light of four immaterial advantages that were largely unrelated to their income level: 1) their ability to move freely due to their citizenship and/or legal status; 2) their level of agency over the decision to migrate and remain in Brussels; 3) the acquisition of international (social and cultural) capital, resulting in a strong capacity to adapt to Brussels' multi-cultural environment; and 4) the development of a particularly strong sense of belonging as a result of their positive lived experiences.

4.2. Becoming a Migrant Versus Identifying as One: The Complexity of Migrant Self-identification and its Effects on Intra-Migrant Solidarity

The lack of universal definition of the term 'migrant' opens the door to a variety of interpretations of what it means to *be* a migrant in the technical sense as well as to *identify* as one on a more personal level. Although past research on people with an immigrant background has focused on their identification to certain social identity markers such as ethnicity, race, religion or nationality (e.g. Skinner & Hendricks, 1979, Zimmermann et al., 2007), research has seldom delved into the question of what it means to *identify as a migrant*, especially amongst privileged migrants.[117] Indeed, migration is often perceived as an objective legal status rather than as a subjective social identity. Yet, processes of 'migranticisation' (Scheel & Tazzioli, 2022) imply that some people are automatically labelled as 'migrants', while others are not. It is therefore important to gauge the potential mismatch between externally assigned and self-assigned migrant identities, by documenting emic perspectives regarding what it means to be a migrant. One of the central premises of social identity theory (See 1.2.1) is that group identification leads to ingroup solidarity. Therefore, it is highly valuable to investigate the extent to which this holds true for people who identify as migrants. I now analyse the extent to which respondents' migrant self-identification (or lack thereof), and reflexivity around their own privileged situation, influence their attitudes towards other migrants in general and lead to discourses of empathy.

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[117] For some exceptions, see Klekowski Von Koppenfels's work on Americans in France, Germany and the UK (2014) and Yanaşmayan's study of highly educated Turks in Amsterdam, Barcelona and London (2019).

4.2.1. The Spectrum of Migrant Self-Identification Amongst Privileged Migrants

As a first step to better understanding my 54 research participants' attitudes towards migration, I encouraged them to reflect upon the question of their own migrant identity (or lack thereof). In order to uncover the variety of interpretations and representations of migration amongst my respondents, I intentionally did not provide them with a set definition of 'migration' or 'migrant' at the beginning of the interview in order to capture their own subjective understanding of these notions. Even though all research participants (except for two)[118] can be considered as migrants according to current UN definitions (See 1.2.3.1), identifying as a migrant is a subjective process: identities are indeed dynamic, situational, and relational (Telles, 2022, See 1.2.1). In other words, becoming a migrant does not automatically lead to identifying as one. Furthermore, literature on privileged migration shows that privileged migrants, especially those from the Global North, often consider themselves – or are often labelled by others – as 'expats' or 'highly skilled mobile professionals' rather than as 'migrants' (Kunz, 2020; Le Bigot, 2021). Not being aware (or not being constantly reminded) of one's migrant status can constitute a privilege, as it reflects an unhindered migration experience. Although previous research has qualitatively analysed how privileged migrants perceive these terminological differences,[119] this thesis aims to systematically assess migrants' identification process by making it an integral part of the interview guide, and the starting point of my enquiry (See Appendix 3).

Figure 18 below offers a visual representation of the main arguments brought forward by my research participants to justify why they identified or did not identify as migrants. Their representation as a spectrum highlights the complex and dynamic nature of the migrant self-identification process, as well as the central role of perceived belonging and of privileged migration experiences. Most respondents were situated somewhere along the spectrum (n=24), followed by those who did not at all identify as migrants (n=19, mostly Greeks), and those who

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[118] The first is a Belgian-Turkish citizen, born in Belgium; the second an Italian woman based in Italy conducting a remote internship during the COVID-19 pandemic in a Brussels-based Italian organisation. She was familiar with Brussels, as she had previously attended French classes and summer schools and had some family there.
[119] See for instance Adrian Favell's work on 'Eurostars' in Amsterdam, London and Brussels, or Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels's work on Americans in Europe.

strongly did (n=9, mostly Italians), with no significant variation according to gender, age group or length of stay.

Figure 18. The spectrum of migrant self-identification.
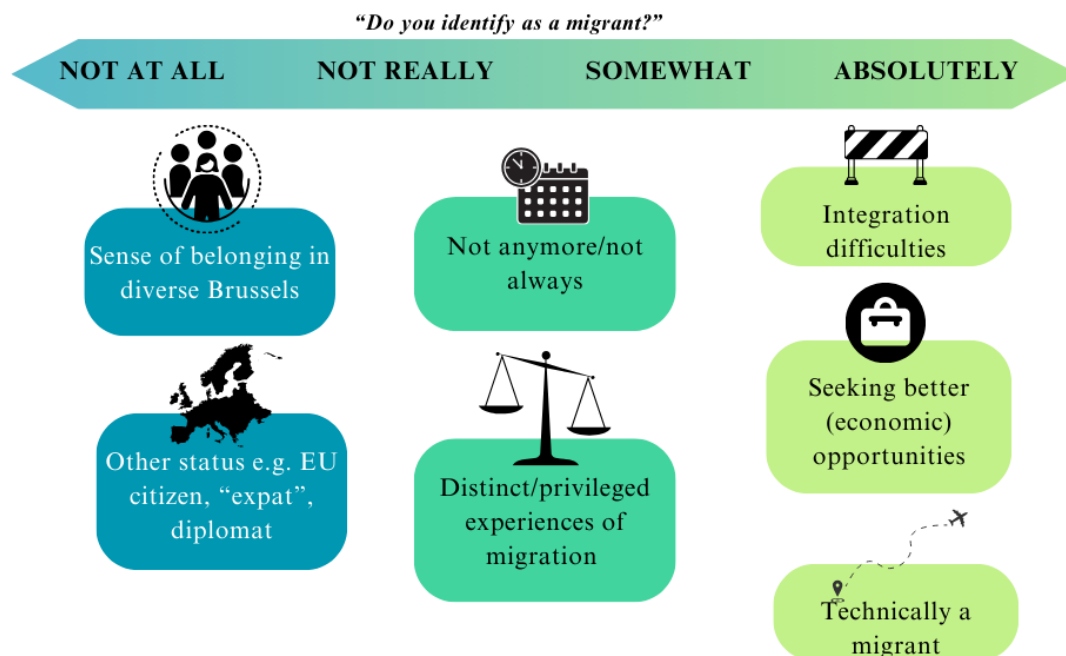
4.2.1.1. From one end of the spectrum to the other…

The leading argument used by respondents who strongly identified as migrants consisted in referring to the integration challenges they were facing – or had faced in the past – and to their perceived lack of belonging to Belgian society (n=7); See 4.1.3). Except for a 24-year-old Turkish man, this subgroup was made up entirely of women of all three nationalities. To them, being a migrant was often synonymous with a lack of integration into the place of settlement (which was generally demonstrated by language barriers or administrative challenges), and with being 'othered'. This perspective was summarised by Anita (30):

> I do perceive myself as 100% migrant, because I experience difficulties, when I need to deal with the *commune* [Belgian municipality] or to open a bank account (...). So, I feel 'a migrant' because I experience troubles. Also, French is not my mother tongue, so I cannot speak it very well, so it's hard for me sometimes if I need to cope with a problem... Also, I sometimes perceive people on the other side not willing to help that much, so that's why I feel like a migrant, because in my hometown in Italy I've never felt that I was treated differently just because I couldn't speak Italian properly, you know? (...) So, these kinds of little things make me feel like a migrant. 100% migrant, yes.

The other main argument had to do with respondents' migration decision, and particularly with the fact that they had come to Brussels seeking better economic and professional opportunities, and sometimes, a better life for their family (n=7). These respondents sometimes spontaneously described themselves as "economic migrants" (Marco, 43; Iraklis; Carla, 32), "work migrants" (Ricardo, 33), or described their move as a "professional migration" (Ekaterina, 24). For instance, Carla (32) explained that her decision to move to Belgium in 2011 – and that of many of Italian youth – had been strongly influenced by the 2007 economic crisis, and the lack of adequate prospects on the Italian job market at the time. Similarly, Adriana (39) and Gianna (49) perceived that their move – and that of other educated professionals – had been primarily motivated by economic reasons. Yet, they both explained that rather than moving "out of necessity" they had moved to find a more rewarding international career, as well as, in Gianna's case, new learning opportunities for her family[120]. In spite of the predominance of work migration amongst my sample, few respondents openly presented themselves as economic migrants. This may confirm the negative connotation associated with this term (Semmelroggen, 2015), especially among privileged migrants, who are more often referred to as 'highly skilled migrants' in the public, mediatic as well as academic discourses (e.g. European Parliament, 2023; Hill, 2018; Weinar & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020).

A few respondents also perceived that they could be considered migrants because they intended to stay or settle in Belgium. Stating: "we are not expats, we are immigrants", Deniz (42) explained that her stay was not meant to be temporary, further explaining that her husband had obtained a permanent work contract and that they had made the conscious decision to put their daughter in a Belgian school so she could develop "real roots" in Belgium. A small group also acknowledged that they were indeed migrants in the technical sense. Anastasia (55) for instance, indirectly referred to the UN DESA's definition of an international migrant by stating: "If I weren't [a migrant], I would be born here!".

Respondents who categorically rejected the migrant label were found on the other end of the spectrum. A common argument amongst them consisted in saying that Brussels' international

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[120] This is consistent with Lafleur and Stanek's (2017a) analysis of the South-North migration of EU citizens during the 2007 economic crisis, which they associated with structural aspirations for more fulfilling and rewarding careers, rather than being guided solely by conjunctural elements linked to the economic recession (See 2.2.1.2).

nature, and the relatively weak sense of national identity in Belgium, made it easy for foreigners to blend in and feel 'at home' (n=11; See 4.1.3.2). As explained by Osman (36):

> Here I don't feel like I'm really a migrant because everyone, almost everyone, is a migrant. Maybe in some real Flemish cities like Bruges, Antwerp, Knokke, you feel like you are a migrant, or a foreigner. But here in Brussels, I'm like everyone! (laughs).

Another related reason consisted of feeling that one had successfully "integrated" into Belgian society (n=4). This argument was predominantly used by respondents who had been in Brussels for over a decade and thus felt a strong sense of attachment to the city. This was the case of Güven (59) who explained that he had lived in Belgium longer than he had lived anywhere else, including in Turkey, or Antonis (41), who said that he had "more things in Belgium than in Greece". Because of these reasons, Stefanos (69) strongly rejected this migrant label:

> Certainly not, certainly not. I feel like a Belgian 100%. I'm not feeling like a migrant in Brussels, not at all, huh! I feel that I have rights there, I feel that I've worked there, that I've contributed, you know... so I feel thankful for many issues, because I've lived my whole life in Brussels after all...

Amongst the main reasons for not identifying as a migrant (amongst Italians and Greeks) was the fact that they primarily identified as "Europeans" and felt that they, as EU citizens, could not be considered *genuine* migrants (n=9). As explained by Luca (30): "(...) in perceiving the EU with no borders, you don't perceive yourself as a true migrant". As Europeans benefiting from the right to move and reside freely within the territory of Member States, these respondents tended to feel more like *internal* migrants. As explained by Ioannis (25), "I don't feel like I am necessarily a migrant, or an immigrant, in my continent. (…) I don't feel like I migrated to another country, I feel like I'm still in my country, sort of" (Hut, 2024; See also 4.1.1).

Other respondents (n=5) felt that their professional status (either as career diplomats, professionals connected to diplomatic circles and/or who had been posted to Brussels on a temporary basis) implied that they could not be considered "typical" migrants (Panagiotis). Yusuf (68), for instance, explained: "My experience has nothing to do with migration. I've never been in a migrant situation. I first came here as a diplomat". These respondents had not necessarily chosen Belgium (or Brussels) as a destination but had followed their employer's

decision, thus sometimes preferring to refer to themselves as "expats" (Murat, 36, Cristiana, 57; Christos, 53) or "diplomats".

To sum up, respondents who strongly identified as migrants in Brussels largely focused on negative experiences associated with being identified as a foreigner and lacking a sense of belonging. To most of them, the term 'migrants' usually described people who were insufficiently 'integrated', who faced prejudice and discrimination, as well as administrative challenges and language barriers, who relied on their national community as an alternative support system, who felt more pressure to comply with certain rules, and who sometimes had negative experiences with local authorities and populations. Conversely, respondents who did not identify as migrants tended to perceive their migration experience in positive terms, and to feel accepted or like they had successfully 'integrated'.

4.2.1.2. ...And everything in between

Identities are fluid and highly contextual (See 1.2.1). Therefore, and quite unsurprisingly, most respondents did not have a clear-cut answer to the question "do you identify as a migrant?". Instead, their answers were located somewhere in between the two ends of the spectrum. Respondents' self-identification process was far from fixed, as they sometimes shifted from strongly identifying as a migrant to firmly rejecting this identifier – or at least bringing nuance to it – for instance stressing how they were 'a different kind' of migrant.

These in-between arguments often had something to do with the length of respondents' stay in Belgium, confirming the transient nature of identity formation. For instance, while some felt like migrants only "at first", others identified more like 'expats' because their stay was *temporary* (Cristiana, 57), implying that *genuine* migrants intended to settle permanently. Others explained that they identified or felt like migrants in very rare instances, notably when they had to undertake some administrative procedures related to their stay. As for Tolga (28), he felt "less of a migrant today" than during his childhood years in Waterloo. In addition to this temporal dimension, respondents' migrant self-identification also depended upon spatial considerations. Despite acknowledging his extensive migration background, Christos (53) explained that he did not feel like "a migrant to Belgium" specifically. Conversely, Luca (30), identified as a "Brussels citizen, but a migrant to Belgium".

The most common discourse, however, had to do with respondents acknowledging the distinct, or privileged, nature of their migration experience, which set them apart from current or previous immigrant groups. Despite reaching similar conclusions, this argument was typically formulated in one of two ways: while a first group of respondents (n=7) supported a broad interpretation of the term 'migrant', recognising that migrants (like themselves) could very well be privileged on different aspects (e.g. on the basis of their nationality, their socio-economic status, or their race), a second group (n=6) inferred that they could not be considered migrants *precisely* because of their privileged experience or status, making a strict association between migration and experiences of marginalisation and hardship. The respondents from the first group spontaneously identified as "lucky migrants" (Raffaele 42), "luxury migrants" (Adriana, 39; Emanuele, 42; Meltem, 50), or "a migrant who is at ease" (Anastasia, 55). In both cases, research participants argued that their experience considerably differed from other migrant groups due to various symbolic advantages (e.g. European citizenship and freedom of movement, cultural capital, social status, whiteness) and material advantages (income level), as exemplified by the following quote by Eirini (53):

> I cannot compare myself to the Greek migrants who arrived in Belgium in the sixties to work in the mines, who had other living and working conditions. These, for me, are the real migrants. (…) And yeah... although I feel kind of privileged if you like, because I have a good job, I have done good studies... I recognise that everybody is not the same. But for us, Greeks, like for the Italians, and even the Spanish or Portuguese, the word 'migrants' has a very heavy, heavy weight, you know. Because we come from poor countries and we had bulks of co-nationals who left since the beginning of the 20th century abroad, in the States, Australia, or Belgium, Germany... so these for me, are the genuine migrants. (…) But you see that these people have had different experiences than what I have had, or other colleagues in the European Union.

Migrant self-identification amongst privileged migrants has several implications in terms of intra-migrant solidarity. The fact that someone in a dominant position identifies as a migrant can contribute to normalising migration rather than stressing its exceptionality, thus unsettling the 'sedentary bias' (Bakewell, 2008) in public discourses regarding this contentious, yet timeless, phenomenon.[121] Respondents normalised migration by saying that anyone "could become a migrant for a number of reasons" (Rhea, 26; see opening quote of this chapter) or "seek to improve their lives" (Panagiotis). More specifically, privileged migrants' self-identification as 'economic migrants' – a term which usually carries pejorative connotations –

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[121] The sedentary bias refers to the assumption that human mobility is the exception rather than the rule.

can serve to highlight the universality of migrants' aspirations and human rights, regardless of the heterogeneity of their experiences. For instance, Iraklis explained:

> [I identify] as an economic migrant, to some extent yes, even though I work in an international organisation and we have a special regime in Belgium. Still, I think that, you know, at the end of the day, we are economic migrants, so working in another European country. That's why I sympathise, you know, with some migration issues generally (Hut, 2024).

In her study of Americans living in Europe, Klekowski von Koppenfels similarly found that many of her respondents "were very aware of the hierarchisation, or stratification, of migrants of different origins in their host countries, with some choosing proactively to identify as migrants precisely because of that hierarchisation" (2014:139), confirming that identifying as a migrant can be used strategically to confront people who are hostile to immigration.

4.2.2. Reflexivity, discourses of empathy and migrant solidarity

To build upon past research on immigrants' attitudes towards immigrants, I assessed under which conditions the self-identification process of privileged migrants – and the reflexive process surrounding it – can lead to empathy and solidarity with migrants in less advantageous positions.[122] The notion of reflexivity has gained considerable traction in migration studies, and social sciences more generally (Dahinden et al., 2020). Particularly adapted to qualitative migration research (Iosifides, 2018) and to the study of privileged migration (Cranston & Duplan, 2022), reflexivity allows both the researcher and the research participant to reflect upon how their own biographies, social identities and personal experiences can shape their perceptions and actions regarding a given phenomenon. Interviews with research participants revealed that, in addition to expressing their sympathy with migrants by identifying as one, reflecting about these questions often contributed to creating empathy and feelings of solidarity with other migrants, regardless of their national or social background. Respondents showed empathy through five main discourses (See Figure 19 below).

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[122] I understand empathy as the ability to take someone else's perspective and to sympathise with their situation (Stephan & Finley, 1999).

Figure 19. Examples of discourses of empathy amongst respondents.

01	02	03	04	05
Reflecting upon own country's current and past emigration	Reflecting upon own family's emigration past	Reflecting upon migrants' shared challenges	Recognizing one's privilege(s)	Reflecting upon one's cosmopolitan ideals
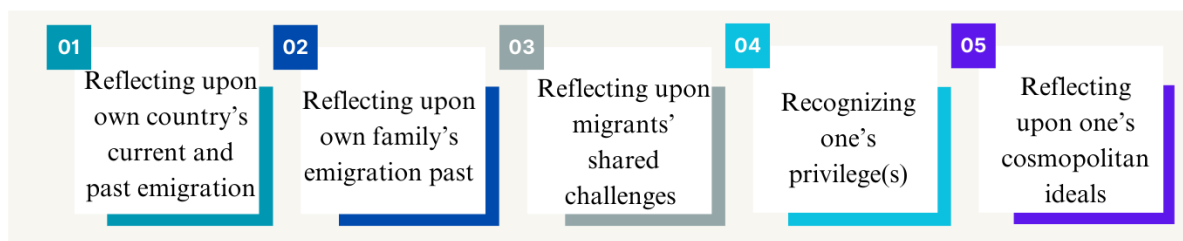
4.2.2.1. Reflecting upon own country's current and past emigration

Several respondents reflected upon current and past trends of out-migration from Italy, Greece and Turkey, highlighting in the process numerous similarities within migrants' experiences across time and space. Respondents evoked the difficult living and working conditions as well as the experiences of marginalisation faced by previous emigrants from Italy, Greece and Turkey, further stressing the need for more empathy towards today's socio-economically disadvantaged migrants. For example, Carla (32) related how some coffee shops had signs to restrict access "to Italians and dogs" during the early years of Italian immigration in Belgium. She added that many first-generation Italian migrants had refrained from teaching their mother tongue to their children to allow them to 'assimilate' into the majority population.[123] Greek respondents also adopted a historical perspective, stressing the many instances in the 20th century where Greeks had been forcibly displaced due to conflict (such as the 1919-1922 Greek-Turkish War and the subsequent 1923 population exchanges,[124] the two World Wars, and the 1946-1949 Greek Civil War), in addition to having migrated to Western Europe as guestworkers after World War II (See 2.2.1.1). Considering this well-documented – yet often overlooked – past, some respondents, such as Ricardo (33), criticised the double standards that led some of their co-nationals to see themselves as more deserving to be in Belgium than other migrants:

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[123] In the United States, where racial segregation was institutionalised until the late 1960s, Italian and Greek migrants in the United States were often othered based on their social origin (as poor, rural, migrants), religious background (as Catholics and Orthodox), and ethnicity. In addition to stereotypes and name-calling, this sometimes led to acts of physical violence, such as the lynching of 11 Italians in New Orleans in 1891. A New York Times opinion piece titled *How Italians Became 'White'* aptly describes how Italians (and particularly darker skinned Southern Italians) were initially racialised as 'non-whites' in the 19th century (Staples, 2019).

[124] The population exchange took place upon the founding of the Republic of Turkey and the signing of the Lausanne Treaty, whereby "1.2 million Christian "Greeks" in Anatolia were denationalised and exchanged for 350,000 Muslim "Turks" from Greece" (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019:8), with the aim of establishing a homogeneous population bound by a common ethnicity and religion.

Yes! I am [a] work migrant. Because I came here to find a better working situation. And I got stuck in this city (laughs). But yes, we are totally [migrants], as we were, as Italians [were] in the past. Because we're a population that's always very well known to be migrants... I remember when I first went to visit New York for example, I did a free walking tour. (…) I discovered how many migrants, Italian migrants, were involved in the construction of New York, in the building sector... and this happens everywhere in the world. So we are absolutely a population of migrants, and it's in history, so... But sometimes yeah, of course, we forget it, and we blame the others that come, you know, that are trying to do the same but coming to Italy (Hut, 2024).

Likewise, two Turkish respondents reflected upon the integration difficulties faced by previous generations of Turkish emigrants and their children in European countries, advising Turkish citizens and politicians to remember this history and to avoid reproducing the same mistakes with immigrant populations in Turkey.

I think what [Turkish citizens abroad] can do is remember that they're immigrants themselves (...) So, I mean, they should just remember why they came, and what kind of difficulties they had, and if they had not been accepted and welcomed by the country and the society that they live in, how would they end up? Just a little bit of empathy maybe. That's the first step. (Deniz, 42)

(…) taking this [past] into account, Turkey should not do the same thing to (…) migrants in Turkey. (…) And the parents [of second and third generation Turkish migrants], they were not very well-educated people. The migrants in the 1960s and 70s, they were all coming here in Belgium from small [Turkish] villages. So most of the time they couldn't give the right support to their children. And if the integration policy in that country is not well structured, if it is not a good one, then you lose that generation, the children of the migrant people. So Turkey should not do that. (Meltem, 50)

4.2.2.2. Reflecting upon own family's emigration past

Another group of respondents drew on examples from their own family's migration history (See Figure 20). Although most of these respondents did not identify as migrants, sharing these stories served as an opportunity to acknowledge the difficulties encountered by people on the move upon their journey, and to sympathise with them. The fact that their family had been directly affected made it resonate more with them. Anita (30) explained that her parents had migrated internally from the South to the North of Italy in the 1980s, and reflected upon the lack of openness her parents had faced:

The North is less open, it's less inclusive, but that's even for historical reasons, because in the eighties, they didn't want people from the South of Italy, in the North. And my parents, they

came to the North exactly in the late eighties, they were perceived as the strangers, the foreigners, although they were completely Italian.

Anastasia (55) also described the hardships faced by her great-grandparents who had come all the way from Azerbaijan to Greece as refugees in the early 20th century, and had continuously been treated as outsiders:

I knew, from all the stories, that they were not received with open arms. My great-grandfather used to say: "*When we were there [in Azerbaijan], they called us Greeks. When we arrived in Greece, we are the Turks, we are the Russians, we are the Cossacks, we are I don't know what... but we are not Greeks, sadly*!" (Hut, 2024)

Figure 20. Respondents' families' migration past.
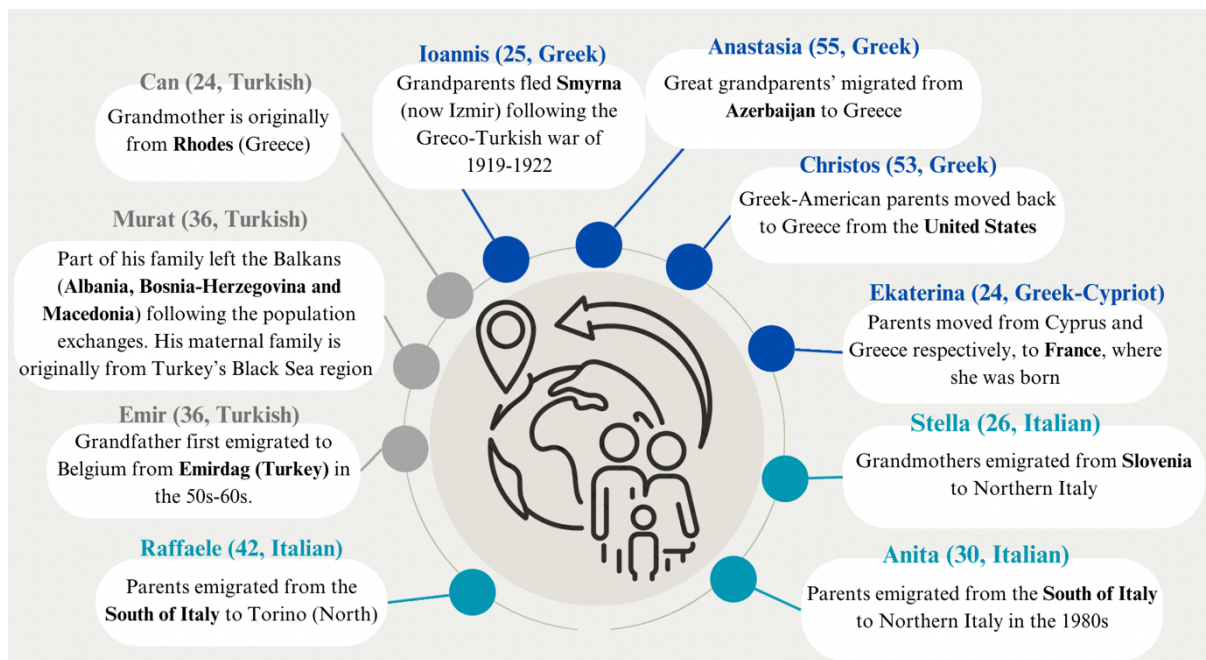
These examples were sometimes brought forward later in the interview, when discussing solidarity with migrants in respondents' country of origin (See 5.1.4). Respondents explained that Italians and Greeks were generally "hospitable" and "welcoming" towards migrants *precisely* because they had been a people of emigrants themselves, using examples from their own family to stress their point.

4.2.2.3.   Reflecting upon migrants' shared challenges and humanity

Respondents also stressed some of the difficulties that they had faced *personally* as migrants, including the emotional cost of leaving their loved ones behind, cultural adaptation challenges, feelings of in-betweenness, and in some rare cases, firsthand experiences of racism and xenophobia. Emanuele (42) for instance, expressed his shock at the normalisation of racist discourses targeting marginalised migrants in Italy, sympathising with them as he reflected upon his own migration experience:

> This is even more striking from the point of view of someone like me, who has partly experienced this… although, as I was saying, from a luxury standpoint, but still! Being uprooted, being far from your family and your friends, needing to adapt to a new context… this is already difficult, but imagine someone who is experiencing poverty, misery, violence… who finds the same attitude in their country of arrival...[125]

Francesca (32) – who strongly identified as a migrant due to the integration challenges she faced, and admitted that she preferred to stay with Italians in Brussels – empathised with immigrants who turned to their national community in their place of destination when they did not feel welcomed by locals, saying: "that's why, when I speak about migrants in Italy, I sometimes say: "I can feel them". Like, I know why they are always together". Becoming a migrant also allowed her to express her preference for inclusive immigration policies (See quote in 5.2.3.2). Similarly, Pietro (27) reflected upon the fact that Italians residing abroad could influence their co-nationals in adopting a more positive attitude towards immigration, by drawing upon their own experience as migrants (See quote in 6.2.1.4).

Other research participants also reflected on the general incomprehension and growing divide they perceived between them and people back home since having emigrated, which sometimes led to feelings of in-betweenness they deemed inherent to the migrant condition.[126] Despite being generally aware of their advantageous socio-economic position in Belgium, respondents regretted that their family members and co-nationals back home made many assumptions about them – and emigrants more generally, such as the idea that leaving their country constituted "an easy way out", that they were "out of touch" with the daily reality in their home countries,

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[125] Quote translated from French.
[126] Algerian sociologist Abdelmalak Sayad (1999) famously described emigrants' feeling of 'double absence', referring to the distance felt towards one's country of origin and destination.

and that they were exceptionally wealthy (See also 6.2.2). For instance, Angeliki (31), who grew up in Belgium, explained that:

> In Greece (…) people see us almost with envy, and as if we are not really true Greeks anymore, you see? We are kind of like… not traitors, it's more subtle than that, no one says it like that, but they kind of make fun of us (…) like you would make fun of a very rich person discovering the world.[127]

4.2.2.4.   Reflecting upon one's privilege(s)

As seen above, many respondents recognised that their own migration experience needed to be considered through the lens of privilege, and that several elements – such as their nationality, socio-economic status, skills level, geographical proximity with their home country – mitigated their integration difficulties. Self-awareness and acknowledging one's privilege(s) – whether racial, gender, social, etc. – can constitute a necessary first step in acting upon systemic power inequalities. The same applies to privileged migration. For instance, Raffaele (42), who self-identified as a "lucky migrant", was aware that being "on the lucky side of the planet and of society" had made his migration experience much easier. The following quote by Andrea (31) illustrates how such reflexivity can lead to empathy towards less privileged migrants:

> So yes, I feel like I migrated. At the same time, it would be superficial, it would just be not true to say that all migrations are the same. So I know I belong to a kind of migration that is perceived [to be] less problematic, but still, I am [a migrant]. And, you know, the fact of feeling that I'm a migrant (...), it's just more (...) to highlight the fact that we are all moving, right? For some reason or another. And (...) I can't tell you how many times colleagues or others have said, you know: *"This area of Brussels is full of migrants!"* (...). *We are* migrants as well. So sometimes it's nice to remind them of that. (...) So yes, I feel like a migrant. But I'm sensitive too, of course, of the opinion or the life experience of somebody who has had to go through something that is unspeakable (...) So (...) anyway, I recognise my privilege.

Respondents sometimes referred to very specific incidents that made them realise that they were privileged. Angeliki (31), who had moved from Greece to Belgium as a young child with her parents and identified as a "Greek who comes from Belgium", was made aware of her own privilege as she could 'pass' for Belgian and had never as such been subjected to xenophobia,

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[127] Quote translated from French.

as opposed to her parents and other marginalised groups.[128] She related an episode from her teenage years when a Belgian motorist told her father to "go back to his country":

> I had never heard this before. Because [Belgium] is my country, you see? And then I told myself: *"Oh yeah, for them, we don't speak French, we are not Belgian, we are from God knows where!"* (She laughs). And for a few seconds, I realised what it was like for all these Muslim people – who are visibly foreign – Because for me it's fine, I can pass as Belgian, but a Muslim girl who wears the headscarf... I realised that people must probably tell her all the time that she's not Belgian. While I have the advantage that, if I'm walking down the street, nobody's going to say: *"Look at this one!"* And I also have the advantage of speaking French without an accent, other than a Belgian one! (laughs). But this is not the case for my parents...[129]

Paola (40) also pointed to the hierarchisation of certain EU nationalities, remarking that unlike Eastern Europeans, Italians and Greeks were not discriminated against in Brussels (See 2.2.1.3).[130] Furthermore, other respondents – all of whom identified as migrants – called into question the 'expat/migrant' distinction that is often put forward in public discourses and regularly denounced by critical migration scholars and non-academic observers alike (See 1.2.3.3). In doing so, they stressed the irony of using the term 'expat', which was perceived to downplay the fact that they were *actually* migrants:

> (…) We tend to talk about ourselves as expats and I'm not really sure what it means, I guess it comes from *'expatrié'*, right, in French, which I don't know if it's a more polite word to say that you are an immigrant (he laughs). Maybe the posher version of immigrants! (Luigi, 44)

> (…) Well, they call us 'expats' but still, I think it's just a type of, you know, migration. I usually say also to my friends in Italy that I consider myself a "luxury migrant" because I just left the country because I wanted to, not because I needed to by all costs... (Adriana, 39)

Others shared their own interpretation of who are considered 'expats' in public discourses. Ioanna (35) explained that "there is this distinction that people draw between 'expats' and 'migrants', basically where expats are migrants with more qualifications". Similarly, Pietro (27) was aware that being considered an 'expat' made him a *desirable* migrant, less prone to become a target of discrimination:

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[128] 'Passing' takes place when someone from a 'minority group' (usually a racial or ethnic minority) is perceived as a member of the 'majority group' (due, for instance, to their physical appearance or their accent).
[129] Quote translated from French.
[130] Lafleur & Stanek (2017a), for instance, observed that although the integration of post-war migrants is generally portrayed as a success, newer immigration from Eastern and Central European countries has been painted in a more negative light.

(…) I think I can define myself as a highly skilled migrant, so when I move abroad, I do not necessarily feel targeted by, you know, xenophobic people. Also, wherever I go, I've always been lucky to find very good jobs, also quite well paid. So it's a different form of migration. Like, I'm an expat, I'm not a migrant. If you see what I'm saying? (Hut, 2024).

4.2.2.5. Reflecting upon one's cosmopolitan ideals

Amongst the many respondents who identified as 'internationals' (See 4.1.2.2), some felt that their cosmopolitan worldview made them more likely to accept and value otherness. Christos (53) suggested that people with an international background and cosmopolitan ideals were less likely to be consumed by "nationalist passions that many people who grow up in only one country end up having, depending on their education".[131] For Anastasia (55), cosmopolitanism primarily meant forming a community of like-minded individuals – regardless of national origin – who had developed certain values as a result of living abroad:

> (…) because [Brussels] is an international place, I feel more like a cosmopolitan. A European and a cosmopolitan. (…) I can feel well with people from everywhere, *if* they are the kind of people that [I] could [be in agreement] with. I even think that sometimes it's even easier for people who have an experience of living abroad, like yourself, or coming from anywhere, and having lived abroad anywhere. There are many elements that you are developing at that moment, that kind of relativisation, that kind of open-mindedness, that kind of... eagerness to accept things that would be different from you, and to cooperate, and to try to adapt also. There are so many things that create almost a group of people that are those cosmopolitans. And they can feel at ease among them, much more easily than even with people who come from their original culture, or just from the culture they have emigrated to. (…)

4.2.3. Conclusions

The range and complexity of answers to the question "do you identify as a migrant?" uncovered above confirms the fluidity of migrant identities and of migrant self-identification, as well as the continued relevance of migration categories in respondents' everyday discourses. Besides

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[131] This is consistent with the findings of two studies conducted by the NGO 'More in Common' about attitudes towards immigration and refugees in Greece and Italy, where the population segments that were described as 'open' to immigration and asylum were respectively classified as 'Greek Multiculturals' and 'Italian Cosmopolitans' (See 2.1.3.). Greek Multiculturals generally believe in the economic and cultural benefits of immigration and are particularly welcoming towards refugees. However, they tend to deem Islam incompatible with Greek society (Dixon et al., 2019). Italian Cosmopolitans are similarly convinced of the positive economic and cultural contribution of immigrants. They are likely to be involved in refugee solidarity activities or to support search and rescue efforts by NGOs active the Mediterranean (Dixon et al., 2018).

the positive effects of migrant self-identification on respondents' attitudes towards immigration and immigrants, this section also revealed several other ways in which respondents expressed solidarity with other migrants (whether they identified or not as migrants; See Figure 18).

4.3. The mirage of diversity

As demonstrated above, only a minority of respondents reported facing challenges that negatively affected their experiences and sense of belonging in the city. The remaining respondents felt that they formed an integral part of a community of foreigners – or migrants – which could be perceived as a defining feature of Brussels' international character, sometimes romanticising their experience. Murat (36), for instance, referred to it as a "beautiful cosmopolitan mix". Yet, two general trends amongst respondents also put this international lifestyle into perspective. First, their strong attachment to their homeland demonstrated the continued importance of national belonging, even in diverse contexts. Second, intergroup contacts amongst the diverse members of Brussels' population remained limited to *certain* social contacts. I now analyse the extent to which respondents' experiences and perceptions of diversity in Brussels impact their contacts with other (migrant and non-migrant) groups, and, ultimately, their othering discourses regarding these groups.

4.3.1. Strong ongoing ties with the country of origin

Literature on diasporas and transnationalism includes numerous case studies that demonstrate the countless ways in which migrants develop and maintain ties with their home country before, during and after migration (See 1.4.2). The transnational space connects the place of origin with that of transit, or destination, through certain social practices (Bauböck & Faist, 2010). In addition to claiming their strong international exposure and identities, most respondents across all national samples had maintained particularly strong ties with their country of origin while in Brussels. Although this can partly be explained by my sampling strategy – which targeted individuals working and/or affiliated to national or regional-based organisations (See 3.1.3) – respondents spontaneously exhibited forms of attachment that went beyond the context of their employment. These links manifested through several complementary transnational practices, summarised in Figure 21 below.

Figure 21. Overview of respondents' transnational practices.

01	02	03	04
Contact with relatives back home (online contact and physical visits)	Staying informed about politics and other developments	Maintaining cultural habits and traditions (e.g. language and food)	Engaging with co-nationals in Brussels (socially, professionally, culturally and/or politically)
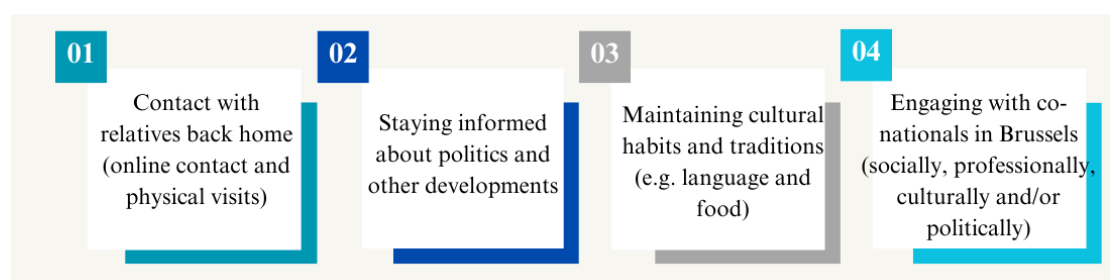
4.3.1.1.   Transnational practices

First, most respondents acknowledged keeping regular contact with their relatives and friends back home, which was usually sustained by regular physical visits to their home country or hometown. These visits generally took place over the holidays (Christmas, Orthodox Easter, summer break), but not exclusively. They were facilitated by the geographical proximity between Brussels and the respondents' countries of origin, particularly Italy.[132] Pietro (27) for instance, compared his regular flights between Brussels and Milan to "taking a flying bus", while others acknowledged that the development of low-cost air travel and of numerous flight options had played a significant role in allowing them to easily pop in and out of Brussels. Other Italians, such as Cristiana (57) and Luigi (44), felt that being able to drive back to Italy gave them a sense of physical and mental proximity with their country, contributing to erasing physical borders (something that was also facilitated by being in the Schengen Area):

> (…) I actually came to realise that we are not really far from Italy in reality (…) since I started driving to Italy, mentally it's actually much closer. So for me Brussels and Milan are actually two cities in basically almost like the same country, which is Europe in a way. You know, Italy is a long country. So actually, to drive all the way from the north to the south is more or less about the same as driving from Milan to Brussels, it's the same distance (Luigi, 44)

Arguably, respondents' ability to travel back and forth constitutes an additional dimension of privilege, as it requires both social networks and financial resources. Naturally, geographical proximity and EU citizenship also play a considerable role in this. Although respondents recognised that the travel restrictions and social distancing measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic (which was underway during most of my data collection) had

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[132] Due to the smaller physical distance separating Italy and Belgium, Italians tended to visit their home country more often (every couple of months, sometimes monthly) than their Greek and Turkish counterparts.

considerably disrupted their travel habits, several of my earlier interviewees – mostly Greeks – had taken advantage of the teleworking measures implemented by their employers to return to their hometown, sometimes conducting the interview from there.[133] Opting to go back to their country of origin rather than staying in Brussels during the pandemic further proves respondents' strong attachment to their homeland and relatives back home. Moreover, having the possibility to go back home – and thus benefit from material and emotional support from one's family – is an important coping mechanism in times of crisis (Bertoog & Koos, 2021). Respondents' accounts further revealed a certain nostalgia and ongoing place attachment vis-à-vis their country, region and/or city of origin (especially as it pertained to the weather, natural environment, and overall way of life). Returning home provided them with a sense of comfort.

In addition to physical visits, respondents – particularly those who had moved before the advent of social media – stressed the importance of online communications tools (such as WhatsApp, Facetime, or Zoom) to keep in touch with people back home. This was the case of Silvio (52) who had moved to Brussels in 1999 and explained that not being able to rely on these online tools at the beginning of his stay made him feel quite isolated at first:

> When I arrived in Brussels [in 1999], social networks were still not so widespread, we were really at the beginning of internet, and my experience of moving from Italy was in this respect really much more similar to the ones that migrants, *real* migrants, made in other periods of history than the current (…) experiences of moving, using Facebook to search for a house and to make new connections and... today I see it's much easier... (…) And I mention this point because I think that today, in relation to Italy, leveraging a number of tools like social networks, it's really helpful... You really don't need to be subscribed to an Italian newspaper in order to be well aware of what's going on in Italy. You don't need to write your weekly or monthly personal letter to your dearest friend in order to get a deep connection with him, because you can exchange easily through WhatsApp or through social networks. And this of course has been an incredible change in the way and also in the nature of keeping and nurturing your relation with your country of origin.

Similarly, respondents showed attachment to their home country through expressing clear return aspirations or considering doing back-and-forth between Belgium and their home country, either as active professionals or retirees. Others also owned property or had ongoing professional and/or academic commitments back home despite residing in Brussels.

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[133] Nine respondents (seven Greeks) conducted the interview from their home country.

Second, respondents also demonstrated ongoing ties with their country of origin by staying regularly informed about what was going on back home, notably politics. Naturally, this can largely be explained by the fact that most respondents worked for an organisation or were affiliated to a network that sought to support the (political, economic and/or cultural) interests of one's country or region of origin, and/or of their co-nationals on the international scene. Respondents usually relied on a variety of Italian, Greek and Turkish media sources, mostly through online media and satellite TV channels, to stay informed about events unfolding back home (See 6.1.2.1). Murat (36) explained that his preoccupation over the state of Turkish politics led him to "obsessively" follow the situation on Turkish newspapers and TV channels, "creating a certain illusion that [he lived] in Turkey". He later remarked that this need to keep abreast with what was going on back home could also apply to other members of the Turkish diaspora:

> I think this is quite a remarkable fact about Turkish diasporas, too. With the possibility to access Turkey via satellite TV, people from the diaspora feel detached from the country in which they live, but feel attached to Turkey, to their country of origin.[134]

This deep interest in homeland politics sometimes translated into a form of political engagement in Brussels, especially amongst Italian respondents. For instance, Paola (40) discussed her involvement with an organisation which sold agricultural products from land seized by the Italian government from Mafia-style organisations. Andrea (31), Luca (30) and Luigi (44) mentioned their affiliation to the Brussels-branch of an Italian Democratic Party party. Others, such as Eirini (53) also expressed their attachment to homeland politics by voting without fail (See 6.2.1.5).

Third, a significant number of research participants remained attached to their place of origin through keeping their cultural habits and traditions alive.[135] For one, speaking their home language on a daily basis, whether with their family, colleagues or friends, appeared vital. This sometimes included passing down their language to their children who were born in Belgium. Language transmission appeared central amongst Greek respondents, and sometimes led to dilemmas regarding choosing a school for their children in Brussels. After hesitating to enrol

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[134] Quote translated from French.
[135] This echoes Herbert Gans' notion of 'symbolic ethnicity', which he defined as "a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior" (Gans, 1979:9).

his children at the French school or the Greek section of the European school, Markos (61) eventually opted for the second option in order for them not to "forget their roots". Several younger Greek respondents appeared strongly attached to their culture and traditions. Angeliki (31), who had arrived in Belgium at a very young age, explained that in addition to attending bi-weekly Greek language classes until she was fourteen, she grew up watching Greek movies, listening to Greek music and reading Greek books thanks to her father's efforts. Ekaterina (24) who was born and raised in France from Greek-Cypriot parents had similarly attended weekly classes in Greek history, grammar and literature sponsored by the Greek Ministry of Education from kindergarten until high school, later claiming: "I've always been in love with my origins, and I've always sought to maintain this link".[136]

Respondents also often cited their attachment to certain culinary habits. Many of them reported regularly hanging out in Greek, Italian or Turkish restaurants, bars, cafes, and supermarkets in Brussels to be able to indulge in traditional dishes or beverages. Konstantina (23) explained that, "during Christmas, I was able to buy the traditional sweets that we eat in Greece. So this was a very efficient way to keep in touch with my country". Marco (43) and Can (24) both acknowledged finding "comfort" in cooking or eating traditional dishes while in Brussels, as it connected them with their homeland and brought back pleasant memories. Ekaterina's family – who was based in France – also owned several high-end restaurants specialising in Hellenic cuisine.

Other aspects of cultural attachment included religion, particularly amongst Greek respondents. They stressed the symbolic role of the Greek Orthodox religion in connecting the whole Hellenic community, regardless of their level of religiosity (Ekaterina, 24), as well as the arts (e.g. traditional music, dancing). Eirini (53) for instance, referred to the existence of sub-national 'clubs' in Brussels whose mission is to "keep alive [local] customs and traditions through celebrations and dancing and singing". Angeliki (31) had taken traditional Greek dancing classes until going to university. Deniz (42) also mentioned that since being outside of Turkey, she started going out to listen to Turkish music – something that she would never do back home, but which she later stressed gave her a "feeling of fake comfort" when feeling homesick:

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[136] Quote translated from French.

(…) there are also things about Turkey that I miss obviously, which I thought I would never miss! But when you're far away then, I think, you [develop] a nostalgia about the things which didn't mean much when you were there!

Interestingly, some respondents reconnected with their national culture later on in life, and their transnational practices were sometimes influenced by their life course. Silvio (52), who had arrived in 1999 and was now married to a Belgian, explained that he was more eager to stay informed about Italy and its culture now than when he first arrived – including as a way to transmit this cultural heritage to his Belgo-Italian children:

> Over time, the element of the Italian identity and culture became more and more precious to me. (…) When I arrived in Brussels, in the first ten years, I was almost careless about Italy. And today, I care much more than I could even possibly care before coming to Brussels. Today I am really very, very careful about everything coming from Italy, both in terms of economic or political chronicles, or in terms of cultural or human experiences and situations of Italy.

4.3.1.2. Engaging with co-nationals in Brussels

The fourth main way in which respondents kept ties with their country of origin consisted in maintaining relations with their co-nationals in Brussels through socio-professional, cultural, and political activities. Although respondents' social and professional circles were generally composed of a relatively balanced mix of co-nationals and internationals, they explained that meeting with their co-nationals was easier, given their numerical significance and due to the cultural similarities uniting them. Hanging out with co-nationals (or with other non-French speakers) was often seen as a means of overcoming language barriers in French (Ioanna, 35) and/or to cope with the fact that internationals "come and go" (Francesca, 32; Anita, 30). Ekaterina (24) was particularly enthusiastic about being able to find a sense of community that was not as strong in her native Paris:

> (…) In Brussels, I found myself (…) hanging out with the Greek and Cypriot community. In Brussels, I rediscovered community ties, *communautarisme* [community spirit], something that we don't really have in France, or at least that we're not supposed to have in a republican state. And I found that amazing![137]

Luigi (44) further described how the Italian community had become an essential support system for him:

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[137] Quote translated from French.

What also made it easy was the fact that here there is a large Italian community of people that have actually the same migratory history that I have, with whom I share the same kind of experience. And naturally for me, this became a network that I could sort of rely on for personal matters. So, in fact, a lot of my friends are Italian – most of the people I see outside of work are Italian.

These accounts validate previous research focused on the socio-economic integration process of 'new emigrants' (See 2.2.1.2). For instance, through interviews with newly-arrived Italian migrants in Paris in 2012-2013, Dubucs at al. (2017c) explored their sense of belonging to a specific generation of Italian emigrants bound by shared experiences (i.e. integration challenges in their place of destination) and representations (i.e. a lack of professional recognition in their country of origin). In a subsequent article, based on an online survey administered to over 500 respondents, the authors further analysed the integration patterns of these migrants in light of an 'integration in Italian circles index',[138] finding, amongst other things, that the longer respondents had been in Paris, the more likely they were to take part in Italian activities and institutions (Dubucs et al., 2017b).

In addition to their Italian/Greek/Turkish friends and colleagues in Brussels, respondents' national circles were often consolidated by the presence of family members (partners and/or children, but also siblings or cousins). As a result, their mother tongue, as their primary language of communication, was central to their daily lives in Brussels. These ongoing contacts and this sense of community sometimes drove them to establish social or professional networks or associations that were focused on the interests and needs of their co-nationals. An even larger number of respondents were involved in such community-based organisations or networks as volunteers, members, or administrators (See 2.2.2.2 and Appendix 2).

Given my sampling criteria (See 3.1.3), it must be stressed that research participants were contacted and selected because of their affiliation to a certain national organisation, network or association which represented the interests of their place of origin (e.g. embassies, consulates, national or regional EU delegations, chambers of commerce, cultural institutions, business and social networks or associations). It was therefore predictable that most respondents would engage with other Italians, Greeks or Turks on an almost daily basis in their professional and/or

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[138] This index is composed of the five following indicators: participating in Paris Italian associations, using expat blogs, going to Italian restaurants, being registered at the Italian consulate, voting for the consulate elections.

social circles. Perhaps more striking is the extent to which respondents predominantly connected with *current* generations of Italians, Greeks and Turks rather than with Belgians of Italian, Greek and Turkish descent, despite their numerical significance in the Belgian context.[139] This shows that, in addition to nationality, respondents' social connections often appeared driven by class considerations (i.e. a similar social and/or educational background. As explained by Murat (36):

> The people that I socialise with are in majority Turks (…). But Turks from my profile mostly. In terms of education. Because in Turkey, education matters for social ranking. They are not the Turks from the diaspora. They are not the Turks from the Turkish neighbourhood. They are essentially diplomats, or people who came like me, as expats.[140]

This serves as further evidence that diasporas do not form a homogeneous bloc but are composed of individuals with manifold profiles, backgrounds, and interests. Indeed, many respondents shared the feeling of forming a distinct community of co-nationals who shared many cultural similarities and interests (See 4.3.2).

4.3.2. Close yet far: The case of Brussels' 'bubbles'

Even though many research participants put forward their international identity and lifestyle in the context of Brussels, a city portrayed as the epitome of diversity and cosmopolitanism, they remained strongly attached to their homeland through various transnational practices, showing the continued importance of national belonging, even in diverse contexts. Furthermore, their intergroup contacts remain limited to *certain* social contacts. This took shape in two main ways: respondents' limited interactions with Belgians (4.3.2.1), and the coexistence of different communities (or 'bubbles') which was often presented by respondents as a downside of Brussels' multicultural environment (4.3.2.2). In some cases, these limits provided a fertile ground for the emergence of specific othering discourses (4.3.2.3).

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[139] A minority (of Greek and Turkish respondents) however, acknowledged that they were in continuous contact with previous migrant generations through their work or personal life and were eager to move past those differences, stressing their shared identity. According to Eirini (53): "(...) you see that [second and third generation Greeks] have had different experiences than what I've had, or other colleagues in the European Union. (...) It's a different world. It shouldn't be. This is why me and my husband, we have quite a lot of social contact with those people (...). We just have other experiences, and maybe there were other reasons that brought us to Belgium, but after all, we're all Greeks!".

[140] Quote translated from French.

4.3.2.1. Limited interactions with Belgians

Over half of respondents across all nationalities observed that their interactions with Belgians were limited, sometimes regretting their partial 'integration' into Belgian society. A dozen respondents acknowledged having "many" Belgian friends or having Belgian life partners, especially amongst those who had been in Belgium for longer periods of time. Others reported having children who were going to Belgian schools, being involved in local politics, or having obtained Belgian nationality.[141] Yet, the vast majority of respondents' interactions with Belgians in both their personal and professional lives were limited, or superficial at best, concerning, for instance, contact with landlords, civil servants, and parents of their children's schoolmates. Some even joked that Belgians "did not exist" (Dimitra, 22; Raffaele, 42). After welcoming the fact that living in Brussels had allowed her to meet and form meaningful relations with like-minded international professionals, Ioanna (35) stated that there were few reasons and motivations to socialise with locals and feel concerned about the daily realities of the country more generally. As she explained:

> (...) it's very interesting, the sense of belonging in Brussels: On the one hand, you do feel that you belong to this group of people [international people], but you do not belong to the broader context of this country. Like, you're in the country but you're living parallel lives. (…) You know, (…) all these people (…) live and breathe [the same air] in the [same] country but they don't really know much about [each other] because they don't really have to, right? Because if you do not interact with Belgians, like, how would you know what is going on in the country? And that is a negative.

The lack of opportunities to interact with Belgians was often explained by different residential choices and practices – with Belgians often perceived to live outside of Brussels or in different municipalities than foreign nationals. Respondents often justified their lack of interest in Belgian current affairs by the country's lack of overarching national identity. By extension, Brussels was perceived to be neglected by Belgians, turning it into a sort of "non-place" (Andrea, 31) which lacked a defining culture or identity. For Luigi (44): "this city probably

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[141] The importance of the life course must be stressed here. Silvio (52), for instance, arrived in 1999 and only started to get more involved in Belgian life after getting married to a Belgian: "Of course there's been a big shift between before and after getting married. Because before being married, I was truly part of the international folk community of Brussels (…) And I was really enjoying this mixture of people, and cultures. And then, once I got married, of course I've been much more focused on the Belgian community because my wife is Belgian and so I got introduced to my wife's family and friends. (…) Of course, for professional reasons, I'm in contact with international people on a daily basis, so I keep cultivating my openness to the international community on a professional basis. But maybe on the personal one, I'm more focused on the Belgian community now."

belongs to many people, but it doesn't really belong to anyone and not even to the Belgians". After suggesting that the Flemish and Walloons – Belgium's two main linguistic and cultural communities – identified more with their respective regions' capitals or main cities, he added:

> (...) sometimes you have the feeling that Brussels is not so well taken care of because nobody is caring so much about it. Because there isn't this sense of cultural identification with the city as being "our city" or "my city", and "we are proud". It's probably not this sort of cultural pride that you have in other European capitals (...).

Others – such as Osman (36) – also pointed out that the Belgian population itself had gone through an important cultural mix due to previous waves of immigration, which further complicated the task of defining the so-called 'Belgian identity':

> (…) we see two families who are Belgian, but when we ask them: "Do you support Belgium in the World Cup?", they say: "Ah! My grandmother is German, my father is Portuguese... I support Portugal!", you know? (laughs) Even them, they don't [perceive themselves as] 100% Belgian, so I think It's quite difficult to find a real Belgian, here in Brussels!

4.3.2.2.   Navigating 'Brussels' bubbles'

Research participants perceived that self-segregation constituted one of the main limits of Brussels' multicultural environment. Indeed, symbolic boundaries – which many respondents spontaneously referred to as "bubbles" –[142] remained between migrants as well as between migrants and non-migrants.

Such boundaries could be formed based on national belonging (i.e., the Italian, Greek, Turkish, as well as the Belgian 'bubbles'; See 4.3.1.2). Indeed, most respondents across all national samples shared the feeling of forming a distinct community of co-nationals who shared many cultural similarities and interests, resulting in a strong sense of ingroup solidarity. Importantly, there were clear internal boundaries *within* national groups, as respondents (who were all first-generation migrants, apart from one Belgo-Turkish respondent) often perceived that the

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[142] Privileged migration scholar, Ann-Meike Fechter, mobilised the 'bubble' metaphor to refer to the "floating character" and "double-remoteness" of expatriates, vis-à-vis their home and host countries. In an ethnographic case study of Euro-American expatriates in Indonesia, she argued that expatriates' transnational spaces "do not exhibit openness and fluidity, but seem to reinforce boundaries, reintroduce traditions and insist on differences" (2012:49). Driezen et al. (2023) similarly drew upon the notion of 'symbolic boundaries' to show how young people in diverse contexts distinguish social groups along religious and ethnic lines, explicitly or implicitly navigating their belonging to one group or the other.

'historical' communities of Italian, Greek and Turkish immigrants in Belgium and their descendants constituted an additional, separate community. Contacts between generations were essentially limited to special occasions or cultural events (such as elections or national holiday celebrations). Distinctions between 'new' and 'old' migrants were largely perceived to be based upon work experience, migration drivers, level of educational attainment, mindset, integration into the majority Belgian society, or residential choices, and were particularly salient amongst Turkish respondents (See 4.3.2.3). Regional belonging was another pertinent marker of ingroup solidarity amongst nationals of countries that were deemed culturally similar. Indeed, Italians, Greek and Turkish respondents sometimes stressed their cultural affinities with "Southern Europeans" (Alexandros, 62), "Mediterranean nationalities" or, in the case of some Greek respondents, with the "Hellenic community" (Ekaterina, 24, Alexia 25, Nikos, 29).[143] Some of them, however, stressed that these friendships were driven by common interests, a shared professional background or matching personalities, rather than purely being a question of nationality.

In addition, and perhaps more importantly, many research participants mentioned the existence of the so-called 'Brussels' bubble' – sometimes referred to as the 'EU/Euro/European', 'international', 'cosmopolitan', or 'expat' bubble (See also Foret, 2022). It was generally described as a community of foreigners from diverse national backgrounds (predominantly European/Western however), specific social backgrounds (i.e. mid to upper middle classes), characterised by common social, cultural and professional practices (e.g. typically working in international affairs, socialising in multinational circles,[144] fluent in English) and a sense of shared identity. Rather than being strictly based on nationality, the 'EU bubble' also follows class lines. Indeed, many respondents explained that they valued their interactions with other "highly skilled", "educated", "ambitious" individuals who were part of this community.

Interestingly, respondents were sometimes split between a sense of comfort induced by belonging to a community, and a certain uneasiness regarding this form of separateness and *entre-soi*. About a fifth of respondents admitted that they deliberately avoided their co-

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[143] In Greece, the ancient notion of Hellenism advances a universal, yet ethnic-based, conceptualisation of nationhood, allowing Greeks who self-identify as 'Hellenes' to perceive Greek Cypriots as belonging to the same People (due to a shared language, culture and religion) despite inhabiting a distinct territory (Bruneau, 2001).

[144] For instance, several respondents referred to 'Place Lux', an infamous afterwork spot for EU bureaucrats. Alexandros (62) was particularly critical of it, bluntly referring to it as "a ghetto of Parliamentarians and assistants and all those who revolve around that" (quote translated from French).

nationals in Brussels – or had at least done so at the beginning of their stay – as they were actively trying to get out of their comfort zone and get a more international experience. For instance, Emanuele (41) explained that he did not want to "create Little Italy in Brussels", while Markos (61) and Alexandros (62) mentioned disliking or "[not wanting] to live in a Greek ghetto".

Respondents such as Iraklis were aware that while being part of a community can provide a sense of harmony and security to its members, it can also contribute to maintaining divides between existing groups:

> (…) the EU bubble, the cosmopolitan bubble, is so big and dynamic that it absorbs you. So, it can keep you alive and happy, and with your family and friends, and, you know, with every [EU] accession it's expanding. So, you don't feel the need to go really outside this. That is positive and negative. The negative aspect, at the same time, is that you're less in contact with Belgian society because you're happy in your bubble, so why would you need to go further? And I think, while originally, the Belgian bubble was really distinct from the European bubble, now there are affinities, you know, there are areas where there is contact. But they're still separate bubbles, we have to admit that. So, the Greeks have these two bubbles [current and previous migrants], Belgians have another bubble, the EU has another bubble (chuckles). And they all coexist, at the same time.

Many also highlighted the limits of this international bubble, describing it as "suffocating" (Antonis, 41), as well as overwhelming and superficial at times. Rhea (26), for instance, reported feeling "lost in multiculturalism". Silvio (52) similarly acknowledged that although diversity could be "exciting and enriching" at first, one was then forced to "make a synthesis of all this diversity". He further argued that it could "become dispersive and even impoverishing because it (...) does not allow you to go in-depth, both in terms of human relations and of the knowledge of other cultures and other habits". Likewise, Rhea (26) remarked that "you can't know every foreign culture". Other respondents echoed the feeling that they were merely scratching the surface of Brussels' diversity, acknowledging that they mostly formed meaningful and sustainable ties with other Europeans or internationals from similar socio-professional backgrounds, but were in practice insufficiently exposed to non-Europeans. This was also reflected in the geographical distribution of these different groups within the city. Pietro (27) described Brussels as "clustered", which considerably limited contact between migrant groups (See also Semyonov & Glikman, 2009):

> I live in Ixelles and all my friends live in the south of the city, maybe Saint-Gilles or very close *communes*. And there are parts of the city where I simply never go. So, yeah, that's probably

it. (…) the segmentation of the city into different districts where you mostly have Europeans, where you mostly have other types of migrants from North Africa or the Middle East, you see.

Furthermore, many respondents seemed to equate diversity with the mere exposure to a variety of foreign languages and cuisines rather than to the building of meaningful relationships with people from different nationalities and/or cultures. As a result, diversity was often experienced passively rather than through active and meaningful intercultural exchanges and dialogue.

4.3.2.3. Othering discourses

In addition to discourses of empathy (See 4.2.2), research participants also embraced othering discourses (albeit to a much lesser extent), (un)intentionally stressing their perceived deservingness vis-à-vis other migrant groups.[145]

Cultural gatekeeping and Islamophobia

Reflecting upon the difficulties that made up their own integration journey, several respondents expressed a normative understanding of what integration efforts should look like, with the idea that because *they* had integrated, others should too, if they wanted to be accepted, amounting to a form of 'gatekeeping'.[146] Instead of conceiving of integration as a bi-dimensional process entailing complementary efforts on the part of both newcomers and locals, these respondents – a sub-group of Greek respondents in their sixties who had typically been in Belgium for several decades and had often acquired Belgian citizenship – tended to place the onus of integration on the shoulders of migrants. Markos (61), for instance, who had been in Belgium since 2004, felt that such efforts amounted to respecting the local 'way of life' and speaking the natives' language. Respect for Christian values and traditions, which they perceived as the absolute norm in the European context, played a key role in determining migrants' deservingness. As a result, these respondents often depicted Muslim migrants as trying to "impose" their religion:

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[145] I understand othering as overt and covert discourses and practices of exclusion which lie at the intersection between xenophobia, racism, sexism, classism, and islamophobia, amongst others (See 1.4.3).
[146] Gatekeeping is a form of control over someone's access to a defined social or cultural space. Although settled immigrants are generally thought to contribute to facilitating 'chain migration' by helping prospective immigrants settle (particularly those from the same country or region of origin), they may also serve as 'gatekeepers' and oppose these arrivals (See for instance Böcker, 1994; Politi et al., 2020b).

(…) there is a danger there, because most of these guys, the immigrants, either coming from Turkey to Greece, or before, most of them they don't integrate. And they try to impose on you. [In a previous job] Every December I used to send a message to everyone saying "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year". And after some years, you were obliged to say: "Happy Festive Days", and I found it wrong. I don't want to impose on anyone, but Europe is Christian. When I go to the Middle East, I respect their religion. If I sit with people who do not drink alcohol, I will not drink alcohol. Because I don't want to provoke them. At home, I drink alcohol, at home I say "Merry Christmas". So, this is a problem that we have in Belgium. (…) the major problem is not that these guys come, the problem is that these guys don't integrate. For me, that's the bottom line. (…) The major problem with immigration is when people do not integrate in the local society. And [do not] respect the rules of the local society. (Markos, 61)

This small group of respondents formulated essentialist and Islamophobic remarks about Muslim communities and particularly women wearing the *hijab*, constructing them as both a cultural and demographic threat. Respondents sometimes generalised them as "Turks and Arabs" or "people from the Maghreb", and blamed them for petty crime, anti-civic conduct, an unwillingness to integrate, for "imposing" their culture and creating "ghettos", amongst others.[147] Several respondents were particularly critical about the fact that Brussels – and sometimes Europe more generally – was on the brink of a "clash of civilisations" (Gerasimos, 68), as illustrated by the following quotes:

(…) You know, when you walk on Anspach Boulevard [in Brussels' city centre], it feels more like Casablanca than Brussels! And I don't like this! I don't like it because if I wanted to live in Casablanca, I would be in Casablanca, not in Brussels! This is too... unicultural, you see? I'm tired of seeing veiled women crossing the street from every corner, you see. I do not like the veil, I'm against it, you see... frankly, it hurts me. It is the same in the metro: I often see veiled women on the line that I use (...) this is not multicultural in my view. I like multiculturalism, but not this, you see. It becomes a bit monotonous. (Alexandros, 62) (Hut, 2024)[148]

(…) In Europe, we don't know [how to integrate diversity]. We are *too* diverse. And I'm afraid that (…) we may experience a clash of cultures, of civilisations. As [Samuel] Huntington has written. I'm afraid that we are close to this scenario, because when I'm in Brussels and I see other cultures next to me, who are provocative, they do not try to come closer to me. When I say to me, [I mean] the Europeans. With Belgium, we have the same culture, more or less – and allow me to say, in all modesty – which is based on Greek values, Greco-Roman values. OK? These people are different. Dialogue is not a concept they accept. We are people of dialogue,

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[147] Apart from voicing criticism against people who were perceived as Muslim, one respondent also specifically blamed Polish workers for creating a public nuisance, as shown by the following quote: "There is also another cluster of people which I see a lot: Polish workers. They work a lot. I know. But they have this habit and that comes from their own country. They drink in the streets. Which is not a problem, but then they start urinating on the street, they leave the cans on the streets..." (Marco, 43)

[148] Quote translated from French.

we listen to the other. They have their own beliefs and they want to impose them on others. This is problematic I'm afraid. (…) And they are becoming the majority, certainly, because they come more and more quicker than we do.

EH: So, it's mostly a negative thing for you?

Gerasimos: I think so, yes. I don't speak about the diversity within the Union, I speak about the diversity in Belgium, OK? And I speak about *this* diversity in *all* of Europe, which is [becoming] a question mark because of this massive entrance of foreign people. (Gerasimos, 68)

These examples of cultural gatekeeping, which present Muslim migrants and non-migrants as undesirable 'others' confirm the relevance of intergroup conflict theory, and more specifically, of symbolic or cultural threats, as well as the increasingly visible intersection between race and religion (particularly Islam) in the European context (See 1.3.1.2 and 2.2.1.3).

Boundary drawing

Another recurring example of migrant othering could be found amongst the Turkish sample and is reminiscent of 'boundary drawing strategies' observed by Yanaşmayan (2016). She had indeed demonstrated how highly skilled Turkish migrants in Amsterdam, London and Barcelona

> (…) mobilise an individual 're-positioning strategy' that allows them to carve out a space for themselves in the societies without challenging existing 'ethnic hierarchies'. This re-positioning manifests itself in two parallel behaviours: (1) encumbering other Muslim communities – be it second-generation Turkish or Moroccan or Pakistani – with the label of problematic community and homogenising them through attribution of 'unwanted' conducts and (2) protecting the individual identity by re-defining its boundaries emphasising specifically, secularism, education level and/or urbanism (2016: 2042-2043).

Boundary drawing enabled respondents to present themselves as the opposite of their co-nationals whose behaviour was not aligned with (a certain vision of) European ideals. Indeed, half of the Turkish respondents (n=6) specifically stressed one or more of the following characteristics to describe themselves: secular, pro-European, educated, urban and, sometimes, opposition party supporters. In doing so, they actively distinguished themselves from the first, second and third generation Turkish migrants in Brussels who they generally depicted as being religious, poorly educated, pro-AKP, and originally from a rural background, and perceived as the 'genuine' Turkish migrants. Zeynep (36), for instance, explained that she initially avoided explicitly revealing their Turkish identity to non-Turks upon arriving in Brussels, as she was

wary of being associated with negative stereotypes used to characterise "the Turkish people in Schaerbeek":

> Besides those Turkish [colleagues], I didn't go to like, Schaerbeek, I didn't want to really be recognised as Turkish. If someone knows... if someone has been in Turkey before, or they have some Turkish friends, they are more open-minded, but even in Place Luxembourg, I met with someone, and after he learned that I was Turkish, he ran away! So, in general, if you don't have a really qualified, like, education, and like, qualified position, in my opinion, they consider you as the Turkish people in Schaerbeek, and you need to really justify, or spend some time, to show that actually we are almost the same [as non-Turks].

Samet (59), whose business was located in Schaerbeek, explained how this community of "third generation" Turkish immigrants in Brussels differed from the "executive-level" and "educated" Turkish people he was more used to interacting with outside of work, describing them as "fluent in French, but still keeping the Turkish values, quite religious. Quite supportive of Erdoğan! (laughs) And quite conservative, let me put it that way". Ayça (31), further explained that Turkish people in Brussels established a distinction between "Turkish expats" who, like her, "were born and raised in Turkey, and came here either for undergrad, or grad studies, or for work" and the *Gurbetçi*, namely the former guestworkers "who did not come for intellectual reasons but for economic reasons", and their children. She went on to describe the differences between these groups and the types of negative characteristics associated with them:

> (…) we see a remarkable difference between the two groups (…) also, in Turkey, the *Gurbetçi* people are not really liked. So, if you were raised in Turkey, you would have a negative idea about the [Turkish] people [living in Belgium]. And you come here with prejudice, this is for sure. Only after coming here, if you spare some time to get to know them better, then you might, like, fight your prejudices, you know? (…) I wouldn't say the prejudice and the negative connotation is totally wrong, by the way. But I really appreciate the effort to get to know them better. (…)
> EH: Could you give me examples of the stereotypes that are used to describe the *Gurbetçi*?
> Ayça: Well, to start with, they are not educated, the families. And even the children, most of them, which is a pity, but unfortunately this is the case – so second, third generation – do not have a university degree. And this is like, really unbelievable for us Turkish people, because in Turkey, going to university is almost the only way, if you want to have a "proper" life, if you have ideals.

4.3.3. Conclusions

Brussels' highly multinational and multicultural context does not necessarily lead to meaningful intergroup contact between migrant groups, as well as between migrants and non-migrants. On the contrary, many respondents regretted that this diverse environment strongly encouraged the creation of close-knit national-cultural or class-based communities. These sometimes resulted in othering discourses and practices towards perceived 'outgroups', namely: gatekeeping and boundary drawing.

4.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed how migrant self-identification (or lack thereof) amongst privileged migrants influenced their attitudes towards other migrants in general, further teasing out the extent to which reflexivity around their own privilege could generate intra-migrant solidarity. The wide range of answers to the question "do you identify as a migrant?" (see Figure 18) demonstrates the complexity and fluidity of migrant identities, as well as the relevance of 'privileged migrants' as categories of practice and analysis. My findings also confirm the key role of reflexivity on respondents' perceptions of migration and diversity more generally. By providing an opportunity to reflect on these questions, the interviews uncovered several discourses of empathy (see Figure 19). However, one must avoid drawing a deterministic relationship between migrant identification and empathy. Indeed, recognising one's privilege(s) plays an equally – if not more – important function in driving compassion and solidarity than formally identifying or not as a migrant.

I have also analysed the extent to which research participants' experiences of diversity (notably their intergroup contacts) transformed their perceptions of migration in general. Overall, respondents' position as privileged migrants positively impacted their lived experiences in Brussels and perceptions of diversity. Yet, my data indicates that Brussels' multinational and multicultural context does not necessarily lead to meaningful intergroup contact. More specifically, respondents' interactions with Belgians, non-EU nationals, and co-nationals from previous emigration episodes, were extremely limited in practice, exacerbating symbolic boundaries between them, and sometimes leading to othering discourses. These findings thus

bring nuance to idealised representations of Brussels as a cosmopolitan 'melting pot', presenting it instead as a "patchwork" reflecting a "juxtaposition of different cultural elements from different times, from different communities" (Luigi, 44). Whilst class and national-cultural belonging appeared as a strong marker of ingroup solidarity amongst the members of the so-called 'EU bubble', certain migrants and other marginalised groups (such as Muslims, or previous generations of Greek, Italian and Turkish migrants) were sometimes actively constructed as 'others' due to their belonging to a different national, ethno-racial, religious, class, citizenship, or migration category.

These findings put into question the assumption that multicultural environments and advantageous socio-economic positions breed tolerance and acceptance of people's differences. They can serve as a first step towards understanding how prejudice develops amongst respondents and further impacts their threat perceptions and attitudes towards migrants, in the country of destination, *as well as in the country of origin* (as we will see in the following chapter).

Chapter 5: Privileged migrants' perceptions of migration in the country of origin

5.0. Introduction

> (…) the thing that strikes me the most is that, well, when we used to use the word 'migration' as a Greek, it automatically meant migration *to* somewhere else *from* Greece. Traditionally, you know, you said 'migration': Aah, okay, we talk about the US, New York, Australia, you know? So (…) *exporting* people. So, I think that was a big shock, to some extent, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that we saw the first *immigrants*, people coming *to* Greece to find work and jobs, you know, and people were always surprised, saying: "*We leave Greece to get better jobs, so who possibly wants to come here to get a better job?*" (Iraklis)

The above quote illustrates some of the questions that arise when a country experiences a 'migration turnaround' (King, 2000), effectively turning from a country of *emigration* into a country of *immigration*. In the present chapter, I explore how my respondents – as emigrants – perceive their country's relatively newfound position as countries of immigration and react to prominent migration-related discourses and policies. This chapter addresses my thesis' third research sub-question, namely: *How did the growing (political and mediatic) salience of immigration in Italy, Greece and Turkey influence respondents' perceptions of migration back home?* In order to answer this question, I have asked all 54 of my research participants to express what first came to their mind when thinking about migration in the context of their home country. I deliberately kept this question vague so that respondents could choose which events, situations, migrant profiles or phenomena were the most relevant to them, and frame the conversation following their own subjective understanding of migration. Additionally, I have asked them follow-up questions regarding the framing of migration as a 'crisis', the overall hospitality of the Italian, Greek, and Turkish societies as key immigrant-receiving countries, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and migration-related debates (See Appendix 3).

5.1. Reacting to common migration-related discourses

Upon analysing my interview transcripts, I identified five prevalent migration-related discourses, or narratives, which respondents referenced to discuss migration in the context of their country of origin. I broadly categorise the first three discourses as migrant othering discourses and the remaining two as migrant solidarity discourses (See Figure 22 below), although some nuances may apply (See 6.3).[149]

5.1.1. Migration as 'a threat'

Integrated threat theory, which posits that group members' support or opposition to migration lies in economic competition (material threat) and/or cultural competition (symbolic threat), has been central to studies of intergroup relations and attitudes towards immigration (See 1.1.1). Discourses depicting migration as an economic, cultural or security threat are extremely relevant to the Italian, Greek and Turkish contexts.[150]

5.1.1.1. Migration as an economic threat

Unsurprisingly, since respondents lived abroad and were socio-economically privileged, they never reported feeling personally threatened by migrants on an economic level. Yet, they were well acquainted with discourses depicting migrants as posing an economic threat, often using this argument to justify their co-nationals' hostility towards migrants. In particular, many respondents felt that migration could not be dissociated from larger internal issues at play in their country of origin, such as unemployment.[151] Ioannis (25), like many others, believed that migration had exacerbated ongoing socio-economic pressures in their country of origin:

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[149] In a recent working paper, de Haas (2024) similarly describes four dominant migration discourses (namely: the 'mass migration' narrative, the 'migration threat' narrative, the 'migrant victim' narrative and the 'migration celebration' narrative), which all show similarities with the five discourses presented here.

[150] See for instance: Abdelhady, 2019; Ambrosini, 2019; De Coninck et al., 2020; Dennison & Dražanová, 2018; Dixon et al., 2018; Dixon et al., 2019; Fouskas, 2019.

[151] Despite seemingly decent macroeconomic indicators, Italy, Greece and Turkey have not been spared by the global economic crisis, and social inequalities have reached critical levels in the past decade. In 2019 (the year my research started), their unemployment rate were estimated at 9.88%, 17.3% and 13.68% respectively. These rates are even higher when considering youth unemployment, which reached 29,4%, 35% and 25.1% in 2020 (CIA Factbook). Despite its economic growth and dynamic economy, Turkey has been dealing with growing economic instability since the 2016 coup attempt and the 2018 currency recession (Hadi et al., 2023).

I think the migrant crisis that hit Greece came into a time where life in Greece, for the average Greek person, was already difficult. And I think in part due to the inaction of Europe and insufficient support for us, (…) it wasn't enough for people. They just couldn't support themselves. How can they support migrants that seem to be non-stopping, that do not stop coming to their borders? So I think, the economic situation in Greece and, in general, the crisis that has plagued Greece for such a long time, almost ten years, played an integral part in not being as hospitable as we used to be in the past, I think. Social and economical problems exacerbated the situation...

For most respondents, this grim domestic context was central to understanding natives' attitudes – and supposed resentment – towards incoming migrants, who were perceived to be favoured over the native population, amounting to a form of 'welfare chauvinism' (Andersen & Bjørklund, 1990). As a result, respondents regularly cited common (mis)perceptions related to the economic impacts of migration, such as the idea that migrants "steal" natives' jobs, abuse the welfare system, drive tourists away, feed inflation, fuel the black market, or contribute insufficiently to the economy. Several respondents acknowledged that the economic crisis that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic had further increased hostile discourses (See 5.1.1.4). Although these narratives were largely criticised and sometimes debunked, this was not always the case. Indeed, several Turkish respondents felt that Syrians had benefited from "unfair" (Osman, 36) differential treatment, which could be considered as the leading cause of anti-immigrant sentiment (as opposed to cultural reasons). Zeynep (36), who had worked on an international project in the Southern Turkish towns of Hatay and Gaziantep, near the Syrian border, claimed that she had witnessed cases of fraud by Syrian camp dwellers, criticising how the aid and welfare systems were abused at the expense of Turkish nationals (See also 6.3.2):

I know this from the project, (…) they would provide some food cards. And [Syrians] were going to Hatay and saying that their name was like Mustafa, and saying they have three children, a wife, and getting five cards. And then they would go to Antep and say "*I'm Kemal, and I have two kids*", so there were these types of things. (…) And they were staying in the camps in Hatay, and they [were prioritised] since they were refugees. But when I was there, I lived with family friends, and one of them was pregnant, and she was in hospital with her husband. But a refugee came from the camp, by ambulance, and she had priority over a Turkish citizen. So there were some rules not really logical at the time.

5.1.1.2. Migration as a cultural and demographic threat

Several Greek and Turkish respondents were concerned that migration could pose a *cultural* threat for their country of origin. This group of respondents corresponds more or less to those who were hostile to Muslim minorities and pointed to the limits of diversity in Brussels (See 4.3.2.3). They generally felt that the greater presence and visibility of migrants in their country of origin (in particular black migrants, or those perceived as Arab and/or Muslim,[152] who were deemed culturally different from the so-called 'majority population') transformed the core identity of Greek and Turkish societies as a whole).[153] Due to a restrictive understanding of the defining elements of their national identity and culture (i.e. stressing the Christian roots of Greece, or the differences between Turkish and Arabic populations despite their shared history and religious proximity; See 2.1.3), they sometimes blamed newcomers for a lack of integration efforts, notably through "creating ghettos" (Markos, 61). Several Turkish respondents observed that the ratio between Syrians and natives was decreasing in the country's South-Eastern provinces, while some Greek respondents felt that the population of the small Aegean islands could rightfully feel threatened by the arrival of foreigners from distant countries and cultures. Several Turkish respondents referred to their personal experience returning to Istanbul and noticing transformations in the demographic composition of certain neighbourhoods, like the famous Taksim square and İstiklal Avenue, which they described as now full of Syrian-owned shops and Arabic signs. Ayça (31), was particularly worried about such changes, suggesting that the European character of the city was fading away:

> The change in the demography in Turkey. (…) as someone who is faced towards Europe and the EU, this is something that I am not happy about, to be honest with you. (…) with regards both to the people who move to Turkey because of the migrant crisis and also tourists who come to Istanbul in these last years. It changed *so* much. Like, before, when I was in Istanbul, when I was going to high school or university, we could see much more European tourists than tourists from the East of Turkey let's say. (…) There are more and more Arabic people living in Turkey now. Living and visiting. Visiting Turkey very often, so it feels like they live there! They really visit very often, and in big numbers. Um, this is something that I'm not very happy

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[152] 'Arab' or 'Muslim' identities are often externally assigned and do not always match the way individuals self-identify (See 1.3.1.2). I use the term 'Arab/Muslim' to demonstrate how these terms were often conflated in the discourse of my respondents and how they can be used to essentialise and 'other' people from North African or Middle Eastern descent, although they may not necessarily identity as Arabs, nor as Muslims.

[153] Since independence, nationhood in Italy, Greece and Turkey has been based on conceptions of a homogeneous population, be it in terms of ethnicity, language or religion. As such, so-called 'majority populations' in Italy, Greece and Turkey are respectively Italian-speaking Roman Catholic Christians, Greek-speaking Greek Orthodox, and Turkish-speaking Sunni Muslims. Each country however counts significant ethnic, linguistic and/or religious minorities, such as Kurds in Turkey (20% of the total population, Berkowitz & Mügge, 2014).

about – it feels like Turkey is getting further away from Europe, or Europe is getting further away from Turkey. And you cannot say that this has nothing to do with the migration crisis.

Although most respondents acknowledged the demographic changes underway, they generally did not feel too strongly about the cultural impacts of migration. Some justified their co-nationals' apprehension by citing reasons such as a lack of education, or their country's overall lack of exposure to Arab/Muslim and/or black populations, claiming that their 'visible differences' (e.g. skin colour, religious attire) made it easier for them to stand out and become objects of irrational fears. This would be the case particularly in close-knit and small-sized communities, which could feel overwhelmed by large and sudden arrivals of foreigners. Others stressed the importance of economic and cultural integration efforts on the part of both migrants and receiving societies to prevent hostile behaviour (See 5.2.3.3), sometimes referring to the positive integration experiences of Albanian migrants in the 1990s in Italy and Greece (See 5.1.3).

A last group of respondents witnessed and more openly criticised the rise in othering discourses which typically targeted Arab/Muslim as well as black immigrants. A dozen respondents – predominantly under 35 – explicitly coined this as racism, echoing recent calls within migration studies to better acknowledge the 'race-migration nexus' (Erel et al., 2016; See 1.3.1.1). The COVID-19 pandemic was also thought to have increased racism, particularly towards Asian minorities, confirming recent findings around the effects of the pandemic on xenophobia (Esses & Hamilton, 2021; Politi et al., 2021; See 2.1.2 and 5.1.1.4). These respondents often criticised the normalisation of racist discourses, including amongst their personal circles, or people they initially assumed would be less hostile to migrants because of their advantageous socio-economic status or progressive political views (See 6.3.2). Some respondents felt that the prevalence of racism was paradoxical given their country's position as an emigration country (See also 4.2.2.1), while others reflected on how migrants' presence called into question fixed conceptualisations of national identity. Silvio (52), for instance, urged Europeans to accept that their national identities were constantly evolving and enriched through cultural diversity and migration (See opening quote of the General Conclusion).

5.1.1.3. Migration as a security threat

Lastly, some respondents observed that migrants' presence in their country of origin could constitute a security threat, at both the individual and state level. At the micro-level, many respondents drew a direct link between migration and criminality, perceiving that the high concentration of migrants in certain areas created a direct risk for individuals' physical safety. In addition to perceiving an increase in criminal incidents (which respondents often justified by migrants' precarious living conditions linked to the irregular nature of their stay, but also, in rare cases, to cultural predispositions), most comments described how people avoided public areas with high concentration of migrants as they were believed to be unsafe. Respondents often described how locals – themselves included – were afraid of migrants roaming the streets aimlessly and relying on illegal trades and petty crime or begging. A direct link can be drawn between xenophobia and aporophobia in respondents' discourses, as they referred to the specific fear of migrants who were perceived as poor, marginalised and often homeless. Gerasimos (68), for instance, was particularly concerned about the demographic and spatial changes that migration had brought to Athens, and perceived higher levels of insecurity:

> I left a Greece – Athens – of Athenians, and now I am in Athens of… I have moved from my *quartier* [neighbourhood] to another one because my *quartier* is now Black, Pakistani. Don't take it in a racist way, [but] it is not Greece. And yes, you feel that you are under threat. For instance, I'm not happy that my daughter walks around late in the evening. I feel unhappy, anxious (Hut, 2024).

Yet, more respondents criticised this securitisation framing of migration than actively supported it. Some recognised that many migrants were somehow 'trapped in irregularity' (from being smuggled to being forced to work on the black market – and sometimes to commit crimes – as a means of survival) and that the answer lay in policy solutions that would take them out of irregularity (See 5.2.3.2). While some regretted that whole communities were sometimes blamed for crimes committed by a minority of criminals who happened to have a migrant background, others criticised the pervasiveness of fear-based 'invasion' discourses in their countries.[154] Migrants were also thought to pose a territorial/border security threat at a more macro level. Such observations usually took place when discussing migration 'crises'

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[154] See Ambrosini (2019) and Dimitriadis et al. (2020) for insights into the construction and impact of the 'crisis-invasion discourse' in Italy, which is explicitly grounded in the exploitation of an 'us versus them' rhetoric.

(See 2.1.2 and 5.1.2), and more specifically arrivals at Italian and Greek borders.[155] Although respondents recognised that their hometowns were not directly affected by large-scale arrivals of migrants,[156] they acknowledged that border areas and the small islands of Sicily and of the Aegean Sea – such as the oft-cited island of Lampedusa – could easily feel overwhelmed and threatened by sudden and large arrivals. Lastly, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic which was still ongoing during most of the interviews, some respondents considered or thought that migrants could be considered by others as a threat to health security.

5.1.1.4. Threat perceptions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

Since the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated measures (e.g. lockdowns, border closures) were ongoing during most of my interviews (See 3.2.6), I asked respondents whether they felt that this topical issue had generally affected attitudes towards migration. About a dozen respondents observed that the pandemic had contributed to raising awareness on the specific vulnerabilities of migrants – particularly of unhoused or encamped migrants, or those relying on the informal economy – which tend to be heightened in times of crisis. This was thought to have generated compassion and led to public responses aimed at improving their access to health services, ultimately benefiting the wider society. Using the example of the development of the BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine by two Germans of Turkish origin, which became "a matter of national pride" in Turkey, Murat (36) stressed the positive contributions of immigrants in the global fight against the pandemic, in addition to their leading role as frontline healthcare workers. While some respondents did not draw a direct link between this public health emergency and migration issues more generally, others felt that pandemic-related border controls had contributed to considerably reducing migrant arrivals and/or to reshuffling priorities in Italy, Greece and Turkey, thus "eclipsing the preoccupation" about migration (Christos, 53). Yet, the invisibilisation of migration as an issue of concern was largely perceived as temporary. Indeed, several respondents anticipated that anti-immigration attitudes would harden again once the economic repercussions of the pandemic started materializing,[157]

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[155] Turkish respondents were less likely to discuss refugees' presence in relation to ongoing conflicts and to the overall security situation in the country, focusing instead on the day-to-day feelings of insecurity that their presence was deemed to heighten and on the discourses of migrant criminalisation that flourished amongst locals.

[156] Although some respondents reported regularly spending time in the Aegean islands for their holidays, the majority came from large cities which only were the secondary stages of migrants' arrivals and reception (See Figure 12).

[157] Italy and Turkey were particularly affected by the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Italy was, by far, the main beneficiary of the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (followed by Spain, France, Poland

or once migrant arrivals resumed as a result of the gradual reopening of borders. However, most respondents felt that, rather than serving as an opportunity to bring people closer through experiencing a shared global challenge, the pandemic exacerbated individualism and threat perceptions – and thus, migrant othering – in Greece, Italy and Turkey. Several respondents stressed the ease and speed with which racist prejudice and fake news spread during that period, casting foreigners as a health threat by sole virtue of their otherness. They described how migrants were in turn accused of bringing COVID-19 into respondents' home countries, of being prioritised over natives in terms of access to health services, and of adding undue pressure on recovering economies by fostering competition over resources. Respondents sometimes explained that these fears were instrumentalised by politicians, citing Matteo Salvini and Donald Trump as examples. Adriana (39), like several others, deeply regretted the widespread and misguided scapegoating of migrants amidst the pandemic:

> Well, I mean, with the pandemic, sure, [the situation] is becoming worse. Because many people can barely survive, keep a job or anything. So imagine having to welcome someone else to their country (…) sadly I think this will simply, you know, (…) make it harder for people to be open and welcoming to others. But yeah, it's gonna be very sad, to be honest. The level of acceptance of the other is a big issue, I think. (…) In many cases and because of some political use of migration, it created a distortion, and a myopic approach. (…) you see immigrants as your scapegoat, in a way. You identify your frustrations etc. in this phenomenon, while you should rather be looking at other things. I mean, you miss the point if you're afraid of migration.

5.1.2. Migration as 'crisis'

Another significant othering discourse consists in depicting migration and migrants as 'crisis' (See 2.1.2).[158] I thus asked research participants to reflect on the suitability of the term 'crisis' to describe the 2015-2016 arrivals of migrants through the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes.[159] This question led several respondents to offer their own definition of crisis. Amongst others, respondents described crisis events as a "very difficult situation" (Anastasia, 55), "a break in the normal" (Francesca, 32), as "something urgent, to be managed" (Angeliki, 31), or "that comes really unexpectedly and escalates in a way that it's not in your control anymore"

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and Greece), receiving a total of 191.5 billion euros in grants and loans. See: https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/plan-de-relance-europeen (last consulted on 01/07/2024).

[158] Although the term 'migration crisis' is problematic and misleading (See 2.1.2), I am deliberately using it here as one of my goals was to assess the extent to which my respondents embraced or criticised the 'crisis' framing of migration. Looking at this concept through a critical lens can help us deconstruct it rather than reify it.

[159] In the case of Turkish respondents, the scope of my question encompassed the period following the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011.

(Rhea, 26), and as something "heavy" (Gianna, 49), that creates a sense of "panic" (Ayça 31). These elements often led them to conclude that the 2015-2016 events did, indeed, constitute a crisis.[160] As remarked by Antonis (41): "I don't see how anyone could say that it wasn't a crisis!". The situation was mainly characterised as such because of the significant rise in migrants' arrivals in respondents' home countries during that period, highlighting the role of numbers in shaping perceptions of the crisis.[161] Greek respondents, in particular, often employed water metaphors (Porto, 2022) to describe the situation, talking about "a mass influx of people" (Panagiotis), "waves of people coming to Europe" (Gerasimos, 68), "a lot of inflows" (Alexia, 25), or "immigration waves that swept across Greece" (Alexandros, 62). Stefanos (69) emphatically added: "In the islands, people were telling me that it was like the… *débarquement de Normandie* [the Normandy landing]!". These remarks were usually followed up by comments about how these sudden and "disproportionate" (Nikos, 29) arrivals had become unsustainable and extremely challenging for both the Greek state and their nationals, entailing significant economic and social difficulties. Importantly, respondents often specified that it should first and foremost be considered a 'humanitarian crisis', focusing on the basic needs and rights of people on the move (See 2.1.2 and 5.1.4). As Ioannis (25) puts it: "at the end of the day, they are people, not numbers we put on a map". Rhea (26) insisted that "we shouldn't call it a crisis, rather a need for human rights protection, and a need for the protection of human lives". These respondents typically underlined the desperate situations migrants were fleeing from, the risky journeys they were undertaking on their way to Europe and the inhumane treatment they often faced in both their places of transit and destination. In doing so, respondents sought to portray migrants as people in need of assistance and sympathy. Respondents also extensively commented on the political nature of the crisis, describing the (inter)national tensions that followed migrants' arrivals in 2015/2016, stressing the lack of preparation and poor management of the situation by national authorities who had failed to meet their obligations towards both migrant and native populations. Several respondents also criticised the EU's response to the situation, and notably the absence of a fair redistribution mechanism and its reliance on a problematic externalisation deal with Turkey. Others also drew a direct link between these inadequate responses and rising anti-immigrant sentiment amongst

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[160] Respondents cited other examples of 'crises', such as the arrival of displaced populations from Afghanistan and Ukraine following the 2021's takeover of Kabul by the Taliban and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine respectively. Some also suggested that climate change would lead to future migration crises.
[161] See also the 'mass migration' narrative identified by de Haas, which is notably "linked to a perception that 'South-North' migration is increasingly about illegal migration that is allegedly 'spinning out of control' (2024:9).

the general public, paving the way for the rise of populist and far-right parties in their respective countries.[162] For Ioannis (25), these events had led to an existential crisis within the EU:

> (…) [this situation] really tampered with our European values for solidarity and adhering to fundamental human rights, and the different national ideas about accepting migrants, refugees, the borders closing... I think that it was an important political crisis Europe faced. In that time where solidarity was needed, Europe was fractured. And the worst of us was revealed then, made its face obvious.

These reflections led many respondents to conclude that the crisis was "ongoing" and/or unsolved, stressing its structural aspects and the need to look at migration outside of an emergency lens. Antonis (41) for instance, recognised that although the crisis had been "put out" by controlling inflows through externalising migration and containing migrants in camps, its "primary causes" (namely, a lack of solidarity amongst EU Member States) persisted. Adriana (39) stressed the need to avoid short-term approaches, presenting migration as "a systematic, philosophical problem, that you have to solve (…) with a long-term vision". Similarly, rather than characterising migration as a 'crisis', Luigi (44) called for a sort of 'de-exceptionalisation' (Cabot & Ramsay, 2021) of migration:

> (…) this is not just a crisis, because a crisis should be something that happened at *some* point in time, that has a beginning and an end, so it should be more of a punctual event. And here it's actually not a crisis. This is a sort of a long-term trend that has started, but it's not going to stop. And so... my problem is how we are looking at this and how we have been characterising this situation. (…) That is a sort of a structural situation that is not a deviation from the norm, but is the new norm of the age that we are living in.

Others felt that the situation had progressively morphed into a "permanent crisis" (Iraklis) for Europe, predicting considerable inflows in the future which, rather than being linked to specific war situations (such as the conflict in Syria), would instead originate in Africa and Asia, and which they mainly tied to demographic and economic factors. In doing so, these respondents often reproduced discourses that presented migration from EU third countries as a demographic threat (See 5.1.1.2) and justified distinctions between migrants and refugees (see 5.1.3), calling for differentiated immigration controls (See 5.2.3.2). Others were more moderate, simply emphasising their countries' long history of immigration, partly due to their geographical

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[162] Respondents' (dis)approval of EU/national migration policies are further discussed in 5.2.2 below.

location, or suggesting that people had become accustomed to the situation through persistent mediatic coverage, ultimately leading to a standstill. According to Francesca (32):

> (…) well, crisis indicates something, like, you know, [a] break in the normal... but then it became the normality. Like, every day we were watching the news, and every day, almost every day, there was an arrival of migrants. It was, like, I don't know, a *status quo*. It was the normal.

Many respondents openly criticised the 'migration crisis' narrative for various reasons. A first group felt that the severity of the situation – and in particular, the perception that immigration inflows were disproportionate and unmanageable – had been overexaggerated. Flavio (60), for instance, correctly observed that the main misperceptions about migration were linked to the overestimation of the number of immigrants present in EU countries (See Special Eurobarometer 469, European Commission, 2018).[163] Furthermore, Can (24) observed that European countries hosted very few Syrian refugees considering their actual material capacities:

> I don't see a crisis to be honest, because, you know... Europe is the richest area in the world basically and there are how many refugees there, how many Syrians, like a million? (laughs) You know, it's not a crisis… everyone has the infrastructure to support them, there's money to support them, there are job opportunities. Europe doesn't have a young enough population to contribute to the workforce in the foreseeable future, and [its young population] will only decrease, so, I really don't see it as a crisis. It can be an opportunity. It's just a crisis because people want it to be a crisis.

Others also condemned the dehumanising and pejorative properties of crisis discourses. Angeliki (31) for instance, argued that "speaking about people as 'a crisis' directly implies that these people are a problem",[164] while Meltem (50) recognised that "using 'crisis' gives a negative impression". Several Italian respondents appeared particularly concerned about the instrumentalisation of this narrative by politicians and the media, stressing how this frame had been used to conceal the wider socio-economic inequalities at play in their country (i.e. chronic unemployment) and which could be directly tied to deficiencies at the domestic state level and a lack of EU solidarity (See 5.2.2). These respondents felt that politicians across the political spectrum had considerably benefited from this framing to obtain electoral and/or diplomatic gains. As summarised by Carla (32):

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[163] Out of all EU countries, the gap between the actual/perceived proportion of immigrants was highest in Italy, ranging from 7,1% (actual number) to 24,6% (perception), and was almost as significant in Greece (ranging from 8% to 20%) (European Commission, 2018); See 2.1.3.
[164] Quote translated from French.

In my opinion, (...) there is no crisis! This crisis has been invented for other reasons. I think that the numbers probably don't justify the word [crisis]. (…) for example, in Italy (...) this concept has been used to avoid talking about other problems that are related to the country. (...) It's much easier to blame our problems on someone who comes from elsewhere, who has no rights and no voice, rather than saying: "(…) *nothing has been done in the past 20 or 30 years to increase job opportunities for Italians and for young people here"*. (...) I think that this crisis has been invented to hide other crises for which we could find the culprits (...). And who are not migrants! (laughs) (Hut, 2024)[165]

Respondents felt that this lack of political accountability, paired with a sensationalist and intensive media coverage of migration, had allowed this crisis narrative to permeate the minds of their co-citizens and result in tangible anti-migrant reactions. Ricardo (33), summarised these performative aspects as follows:

In the end, the data, the numbers [of migrants], were going down. But still, in the newspapers, in the storytelling of the right-wing let's say, as a crisis, [migration] was really the main problem of the country. (…) and even the vocabulary was really chosen on purpose to highlight this... not *fake* problem, but exaggerated issue. (…) So when you have these narratives, you mix it with the low-level of knowledge about what's happening around Europe... you make a very dangerous cocktail.

5.1.3. Migrant categorisation discourses

Several respondents drew distinctions between migrant groups who were perceived as more or less deserving depending on – amongst others – their status, their nationality, their ethnicity, their gender or age (See 1.2.3.2; See Table 8 below). The main migrant categorisation discourse that transpired from the interviews consisted in stressing the 'migrant/refugee binary' (Hamlin, 2021; Abdelaaty & Hamlin, 2022) which categorically opposed 'voluntary' to 'forced' forms of migration in the eyes of respondents. In line with previous literature about attitudes towards migration, respondents were generally extremely sympathetic towards migrants who were perceived as fleeing their country due to conditions that were beyond their control (i.e. political persecution, extreme poverty) (See 1.1.2). Instead, those who were largely perceived as 'economic' or 'irregular' migrants, rather than candidates for asylum, were seen as less worthy of reception efforts.[166] As a result, some respondents called for establishing clear distinctions

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[165] Quote translated from French.
[166] Silvio (52) stood out in his observation that the migrant/refugee binary was irrelevant in practice both "on a moral ground (…) and a policy ground". He argued that "if you think about a sensible solution to manage

between the two, rather than recognising the interconnectedness of migration drivers in practice, sometimes suggesting that 'economic migrants' had a higher propensity to be involved in criminal activity. This was the case for Alexandros (62):

> (…) I would make distinctions here. I mean, I cannot have the same perception or the same attitude towards all of those who try to cross borders. Because everyone is not the same. As I was saying, there are families who come because of war and then there are economic immigrants. And as far as families are concerned, yes, I say we should welcome them with open arms because in any case, the war is also Europe's responsibility (...). So we must be open, and I think that (...) we can welcome them, we can integrate them even... Because they are people whom we must respect, who have pride and common sense often... Now, you also have economic immigrants: as far as they are concerned, I don't think we should be forced to welcome them. We should be entitled to make a choice and say: "*I need labour, because Greece's population is declining*". So yes, we can welcome people (...) but here it's a matter of choosing who we will welcome. The problem is that with all these people, there are other elements who are adventurers, (…) you know, criminals (…). So for these people, frankly, I say, we've got to get them to the border, we've got to get them back home, sorry, we don't want them! (Hut, 2024)[167]

Other categories of migrants were also largely seen as unproblematic due to their perceived economic contributions, and the temporary nature of their stay. For instance, Markos (61) felt that 'digital nomads' whose numbers are increasing since the post-COVID-19 era and the normalisation of remote working (Holleran & Notting, 2023) were "most welcome" because they can "spend and boost the economy". Similarly, given the importance of the tourism industry in Italy, Greece and Turkey, some respondents drew an explicit distinction between migrants and tourists. Panagiotis, for instance, felt that, unlike tourists, who could be considered a 'norm' in Greece, migrants represented a significant economic cost:

> (…) [migrants are] not tourists... Because in Greece we have millions of tourists every year, so people – normal people – you or whatever, come to spend a holiday in an island, are welcome. There's a whole infrastructure on that part in Greece. Every year, before the pandemic, we had 20-25 million people passing in a country of 10 million, for holidays. (…) [Greeks are] not afraid of foreign people generally. But that's different you know. Because tourists come, they want a service and then they go back. Ok that's it. But a huge population coming without money, in a small island, and they don't know when and if they will leave... it's very, very, difficult.

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migration flows, (…) if you put in place a system where from country of origin to country of destination, there is the possibility of having a clear path for letting people move from one side of the world to the other... this distinction is not relevant anymore."

[167] Quote translated from French.

Yet, not all tourists were deemed equal. Ayça (31), for instance, regretted that there were now more "Arabic tourists" than "European tourists" visiting Turkey (See quote in 5.1.1.2). Other respondents explicitly called out the hospitality double standards which applied to migrants and tourists. Emanuele (42) declared, laughingly: "I do not believe in the fairy tale of welcoming, smiling, Italians. It is not true. We are only [welcoming and smiling] with tourists!".[168] Can (24) further claimed that "hospitality only applies to white people". He further explained, with sarcasm, how deeply entrenched racism was in Turkish society:

> If they're white, we like them! If they're not we don't like them. It's as racist as that. It's funny because we don't have a big black population here, people often say that "*No, in Turkey we don't have racism, we don't know what black is, and blah blah...*", but it's a lie (laughs). It's one of the biggest lies that I've heard. It's as racist as that. We like white people, we don't like non-whites because they are not civilized.

Two context-specific cases illustrate how 'forced migrants' are not automatically seen as deserving and how, conversely, 'economic migrants' can be seen as desirable under certain conditions. The first example concerns Syrian refugees in the Turkish context.[169] Although Turkish respondents sometimes referred to current and previous arrivals of other nationals (e.g. Afghans, Iraqi Kurds, as well as nationals from African and Balkan countries) non-Syrians were largely seen as unproblematic due to being relatively less numerous and/or visible, or to being seen as a problem from the past. Conversely, and regardless of whether respondents agreed with such discourses or not, the Syrian refugee population was often presented as an economic, cultural and security threat due to its significant size (See 2.1.3 and 5.1.1). Can (24) recognised that Syrians were "the least wanted group right now". In comparison, Italian and Greek respondents often admitted that the reception of Syrian refugees was seen as less problematic than that of other migrants who were not perceived to be fleeing armed conflict.

The second example concerns Albanian immigrants who had come to Italy and Greece in the early 1990s (See 2.1.1). Over a dozen respondents spontaneously referred to their arrival and three-decade-long presence as a form of integration 'success story'. Christos (53), for instance presented it as "a great case study of assimilation and successful integration". Although respondents recognised that Albanian migrants were initially not met with open arms or that

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[168] Quote translated from French.
[169] Turkey being the first recipient country of Syrian refugees worldwide util 2023 (See 2.1.1), Turkish respondents' observations focused almost exclusively on Syrian nationals.

they still faced some form of prejudice, they gradually became deserving of acceptance through their positive economic contributions to local economies (See 5.1.5), and respondents regularly praised their "hard work".[170] Importantly, respondents recognised that this had been helped by an "optimal" economic context (Eirini, 53) which allowed them to prosper economically and contrasted with the situation faced by today's (economic) migrants. From a cultural viewpoint, they were largely perceived to be completely "integrated", or to have been "absorbed" (Iraklis, Raffaele, 42) into the majority society. Respondents argued that they could barely tell them apart from natives thanks to their language proficiency and their children's incorporation into the national educational system. Christos (53) even suggested that as "the new locals", they could potentially feel threatened by 'new' immigrants and display anti-immigrant views.[171] Francesca (32) drew an interesting comparison between Albanian migrants and current African migrants, suggesting that fears surrounding the latter would subside over time:

> [Something] that I was reading a couple of months ago was a comparison between the time when people from Albania arrived in Italy and the perception that was like: "*Oh my god, so many people are coming here!*". That was in the nineties, I guess. But now for example, there's no issue with people from Albania. And where are they? I mean they are Italians, like us, at the moment. And so, [I saw] this comparison, that like, maybe in ten years, people from Africa will be Italians like people from Albania now.

Conversely, a small group of respondents observed that migration categories had a limited impact on people's attitudes in practice and recognised that there was a tendency to reject migrants as a whole, regardless of their migration driver . As explained by Marina (23):

> I think we don't really have in mind the difference between the type of migrants. (…) as I said before, we are just getting used to the fact that there are flows of people coming to our country because they cannot live any longer in their national ones. But you may not really understand the different reasons, why one of them is coming, and another one is coming. So maybe... (…) informed people know the difference, but I think that the average Italian doesn't really know that. Also because when like, members of political parties or whatever, speak about the migrants' topic, they never make the difference. So they are just described as general migrants coming to our country and there is no, like, [distinction].

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[170] Albanians were initially viewed poorly by their Italian and Greek hosts, occupying underpaid jobs in the agriculture or construction sectors and facing discrimination (King, 2000; Lazaridis & Psimmenos, 2000). Despite being largely perceived as 'Hellenised' or 'passing' as Greeks (through having learned the Greek language, changed their names and/or converted to the Orthodox faith), they still experience forms of othering, ranging from invisibilisation to stigmatisation. See the recording of the online roundtable "Thirty years later – Rethinking Albanian-Greek identity" organised by the 'Greek Studies Now' network: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo-_R_k3d8I

[171] This aligns with previous research showing that immigrants' attitudes towards immigration tend to converge with those of the native populations over time (See 1.4.1).

Table 8. Main (un)deservingness categories mentioned by respondents

Deserving migrants	Less deserving migrants	Criteria affecting perceptions and justifying categories
'Forced' migrants (e.g. refugees and people fleeing economic deprivation	'Voluntary' economic migrants	Migration driver; perceived level of agency/vulnerability
Tourists	Migrants	Nature and duration of stay; perceived economic contribution
White/European migrants	Non-white migrants	Race/ethnicity
Albanian migrants from the 1990s	Economic migrants since the 2000s	Race/ethnicity; the economic context
Syrians in Europe	Syrians in Turkey	Population size, race/ethnicity

Other examples of 'deserving' migrants cited by respondents include Vietnamese refugees, East European care workers in Italy (Ambrosini, 2013), political opponents of Erdoğan who had fled the failed 2016 political coup in Turkey, environmental migrants and immigrants from the Balkans region in Turkey.

5.1.4. Humanitarian discourses and the 'duty of hospitality'

In addition to noting the prevalence of migration-related discourses rooted in fear, emergency or double standards, respondents also highlighted more positive narratives. Nearly half of respondents stressed the long traditions of hospitality associated with Mediterranean countries, hinting that Italian, Greek and Turkish societies were 'historically' and therefore 'naturally' open to welcoming foreigners or people in need more generally. They mainly explained that this tradition of hospitality stemmed from their country's emigration past (See 4.2.2.1) or their historic and geographic position "at the crossroads of different cultures and religions" (Andrea, 31). Some respondents drew on examples of how welcoming their countries had been towards previous immigrant populations. Greek respondents, in particular, often referred to the ancient principle of *philoxenia* (hospitality).[172] For Gerasimos (68), for instance, this is what first came to mind when thinking about migration in Greece:

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[172] In her work on hospitality in Greece, Greek anthropologist Ekaterina Rozakou (2012) demonstrates how philoxenia carries inherent contradictions in practice, despite having been 'constructed' as a traditional Greek value.

Openness and traditional hospitality from the ancient years. It was the *Xenios*, you understand? The stranger [foreigner]. "The one who comes from outside", it was called and it's still called *xenios*. And *Zeus* was *'Zeus Xenios'*, so the father of gods [Zeus], was *Xenios*, the one who welcomes [foreigners]. So traditionally, culturally, mentally, Greeks were open. When Ulysses arrived in Corfu, trying to reach home, nobody knew who he was, he was received by the king of the island, with honours, because he was *xenos*. Hospitality, it is very… dear to Greeks.

While discussing traditions of hospitality, respondents often argued that Greek, Italian and Turkish societies had created a rather welcoming environment for migrants. Whilst stressing that these positive attitudes and efforts could not be generalised to the whole population or faced some limitations in practice, most commended local populations for demonstrating great openness towards migrant populations. Besides being offered humanitarian assistance, several respondents stressed how migrants could durably improve their livelihoods through receiving socio-economic integration opportunities (e.g. being able to learn the local language, find employment, and/or enrol one's children in local schools). Respondents also praised the role of populations in small island and border communities as well as civil society organisations in dealing with large and sudden arrivals in spite of their limited resources, contrasting it with the inadequate response of public authorities. They often gave specific examples of hospitality and integration 'good practices', stressing the role of private and public actors who had shown compassion by tending to migrants' basic needs, opening their doors, or defying the legal framework to assist them. For instance, several Italians referred to Domenico 'Mimmo' Lucano, the former Mayor of the small Sicilian town of Riace, who welcomed migrants in his village despite the hostile political climate of the time. In the Greek context, several respondents referred to a viral photograph showing elderly Greek women in Lesvos comforting a Syrian infant (See Image 4). Other mentions included Pietro Bartolo, a medical doctor who assisted thousands of incoming migrants in the island of Lampedusa before being elected as a MEP for the Italian Democratic Party, or Pope Francis, whose first official visit in 2013 took place in Lampedusa. Respondents also praised the role of 'everyday citizens' such as fishermen who rescued migrants at sea, citizens who agreed to defy the law to assist migrants, or of small-sized municipalities who showed themselves particularly hospitable in spite of their limited capacities.

Image 4. Elderly woman feeding a Syrian infant in Lesvos, Greece.

Photo: Lefteris Partsalis.

Respondents' recognition of such practices of hospitality often went hand in hand with promoting a 'humanitarian' or 'humanistic' approach, which consisted in stressing migrants' shared humanity and normalising their presence by refusing to see them as 'numbers' or as dehumanised or problematic beings, reaffirming the universality of the human rights framework, and/or stressing the existence of a moral and/or religious duty to help those less fortunate. Indeed, some observed that such a duty of solidarity towards underprivileged people – including migrants – was entrenched in both Christian and Islamic traditions, recognising that moral and religious considerations engendered positive reactions towards migrants.[173] Even Deniz (42), who strongly opposed the religious AKP government, acknowledged that Erdoğan's resorting to religious arguments to help those less fortunate had contributed – at least initially – to alleviating hostile reactions towards Syrian refugees in Turkish society:

> In Turkey, the language used by the government has not been toxic. Erdoğan generally used some references from the Coran or Islamic thought, that we have to be the hosts, (…) so he didn't refer to obviously the international legal obligations, but he referred to Islam and to the Islamic law, that we should host people who have ended up on our doorstep and who need help. I think it was good that he did it that way. I think, you know, in all this fiasco, one of the things that he did well was to use the right language to convince the Turkish people. If it hadn't been

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[173] A study conducted by More in Common about attitudes towards immigration and refugees in Italy explicitly identified 'Catholic Humanitarians' as one of the population segments that were deemed 'open' to immigration and asylum. Amongst other things, they are "compassionate and feel a strong sense of duty to help refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors, because solidarity and compassion is part of being Italian", "strongly agree with Pope Francis on the need to be more welcoming of migrants entering Italy", "feel warm towards refugees and migrants and warmer towards Muslims than other segments", and are "more likely than others to make financial contributions to support refugees" (Dixon et al., 2018:11; See 2.1.3).

for that positive, affirmative language, I think they would have been much more reactive to refugees in Turkey, because Turkish people don't like differences, they don't like diversity in general. (…) I think the refugee crisis in Turkey would have been much bigger than it is now, at the societal level, if it hadn't been for the positive language that the government [used].

In addition to emphasising the distressing conditions that migrants were fleeing from (e.g. war, economic deprivation – sometimes stressing European countries' responsibility in creating such conditions in their former colonies through maintaining postcolonial inequalities), respondents' humanitarian discourses highlighted the dangerous nature of 'forced' migrants' journeys. In doing so, they erred towards emotional language, expressing their empathy and pain at the plight of forced migrants. Respondents acknowledged that they were risking their lives and that of their families out of desperation. In these instances, migration is perceived as a matter of survival, and a way to secure people's safety and dignity. Some reported feeling "sad", "sorry", or "hurt" by the overall situation, referring to it as "depressing", as a cause of "discomfort", or "worries". A few respondents referred to the sea crossings and countless migrant deaths in the Mediterranean as a "tragedy". They sometimes remembered images that had emotionally impacted them such as that of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian boy who was found dead on the shore of a Turkish beach in the summer of 2015 and whose photo went viral at the time. This resulted in an inclination to show hospitality towards people who lacked agency in their decision to migrate, as they are fleeing situations of conflict and/or extreme poverty, which were often seen as "legitimate" migration drivers (Pietro, 27), setting them apart from traditional 'immigrants' who did not move out of obligation (Melis, 48). As explained by Markos (61): "they are poor people, so from a humanistic point of view, they are welcome". Carla (32) further called for a duty to rescue and treat forced migrants with dignity in light of the arbitrary nature of physical borders separating countries, stressing the hypocrisy of efforts that sought to prevent people from moving:

> Generally speaking, the concept of borders (...) is more philosophical and ethical. So I think that anyone who finds themselves in the situation of wanting to leave their place of residence, where they were born by coincidence, should be free to do so. And [I think] that the world is one and belongs to everyone. So, if someone decides to leave the middle of Africa, and decides to risk dying at sea, the very least we can do is help them, bring them back to land, and not put them in a closed centre, in inhumane conditions.[174]

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[174] Quote translated from French.

Respondents did not only stress the difficulties migrants faced on their way to Italy, Greece and/or Turkey, but also emphasised the poor treatment faced by migrants in transit and/or at destination. In doing so, they called for more dignified and humane reception conditions in their respective countries, particularly in the hotspots and similar border areas but not only. More specifically, they denounced inhumane detention conditions or living situations in refugee camps and other so-called 'reception centres', misinformation of migrants along the way, inadequate relocation schemes, situations of forced immobility, of exploitation and homelessness, dangerous games of hide and seek with the authorities, as well as a lack of access to opportunities and services, generalised stigmatisation and discrimination, or even xenophobic attacks. Some pointed out the conditions of migrant populations who were perceived as particularly vulnerable and deserving of assistance, such as unaccompanied children and single mothers, or families more generally. Deniz (42) predicted that the marginalisation of Syrian youth in Turkey could only lead to negative outcomes over time, drawing a parallel with the way in which the Kurdish question initially arose in her country:[175]

> I'm just really sad that the refugees have had to go through what they had to go through in general. I mean, I have a lot of sympathy and empathy for them... From the way the crisis emerged (…) to the way it's evolved, so many mistakes have been done, and I feel like... a whole kind of – I don't want to call it 'lost' generation – has grown up in the midst of this crisis. A lot of people who are under-schooled, a lot of people who had to go through a lot of discriminations. I mean *now*, the Turkish society thinks that they have a refugee problem. If they are going to have this problem, they are going to have it from now on, not before! Because a lot of refugees have grown up with all the stigmas, and biases and prejudices, and insults, and attacks. (…) Because if you're always suppressed, humiliated, but you still have to live in that society, you create a coping mechanism. We will see what the coping mechanism is going to be (…)! We will see the consequences of this whole... mismanagement, in the years to come, when all these kids grow up, who were humiliated in their neighbourhoods, in their schools.

Importantly, most respondents recognised that hospitality, or humanitarianism, suffered limitations in practice (See 6.2.2 and 6.3.2). This led some respondents to put into perspective the existence of a 'natural' sense of hospitality in Italy, Greece and Turkey, seeing it in fact as conditional or as a thing of the past, particularly in how it applied to today's migrants. In doing so, they mostly explained that hospitality could only be exercised to a certain extent. In

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[175] The Kurdish Question has been a longstanding issue since the creation of Modern Turkey in 1923. The Kurdish language was officially banned from public and private life in 1980, following a coup attempt, until 2002. Many restrictions to the Kurdish minority's freedom of expression and recognition of their cultural identity remain to this day. See Berkowitz & Mügge (2014) for an overview of the 'Kurdish question' in Turkey.

particular, they observed that hospitality was conditioned by several factors, including the overall economic context (See 5.1.1.1). In that respect, the COVID-19 pandemic was perceived to have considerably worsened the situation. The migrant population size also played a role, as respondents implied that acts of hospitality in the traditional sense were more likely to be exercised towards individuals than a wider group. Similarly, some respondents observed that although some actors (e.g. private citizens, CSOs, local municipalities) had made considerable efforts in terms of reception, they lacked resources, infrastructure and institutional support to meet actual needs on the ground. This eventually lead to them disengaging themselves. Indeed, time also contributed to reducing hospitality, as it led to 'compassion fatigue' (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024). Others also referred to the negative influence of fear-based narratives (See 5.1.1 and 5.1.2), or of certain individual-level factors (e.g. income, educational level, or residential profile) as drivers of (in)hospitality (See 6.1.1). Most of the above-mentioned elements are summarised by Markos (61):

> Greece used to be very hospitable. (…) if you suddenly have 150, 5,000 refugees in a camp of Lesvos, where in Lesvos there are 3,000 inhabitants, we aren't talking about *philoxenia*. Philoxenia is one to one. It's not a mass who is coming in. And don't forget that Greece has suffered for ten years. They lost 20-50% of their income, most of the guys. And it hasn't recovered yet, because of the recession, I mean with the pandemic... So (…) you cannot see the Greek tradition of *philoxenia* in the context of the thousands of immigrants coming to Greece.

Several respondents noted that a pragmatic, or utilitarian, vision of hospitality prevailed because sectors crucial to the Italian, Greek and Turkish national economies (e.g. tourism, agriculture, textile production) relied upon foreign workers. Some perceived that their national societies' actively stressed differences between nationals and non-nationals, encouraging hostility towards the latter (See 5.1.1). Others noted that if some of their co-nationals were at worst hostile, most were, at best, impartial or indifferent to the plight of underprivileged migrants. In a similar vein, Christos (53), highlighted the nuance between the concepts of solidarity and tolerance:

> (…) the adjective I would use is... not hospitable, even though hospitality is supposed to be a very Greek value (…) I would say tolerance (…) So, you know, down to the most practical, cynical level, if you will, there is this tolerance. (…) Of simply *"live and let live"*. (…) No, I wouldn't use the word hospitality. I would be overstating it, that would be... painting the Greeks too positive!

5.1.5. Migration as 'an opportunity'

Some respondents sought to stress the positive impact of migration for their country of origin, particularly from an economic standpoint. Silvio (52) criticised the "biased narrative" which had portrayed migration as a threat rather than an opportunity during the 2015/2016 migrant arrivals:

> (…) as I said in the beginning, for me, migrants should be – especially for a developed society, for a society which is at a stage of maturity and of welfare which is much more advanced – I do not see why and how it is not possible to look at this phenomenon as an opportunity, but only as a threat.

Most of respondents' observations had to do with the positive *economic contributions* of migrants in a general context of demographic decline.[176] They conceded that migrants took on difficult jobs that the locals refused to do, or no longer wanted to do – i.e. harvesting, domestic work, delivery services, shepherding, construction –, that they helped keep the welfare system afloat in a context of an ageing population, or that they brought in "a lot of energy, a lot of ideas" (Iraklis). However, their deservingness was often seen as conditional (See 5.1.3): their numbers should remain at a "manageable" level, they should be "educated" and "hard workers". Several respondents, such as Theodoros (64), gave the example of Albanian immigrants and their contributions to their country's economic growth in the 1990s:

> (…) if [migrants] know how to… merge in the local culture, in the local economy, then they can be very, very, helpful. I mean, in the past, (…) when the Albanian regime collapsed, we had the Albanians who came over to Greece. And that was an enormous boost in the economy. People who worked, they knew very, very, well how to build using stones, stonemasons. (…) And they were amazing craftsmen. So, you have to accept it, and we have to see how these people can actually make use of their knowledge, what they know how to do *well*.

Importantly, other respondents stressed the primary responsibility of states in putting in place robust integration policies to ensure that migrants and local populations *mutually* benefit from each other (See 5.2.3.3), rather than highlighting the individual-level characteristics that should condition migrants' acceptance (e.g. their propensity to work hard or skills level). Some stressed and criticised the utilitarian nature of selective immigration as practised by certain EU

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[176] See Holloway et al. (2021) for an overview of the benefits of immigration in the Italian context, whereby the ageing population and low birth rate are putting the current social welfare system at risk.

states. This was the case of Güven (59), who criticised the double standards applied by European countries who hosted considerably less refugees than Turkey:

> (..) Actually, Germany is the only [EU country] who takes [many refugees], but they choose huh! They don't take everybody. They say: "*Ah, you're a doctor, you can come!"*, this kind of stuff. So, it's not good either, right? I don't like that.

Nevertheless, respondents were less inclined to stress the *cultural* benefits of migration for their home countries. Although many respondents had previously acknowledged the advantages of living in a place as multicultural as Brussels (See 4.1.3), very few explicitly discussed migration as an opportunity to culturally enrich Italian, Greek and Turkish societies. One such exception was Ioannis (25):

> (…) I think that there are quite significant cultural contributions. [Immigrants] bring their culture, their traditions to Greece, so you can find a lot of traditional places to go shop, or restaurants from immigrants from other countries, so I think from a cultural point of view, it is beneficial. Also, a lot of people can contribute to, for example, creating some local communities that can be the middlemen in fostering relations with the other country, for example, the Nigerian community can help foster greater relationships between Greece and Nigeria, that's a great benefit local communities can have.

5.1.6. Conclusions

In summary, respondents across three national samples embraced and/or rejected several discourses which veered towards migrant othering or migrant solidarity (See Figure 22).

Figure 22. Main migration-related discourses amongst respondents.
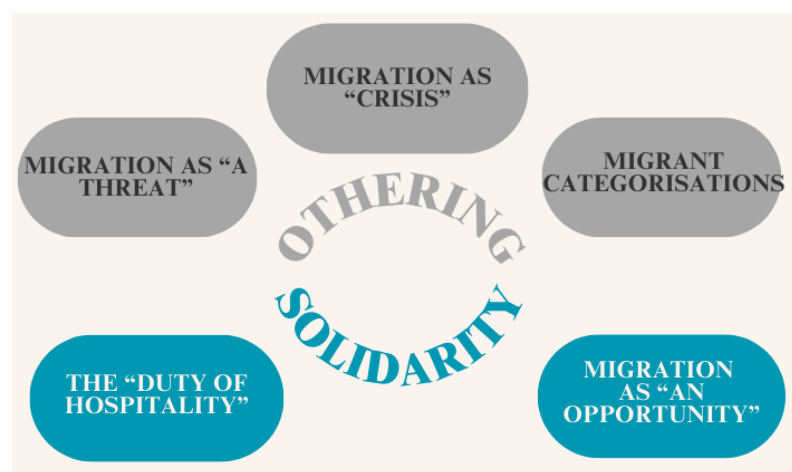
Embracing threat discourses contributed to establishing the figure of a migrant 'other', which was inherently opposed to and excluded from the national 'imagined community'. Given the profile of research participants, economic arguments (material threat) appeared less relevant to them than cultural and security aspects (symbolic threat). Although they did not necessarily reject the framing of migration as 'crisis', many respondents criticised its limits, seeing it as a sensationalist and misleading frame, used by political and mediatic actors to conceal the systemic nature of the challenge surrounding migrants' reception and integration in Italy, Greece and Turkey. Migrant categorisation discourses were utilised in one of two ways: to classify migrants along different conceptions of (un)deservingness, or to criticise the differential treatment created by these categories in practice. Their widespread usage demonstrates the relevance of migration categories as 'categories of practice' (Brubaker, 2006; 2013), which resonated with the perceptions and day-to-day experiences of research participants. As for solidarity discourses, a recurrent narrative consisted in stressing receiving societies' moral duty of hospitality. This was often rooted in the reference to a humanitarian frame which can be opposed to economic, cultural or securitisation frames (Van Hootegem & Meuleman, 2019). Lastly, many respondents argued that migration should be seen as an opportunity, rather than a threat.

5.2. Reacting to migration policies

Since having become countries of immigration and transit (See 2.1) and due to their prime location along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean migration routes, Italy, Greece and Turkey have been at the forefront of migration-related debates at the national, regional and international level. This has become highly politicised over time. Recognising migration as "a constant feature of human endeavour", Silvio (52) stressed the importance of "avoiding indifference and carelessness" about this "complex issue". In fact, migration was identified as a highly relevant policy challenge by most respondents (5.2.1). As a result, they openly voiced their opinion about migration policies put in place at a national or supranational level (5.2.2) and often formulated their clear support for alternative policy options (5.2.3).

5.2.1. A politically relevant matter

Inspired by a question contained in the Standard Eurobarometer survey asking EU citizens to identify the "most important issues" facing their country of origin, the final question of my interview guide consisted in asking respondents to cite and discuss the three main challenges facing their own country of origin (See Appendix 3). The objective was to check whether migration did indeed feature amongst their key areas of concern. Due to the range of answers and level of detail provided, challenges were grouped under three main categories: socio-economic challenges, political-institutional challenges, and socio-cultural challenges. Other themes emerged distinctly and were classified separately, such as international relations, environmental challenges, COVID-19-related challenges, as well as migration – although migration was often deemed to cut across several of the other themes (See Table 9).[177]

Table 9. Main challenges identified in the country of origin.

	Type of challenge (ranked by order of importance)	Number of times cited	Main examples cited[178]
1	Socio-economic challenges	43	(Youth) unemployment and lack of prospects; social inequalities; inflation; economic crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic; Need for structural economic and fiscal reforms to increase competitiveness (modernisation, digitalisation, green transition); demographic pressure (ageing population)
2	Political/institutional challenges	27	Corruption; lack of meritocracy; need for a reform of public administrations and/or the political system (e.g. decentralisation, digitalisation); violations of human rights/democracy/the rule of law; leadership gap and loss of trust in public institutions; populism and authoritarianism
3	**Migration (immigration *and* emigration)**	25	'Brain drain'; need to improve migrants' socio-economic integration
4	Socio-cultural challenges	24	Underperforming educational systems; gaps between skills/job market needs; conservative and patriarchal mindset
5	International relations	11	Geopolitical tensions (e.g. Turkey/EU); Limited diplomatic influence (globally/at EU level)

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[177] Although I did not provide respondents with any response options, the overall theme of the interview likely prompted several of them to bring up migration as a distinct issue.

[178] Other context-specific challenges were also regularly cited, such as the North-South socio-economic divide in Italy opposing the country's agrarian South to its industrialised North (See Asso, 2021), the diplomatic tensions between Greece and Turkey, as well as the question of Kurdish separatism in Turkey.

6	COVID-19 pandemic	8	Management of the health aspects of the pandemic (e.g. vaccination strategy)
7	Environmental challenges	6	Climate change and environmental degradation; Need for a green transition; air and water pollution.

Respondents' answers confirm that migration featured amongst their top three issues of concern (cited by 25 respondents), along with socio-economic and political-institutional challenges (43 and 27 respondents respectively). Socio-cultural challenges (which were largely understood as declining educational levels and the predominance of a conservative mindset) were also concerning to many (24 respondents). Although important to some, difficulties related to international relations or to climate change were comparatively less cited. A recurrent concern across all national contexts consisted in stressing the unappealing prospects of the youth, resulting in calls to structurally transform or "modernise" the society as whole.

Figure 23 below nuances the above data, highlighting some differences across the different national samples. For instance, while Italian and Greek respondents were mainly concerned about socio-economic issues (cited by 17 and 18 respondents respectively), Turkish respondents appeared predominantly worried by political-institutional challenges (10 respondents). This graph further shows that the Greek sample is the only one to have migration appear in its top three (13 respondents). In comparison, Italians and Turks appeared more concerned by socio-economic, political-institutional and cultural challenges facing their country of origin, with migration being cited by 7 and 5 respondents respectively). [179]

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[179] My sample includes 21 Italians, 20 Greeks, and 13 Turks (See 3.2.3).

Figure 23. Main challenges identified in the country of origin (by nationality).
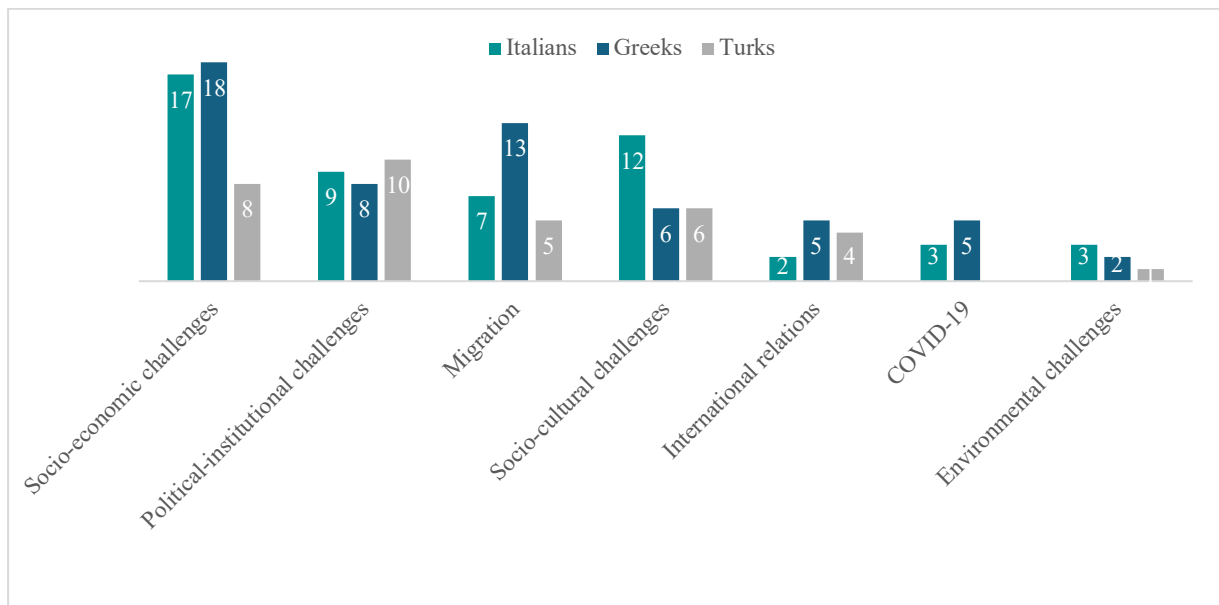
Based on answers to this specific interview question, several conclusions can be drawn regarding respondents' perceptions of migration. Firstly, in addition to discussing immigration, a dozen of respondents referred specifically to challenges related to *emigration*, citing more specifically the urgent need to "stop the brain drain" (Adriana, 39) in their country of origin (See 2.2.1.2). As observed by Ioannis (27):

> (…) the state spends a lot of money on young scientists and academics, just to have them leave and go to another country to find better conditions. I think that is the third and most important aspect and challenge that Greece faces, the brain drain.

These respondents, who were usually influenced by their own emigration experience, regretted the lack of adequate job prospects for educated youth, the mismatch between their skills and the needs of the domestic labour market, or the fact that young people were seldom given adequate responsibilities in the workplace, or opportunities to grow career-wise. They often observed that the predominance of an overall conservative mindset in their countries of origin limited the general appreciation of youth – and societal change more generally – thus facilitating patriarchal, gerontocratic, and ethnocentric worldviews.

Secondly, respondents who did refer to *immigration* often refrained from framing migrants as a 'problem', focusing instead on potential actions to be implemented to improve their reception,

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living conditions and cohabitation with Italians, Greeks and Turks. In doing so, respondents' observations were overwhelmingly formulated as practical solutions or recommendations (See 5.2.3). In other words, immigration or migrants were not the problem, but migration policies were. For instance, many called for a revision of domestic migration policies, with a strong focus on enhancing existing socio-economic inclusion efforts. A minority of respondents also argued in favour of solutions aimed at limiting certain forms of immigration, such as Marco (43) who called for "more money towards controls" and Cristiana (57), who – amongst other things – recommended to "help [migrants] in their country" (See 5.2.3.4). Others stressed the need to rethink supra-national policy responses and to improve cooperation at the EU level, particularly through a fairer "burden sharing" mechanism (See 5.2.3.1). Additionally, several respondents felt that the challenge lay in deconstructing fear-based narratives about migration and improving the population's attitudes towards migrants. For others, migration was perceived as a never-ending and unavoidable phenomenon and therefore, as an obvious "source of future social problems" (Yusuf, 68), inherently connected to economic and/or diplomatic tensions. Once again, respondents acknowledged the particular situation of young people by stressing the necessity of a long-term perspective and of improved access to education and opportunities for migrant youth, as illustrated by Meltem's (50) closing interview remarks:

> Turkey should not lose [sic] a migrant child. They are the new generation who can and who will contribute to Turkey's development in the future. So this young generation should be invested in more and more (...). And everybody knows in Turkey, and should accept, that these people will not go back. So, if we accept it, it means we should have a long-term strategy.

In addition to these *direct* references, migration was often *indirectly* discussed by other respondents, who rather than pinpointing migration as a discrete issue, stressed its transversal – and equally challenging – nature. Ioanna (35), for instance, acknowledged that migration was "not a standalone issue" and "definitely an issue, but in combination with all the other things that are happening", citing the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some highlighted how environmental changes constituted an important source of current and future population movements, while others stressed how better educational levels and a cultural mindset shift away from conservatism could lead to more positive and inclusive attitudes towards migrants and other minorities. Other respondents explicitly did not identify migration as a current priority or challenge, arguing that their countries faced more "serious" or "structural" issues at the moment, or that it would only be a challenge in the future (Murat, 36).

On a more positive note, Christos (53) insisted that, under the right conditions, migration should be seen as an "opportunity" (See 5.1.5):

> No, I wouldn't rank migration, it didn't even occur to me! No, no. I mean not for Greece at all. If anything, if done right, it's an opportunity. Because our population is declining. It might be an opportunity, it *is* an opportunity for the whole of Europe, but it needs to be done right also.

5.2.2. State and EU policy (dis)approval

The majority of respondents were critical about their government's responses – and those of the European Union – to migration as a whole, especially in the context of the 2015/2016 migrant arrivals. Some exceptions were found amongst Turkish respondents who, regardless of their political ideology,[180] and despite recognising some mistakes on the part of their government, stressed with irony that unlike most European democratic governments, President Erdoğan had adopted a humanitarian stance towards Syrian refugees despite being commonly presented as anti-democratic by Western observers:

> What's ironic is that the Turkish President is sometimes compared to authoritarian regimes or far-right authoritarian leaders, when in fact he's doing the opposite of what they do when it comes to migrants... he is pro-migrant. If [Viktor] Orbán [Hungarian right-wing Prime Minister] had been at the head of Turkey for example, he would have turned away these migrants. Or [Marine] Le Pen [French far-right politician], etc. (...) That's kind of the paradox, the contradiction of those who call themselves Democrats in the West, (...) they have anti-migrant rhetoric but at the same time they allow themselves to give lessons in democracy (Emir, 36).[181]

Greek and Italian respondents frequently justified the inefficiency of national and local public authorities by citing structural limitations that were beyond their control. For instance, they often highlighted a lack of human and material capacities and resources to deal efficiently with large and unexpected arrivals in border areas. In stressing systemic economic difficulties faced by their countries of origin, particularly in the islands, and acknowledging that the situation

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[180] Several respondents explained that the cleavage between secularism and religious conservatism was more relevant to understand Turkish politics than the traditional opposition between left-wing and right-wing ideologies. As a result, they stressed – not without irony – that the main Turkish opposition party (CHP – the Republican People's Party) did not proactively adopt a pro-migration stance. Can (24), for instance, found it "weird that the right wing here is more tolerant towards the migrants than the left wing", further adding: "it's the conservatives who support migration here in Turkey because of Erdoğan. Because he supports it, and conservatives (…) support whatever their leader supports". Based on a survey experiment conducted in Turkey in 2014, Getmansky et al. (2018) indeed confirmed that partisan identification – and, more specifically, support for the governing AKP party – reduced the perception of threat associated with Syrian refugees.
[181] Quote translated from French.

had been "heavy for both sides" (Anastasia, 55), these respondents insisted on striking a balance between states' obligations towards both incoming migrants and native populations. Their country's geographic location at the external borders of the EU was also perceived as inherently problematic. Respondents observed that, as countries of first arrival, they were forced to apply the provisions of the Dublin agreement, unfairly turning migration into a "country-specific problem" instead of a "European problem" (Nikos, 29), further validating feelings that they had been "left alone by Europe" (Gianna, 49). Western and Eastern European countries were also blamed for refusing to receive more migrants in the context of proposed relocation schemes, penalising countries of first arrival such as Italy and Greece. Although Francesca (32) agreed that the EU should play a bigger role, she recognised that its lack of legislative powers and exclusive competencies around migration limited this possibility and that "blaming the European Union for something that it cannot do is not helpful". Others felt that the situation had stabilised over time, whether this was due to the advent of a liberal-conservative government in Greece in July 2019, to increased patrols by Frontex around the Aegean Sea, to the building of a fence at the Greek-Turkish border, or to asylum procedures eventually running their course, with recognised refugees being transferred outside of the islands.

Although these respondents highlighted what their countries had done well or recognised that they had done their best despite difficult circumstances, they did not refrain from criticising their action. In fact, most respondents openly condemned the policies put in place to manage immigration since the early 2000s. In most cases, they highlighted the mismanagement of the situation by national and EU institutions. Insisting that their countries had felt "abandoned" (Marina, 23) by other EU Member States, most respondents decried the absence of a coordinated and solidarity approach at the EU level, which strongly penalised migrants as well as countries of transit and destination. This was the case of Antonis (41):

> You know, I think it's a sad story, because it's been a failure, to be honest, on all sides. Neither Greece has managed to deal with this effectively, neither the Europeans, and, you know, it's a story where the true victims are the people coming in. (…) I find it's kind of an issue which has really divided society also, divided the Europeans, and there's no real end in sight for the time being because (…) Greece cannot handle this pressure on its own, I mean that's clear. At the same time, (…) there's no kind of institutional mechanism for managing this at the European side, and that is kind of really dividing the European Union.

Other respondents extensively criticised their governments' poor communication and decision-making, especially in the context of the 2015/2016 arrivals. For example, some Greek respondents criticised the "mistakes" made by the previous party in power (Syriza, radical left), "who opened the borders (…) for ideological internationalist reasons (…) but didn't know what to do with these people" (Alexandros, 62), lacking a "structured approach" (Markos, 61). Several respondents regretted the absence of a clear procedure or legal instrument at the national level which sought to deal with the longer-term consequences of migration. According to Luigi (44), for instance: "Italy has remained for too long stuck in a sort of emergency-like management of migration issues, which has actually made it even more difficult to solve the problem". He further explained that this emergency lens had only exacerbated negative perceptions amongst the wider Italian public. Others criticised their government's lack of preparedness, or the fact that their decisions and policies were rarely based on sound data or factual evidence. Although some Turkish respondents commended their government's initial 'open-door policy' at the onset of the Syrian civil war in 2011, others described the government's decision to welcome Syrian refugees as, amongst others, "irresponsible" (Osman, 36), "irrational" and "miscalculated" (Murat, 36), "unprofessional" (Tolga, 28) and "ill-advised" (Emir, 36). The main sentiment was that the Turkish government had been unprepared to support refugees adequately, and that Turkey was now "paying the price" (Tolga, 28) for the political decision to support the Syrian opposition to Bachar El Assad's regime. Respondents observed that this decision "backfired" as the conflict became protracted and the numbers of Syrian refugees surpassed initial expectations. Some appeared particularly concerned about refugees' lack of formal registration, mounting criminality and economic competition, as well as demographic changes in some Turkish neighbourhoods and provinces (See 5.1.1).

Numerous (Turkish and Greek) respondents specifically referred to the thorny EU-Turkey relations, expressing their profound disapproval of the European Union's externalisation policy (See 2.1). They specifically called out the EU's "problematic treaty with Turkey, which simply means that we pay them to keep the migrants in Turkey" (Antonis, 41), as well as the way in which it actively promoted the encampment of migrants in the Greek hotspots (See 2.1.2). Markos (61) summarised the situation as follows:

> Nobody wants these guys... Europeans do not want them, they give money to Turkey to keep them, and when they come here [to Europe] they give money to Greece to keep them down there.

Greeks they push them, they try to keep them on Lesvos, or on Samos, and some refugee camps, where the living conditions are to be ashamed of...

Others questioned the efficiency of "the shield of Turkey" (Gerasimos, 68) in keeping migrants away from European shores, questioning the intentions of the Turkish government and the amount of money that it had received in the framework of this agreement. Anastasia (55) saw it as a "game of Turkey against the EU", recognising that President Erdoğan had gained considerable leverage as a result of this agreement. To illustrate the ensuing political tensions between their two countries, Greek respondents often referred to the episode of the 2020 Greek-Turkish border crisis along the Evros river (See 2.1.2), describing it as a "really terrible situation (…) [when] Turkey pushed the refugees to attack the frontiers" (Anastasia, 55) and "a huge incident (…) which clearly showed us that Turkey is willing to use [migration] as a political weapon to put pressure on us" (Antonis, 41). Turkish respondents were also critical of the EU-Turkey deal, although their arguments slightly differed. Many regretted that Turkey currently bore most of the responsibility with regards to hosting Syrian refugees. Deniz (42), for instance, felt that the EU had found "creative ways to bypass [its] obligation [to host refugees] and put the burden on a few other countries", further pursuing "a lot of ultra-right policies" and "polarising the electorate against refugees". Tolga (28) also called for more balance and accountability in the framework of the ongoing partnership between Turkey and EU Member States:

> (…) what I find a bit unfair is that, from a humanitarian perspective, you're expected to take a lot of immigrants, because otherwise these people are going to be killed, and you'll be labelled by everyone else as not helping them. But then, at the same time, the countries who, together with you, participated in supporting the opposition in Syria, are not willing to take on the burden with you. (…) but then, the country that has to support most of the consequences of the refugee crisis is Turkey, so… Turkey is kind of, like, left alone in this, and it's not really fair to put all of the blame on Turkey. (…) So, I think there should be more sharing of... or at least acceptance of responsibility there.

Others were disappointed that immigration had contributed to "crystallising the estrangement between Turkey and the European Union" (Murat, 36), notably with regards to the EU accession or visa liberalisation processes. Others firmly condemned the human cost of this generalised "hypocrisy" (Deniz, 42; Güven, 59). Can (24), for instance, denounced the

dehumanisation of Syrian refugees and their use as a strategic 'bargaining chip' by both the Turkish and EU Member States:[182]

> I must say that I'm very displeased that the Turkish government is literally using these migrants as, you know, something that they hold against the European Union... Because, I mean, they're human beings, they're not... political tools that you can just, you know, send to the gates, send to the borders and then recruit them back again, and find an agreement saying that "*Ok, if you give us that much money, we're not gonna let them go through the Union*", and then the European Union giving the money so that they don't have to deal with migrants… but these are human lives that we are talking about, right?

Lastly, another group of respondents identified and openly condemned hostile state practices, such as the closing of the ports to NGO search and rescue ships by the Italian authorities in 2018, instances of criminalisation of solidarity, prolonged encampment of minors, pushbacks, relocations, as well as the building of walls aimed at preventing arrivals. They also stressed the role of certain public figures – such as former Minister of Interior, Matteo Salvini in Italy – for disseminating misleading fear-based narratives, which effectively permeated the minds of the general public.

5.2.3. Voicing policy preferences

As observed by Eirini (53), for whom migration debates often lacked "realism", "it would be more beneficial for everybody if we had less narrative and more action". In fact, respondents' criticism of existing migration policies or state practices frequently led them to openly and unequivocally defend alternative and (allegedly) more desirable policy approaches, which mostly had to do with governing foreigners' entry and integration into their country of origin. I now explore their most frequently cited policy preferences.

5.2.3.1. Introducing a fair redistribution mechanism based on inter-state solidarity

Unsurprisingly, most respondents' negative views about the EU's externalisation strategy and the Dublin agreement (See 5.2.2), led them to call – more or less explicitly – for the introduction

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[182] See Adamson and Tsourapas (2018; 2019) on 'migration diplomacy' and Tsourapas (2019) on 'refugee rentier states' for insights into how multilateral migration deals (such as the EU-Turkey Statement) have led to a 'commodification' of forced migrants.

of a fairer migrant redistribution mechanism both amongst EU Member States and vis-à-vis third countries, such as Turkey. Whilst Turkish respondents called for a more balanced EU-Turkish partnership on migration, urging EU countries to accept more "responsibility" (Tolga, 28) and "[migrant] numbers" (Samet, 59), Greek and Italian respondents specifically called for improved cooperation at the EU level, pointing to the division of Member States on the topic of migration – and particularly to the reluctance of Eastern European countries to participate in such collective efforts.[183] Christos (53), for instance, observed that "the fact that not everyone is participating equally creates secondary effects" whereby "you end up really fighting about the behaviour of other member states rather than about the core issue". Likewise, Stefanos (69) observed that such a division "discredits the EU and diminishes its effectiveness". Like many others, he felt that migration should be treated first and foremost as a European issue rather than a national one:

> I certainly believe that the EU must be more coordinated because migration, as environment for example, is not a national policy. You cannot say: *"I will construct walls around my frontiers, and then the question will be solved"*, as Trump has done in Mexico for example. I mean, we have the Schengen agreement, we appreciate movements without restrictions, so... there must be a coordinated action amongst EU Member States. This is what I strongly believe. But I think that we are not yet there, unfortunately.

Cristiana (57) acknowledged that the first solution would be "to really share this issue with the European institutions" by having the European Commission initiate an EU-wide agreement allowing migrants "to be sent to other countries that can host them with more dignity". Angeliki (31) further observed that such a redistribution mechanism should remain mindful of migrants' individual preferences, and refrain from seeing them as mere numbers to be tossed around: "we cannot redistribute them at random, they are people. They must be able to integrate into a country and have at minimum a say in what they want for themselves and their families".[184]

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[183] Interviews were conducted before the adoption of the New EU Pact on Migration and Asylum in April 2024. The Pact notably introduces a mandatory 'solidarity mechanism' whereby all EU member states can support EU border states (such as Greece and Italy) through relocations or financial support. It remains to be seen how the EU will ensure a harmonised enforcement of this measure and whether it will effectively relieve the pressure faced by member states that feel penalised by the Dublin regulations (Russo, 2024).

[184] Quote translated from French.

5.2.3.2. Selective immigration controls and increased 'legal' migration opportunities

Several respondents acknowledged the need to implement selective controls – notably to ensure that migrants' numbers remained "manageable" for countries of first arrival (Eirini, 53). This was the case of Alexandros (62), who called for an EU-sponsored 'triage' process that would favour asylum over other forms of migration:

> With the European Union, we must find a way of *triaging* those who come from war-torn regions, or from countries where their lives are at risk because they are opposed to a regime… so those who leave because they are afraid of being punished for their political convictions, we have to welcome them. But the others need to be sorted out.[185]

Similarly, Marco (43) stressed the need for migration controls based on the need to distinguish three types of people on the move. Although he acknowledged that the first two categories – namely refugees and (educated) economic migrants seeking better prospects in Europe – deserved integration support in their country of destination, he argued that controls should be put in place to filter out a third and problematic category – that of economic migrants who happened to be "criminals":

> (…) this is a big issue because these are the guys who come and actively seek contacts with the black market and the mafia, and they are the ones causing the troubles (…), usually because they have a criminal instinct. (…). So I think this is the reason why we need to control immigration. We should have solutions whereby you can check on people (…) but it is difficult, I know, because a criminal will not tell you: "*I'm a criminal*". You should have a system, you know, of bilateral agreements or multi-agreements where you have a person coming and you call the local authorities in their own country and ask: "*Is this guy a criminal or not?*".

Migrants' educational level and ability to contribute to the economy of the destination country were seen as key deservingness criteria. For instance, although Samet (59) felt that European countries should accept more third country nationals due to its declining demography, he called for "a smart selection" that would favour people with a certain potential to be trained or educated, in order for Europe not to "lose control" over its immigrant population. Migrants' ethnic and cultural background also played a role for some. Theodoros (64), for instance, appeared concerned about the prospect of unrestricted immigration from outside of Europe:

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[185] Quote translated from French.

(…) at some point, you have to sort out whether you actually have immigrants who are eligible to stay in Europe or others who have to be pushed back to their country. Because otherwise, you know, we will end up having the whole of Africa and the whole of Asia arriving in Europe, and then where are we going to go – if you know what I mean?

Such calls for controls contributed – sometimes unintentionally – to casting certain migrant categories as more desirable than others, thus constituting a form of othering (See 5.1.3). Yet, they were sometimes in favor of creating mobility schemes for migrants who did not qualify for asylum. Based on the observation that so-called economic migrants were often forced into illegality, exploitation and/or deskilling under current circumstances and policies (or lack thereof), various research participants – such as Luigi (44) – were in favour of strengthening 'complementary pathways' to immigration:[186]

I think the more legal opportunities [we] give these people who want to come and work in your country the better actually, because it's really about integrating them into the economy, into the social fabric. So they shouldn't be treated in a way that pushes them to go into the black economy, into the black market, to go off track. On the contrary, you need to organise routes for these people to enter the *legal* tracks, get a proper job, have a contractual relationship with the job employer, pay taxes. So you actually need to make it easier also for economic immigrants to, in a way, obtain what they look for. And actually, by doing that, you're going to... incentivise the best part of the migration if you like (laughs), it's not very politically correct to say that, but I mean... the people that have good intentions and bring value I think you [should] actually make their life easier.

Measures such as work permit quotas, regularisation of undocumented migrants, or temporary/seasonal labour schemes were seen as necessary to guarantee migrants' protection and socio-economic integration on the one hand, and benefits for European societies on the other hand. This was the case for Francesca (32), who, convinced that "everyone deserves to be able to improve their own life" – notably through migration – and based on her personal experience going to Australia on a 'working holiday visa', advocated for the implementation a similar migration scheme at the EU level to allow temporary labour migration from third countries:

An option could be for example to [resume] the Blue Card they tried to do some years ago or implement a system where people that want to come to Europe need to buy a visa, and they can work for like, one year, like in Australia. (…) when I was in Australia, I was a migrant too, I

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[186] Complementary pathways may for instance include humanitarian admission, private sponsorship and family reunification programmes, as well as student scholarships.

had a working holiday visa, so I was doing really basic jobs like, I worked in a farm, (…) I worked as a waitress, and I simply paid for this visa and I stayed for one year. After one year, if I wanted, I could have stayed more, (…) otherwise, you know, go back to Italy. (…) So since, you know, most of the time, the people that arrive from Africa or from other countries, they pay the smuggler to get to Italy or to the European Union in general: why not use this [money] to allow them to enter in the European Union paying for a visa card?

5.2.3.3. Promoting a mutually beneficial integration process

As seen earlier in this chapter, migrants' socio-economic and cultural integration into their place of destination was both considered a migration-related challenge (5.2.1), and a condition of their acceptance by respondents (5.1.1.1). Importantly, several respondents stressed the fact that integration should not be migrants' sole responsibility, emphasising instead the two-way nature of the integration process (See Pratsinakis et al., 2017). That is, host societies would actively need to match migrants' efforts through putting in place effective and fair integration policies. Most respondents insisted on the socio-economic aspects of integration, defending the need to include immigrants through work, as well as educational and training opportunities – including language training and programmes seeking to match their skills with labour market needs. Respondents frequently observed that this would allow migrants to "find their purpose" (Marco, 43), put their skills to use (notably through better diploma recognition) and contribute positively to the economies of their places of destination in a context of population ageing. Others felt that this could also mitigate potential security risks which could arise from positions of marginalisation. They largely advocated for a mutually beneficial and long-term strategy which would focus on the durable inclusion of immigrants and their children. They were urging policy makers to think of migration as a structural issue, to be dealt with pre-emptively rather than reactively. In doing so, they often supported the idea of establishing a clear national integration policy or dedicated institution. Lorenzo (63), for instance, called for the reframing of migration as a social policy issue, rather than as a domestic security issue primarily dealt with by Ministries of Interior. Considering migration as Turkey's "number one problem", Yusuf (68) called for the creation of a distinct migration ministry. He further drew a parallel with the inadequate integration of Turkish guestworkers in post-war Germany, predicting similar societal challenges should Turkey fail to invest proactively in migrants' inclusion:

> The same will happen in Turkey. '*Migrants*'… But they are not migrants, they are people, and they will become our people soon, if they don't go back in a couple of years. After 10 years, 15 years, we have to give them residence cards, citizenship, whatever! They will have jobs, they

will have kids, they will learn the language, they will be staying here, but I think they will never harmonise [sic] if we don't do anything. We cannot just leave it and say "*Ah! They will adapt naturally! Nature will solve it*". No, it doesn't work like this!

Respondents also touched upon the cultural aspects of integration, highlighting the need for receiving societies to be involved in deconstructing misperceptions about migrants and improving the population's attitudes towards racialised people. For instance, Dimitra (22) felt that the most difficult challenge consisted in "changing the mentality of Greek people [towards] becoming more open and ready to accept refugees as part of the society", while Flavio (60) urged the Italian government to launch a communications campaign to fight racist prejudice and the public's misperceptions about migration. Although Melis (48) called for the introduction of an "adaptation", or "harmonisation" policy which would allow migrants and locals to coexist peacefully, Eirini (53) argued that people's cultural differences should be accepted and preserved, refusing to equate 'integration' with 'assimilation':[187]

> We have to be tolerant. Tolerance doesn't mean the Syrian or the Afghan has to come tomorrow morning, and has to act like (…) a Greek living in Belgium. No. Because I'm a Greek living in Belgium, but in the very end, I'm European. And the Belgians are Europeans. First. Second, I went to Belgium for other reasons than the ones they came for. (…) We cannot expect them to change from one day to another. And the big question that remains in me always, is: do you want them to change? Does integration mean that you have to change? (…) So maybe we should be really tolerant. We say: "*Ok, you come here, you just have to respect the country you are coming to*". And not ask them really to start behaving like Northern Europeans, if you see what I mean, ok? (…) I think we are all different. In the European Union we have this motto: *united in diversity*. But this diversity has to be mutually respected. (…)

Other respondents, such as Flavio (60) called for a reform of Italy's citizenship law which would recognise the *jus soli* principle, allowing migrants born in Italy from foreign parents to acquire the country's citizenship by birth.[188]

Discourses about the advantages of migrants' socio-economic and cultural integration were counterbalanced by a minority of respondents who underlined their limits. To them, it appeared impossible to "integrate", "absorb" (Gerasimos, 68; Panagiotis), or "sustain everyone" (Markos, 61) and crucial to limit abuses of the social welfare system.

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[187] Tolerance can sometimes conceal a form of othering. As remarked by Agier (2016), in his summary of the four motivations behind 'the migrants' cause' (See Table 2), the 'exotic cause' – seeks to stress and preserve migrants' cultural differences. As such, it runs the risk of essentialising their otherness.

[188] Currently, foreigners must live in Italy for a minimum of ten years before applying for naturalisation. Children born in Italy of foreign parents must wait until they turn 18 to apply for citizenship. A citizen-led campaign is underway in Italy to amend the current 1992 citizenship law and reduce the wait period to five years.

5.2.3.4. Addressing the 'root causes' of migration

A final recurring discourse focused on the so-called 'root causes' of migration (e.g. underdevelopment, climate change, poor governance, conflicts) and argued that the solution to the plight of underprivileged migrants lied in "helping them at home" (Caselli, 2019). In turning to this narrative, respondents implied – more or less explicitly – that international efforts towards solving these root causes would ultimately reduce or prevent migration altogether. When advancing this argument, respondents sometimes accused Western European countries of having fuelled political instability and/or poverty in migrants' countries of origin or transit through military interventions and/or the longlasting exploitation of natural resources (citing Iraq, Libya, Syria, Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo as examples). They thus argued that these countries bore a direct responsibility in addressing these 'root causes'.

Several respondents explicitly supported measures that would prevent people leaving their homes in the first place. These measures included promoting humanitarian and/or development aid, conflict resolution, or climate mitigation efforts. Alexandros (62), for instance, affirmed that "we must develop the countries that need it, this way people won't migrate. I am talking about Africa. We must give them the means to stay home, to live there".[189] Others similarly recommended to "find ways to support these people, (…) to do something for their homelands, that would not push them to emigrate" (Anastasia, 55), and "enable these people to stay in their countries and become happy there" (Gerasimos, 68). For Panagiotis, the goal should be "not to have any wars (…) in the world, [in order] not to have people leaving their homes". In the same vein, Marco (43) argued that:

> (…) the issue is to try to prevent them to move. So we need to help them tackle the issues. (…) I don't think exporting democracy there, the American model, is the right solution, but you know, I think that working in ensuring that the country is able to come out of the economic or political crisis, but also climate crisis, is the way to go. (…)

Although respondents felt that this solution was driven by good intentions – notably the idea that migrants should be spared from difficulties when living in Europe – research has demonstrated that such arguments were misleading. Indeed, human development actually increases migration capabilities and aspirations, leading to more emigration, and individuals

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[189] Quote translated from French.

with the most social and financial capital are usually the ones who end up migrating (de Haas, 2007; UNDP, 2019). According to Hagen-Zanker & Carling, besides being "unlikely to work", this migration management strategy is "ethically and politically flawed because it rests on the idea of migration as a problem to be solved" (2023:4). Carla (32), reflected on and criticised the normalisation of this discourse amongst left-wing politicians, naming Matteo Renzi (Former Prime Minister between 2014 and 2016; and former secretary of Italy's Democratic Party) as an example:

> I remember that back then, when the Prime Minister said that [we had to help them at home], I was really furious because (...) a few years ago it was unthinkable that the leader of the Socialist Party would say things like that. It was Berlusconi who said that back then! (laughs). But (...) I would say that the majority of people agree with this proposal. (...) but in some contexts it's impossible, (...) how do you *help* someone in Syria, I mean if you've got bombs falling from the sky, how?[190]

Ekaterina (24) also recognised that although "we could perhaps contribute globally to improving the situation in their country" this had to be done "without any European or Western imperialism".[191]

5.2.4. Conclusions

Migration was seldom perceived in isolation, but rather as a transversal issue, intrinsically connected to wider societal challenges. Respondents' answers to my last interview question (5.2.1) downplay the mediatic and political framing of migration as a problem. In fact, if anything, to most respondents, the absence of solidarity towards migrants appeared more problematic than the question of their presence. Although this rather positive outlook could be explained by the profile of respondents – citizens residing abroad, who, therefore, are not confronted by everyday domestic realities – I have demonstrated in the previous chapter how they stayed closely informed about societal issues going on back home. Given the salience and politicisation of migration issues in Italy, Greece and Turkey, it is unsurprising that they demonstrated strong opinions about how migration was governed by national and supra-national public authorities (5.2.2) Although some respondents did justify their country's

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[190] Quote translated from French.
[191] Another less cited yet highly relevant policy option brought up by respondents, consisted in promoting migrants' return or repatriation to their home country. Two Turkish respondents indeed suggested "sending Syrian refugees] back to Syria" (Samet, 59). Emir (36) argued that such returns should however be made on a voluntary basis and encouraged only in cases where dignified living conditions could be guaranteed.

inherently difficult position as countries of arrival and transit, they were mostly critical about their handling of migration, both in the short-term and the long-term. The most recurring criticism was directed at EU Member States for their failure to show greater solidarity towards countries of first arrival (Italy and Greece) and its externalisation partners (Turkey). Respondents also formulated a number of desirable policy options which either veered towards more migrant othering or solidarity, namely: the introduction of a fair migrant redistribution mechanism; the implementation of selective immigration controls – with a focus on expanding complementary immigration pathways –; the promotion of a mutually beneficial integration process, and the need to "address the root causes of migration" (5.2.3).

5.3. Conclusion

Starting from my previous observation that research participants remained strongly attached to their country of origin despite the geographic distance, the present chapter sought to analyse how they perceived the impact of certain migration discourses and policies in their countries of origin. Indeed, having been at the forefront of migration-related debates since the turn of the 20th century, Italy, Greece and Turkey have become central 'migration states' (Hollifield, 2004; Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019) and actors of 'migration diplomacy' (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2018). Through the overlooked yet essential point of view of emigrants, I demonstrated how migration was thought to have impacted Italian, Greek and Turkish societies. In particular, I showed how respondents reacted to common migration-related discourses in their country of origin (5.1), specifically those depicting migration as a 'threat', as 'crisis', or as an 'opportunity', as well as those highlighting the 'categorisation' of migrants, or the 'moral duty' of hospitality. In addition to assessing respondents' opinions of how migration is *talked about*, I analysed their views regarding how it is *acted upon* by (inter)national public actors (5.2). In doing so, I highlighted how they justified their (dis)approval of state policies and formulated alternative policy options or preferences. In line with the three types of studies about attitudes towards immigration outlined in Chapter 1 (Figure 1), the analysis contained in this chapter covered respondents' attitudes towards incoming migration, vis-à-vis the perceived economic and cultural impacts of migration, as well as towards different migration categories.

Research participants' unequivocal opinions about migration-related questions affecting their country of origin confirm the need to better understand and incorporate emigrants' perceptions of migration into both research and policy efforts. For example, their subjective interest in *emigration*-related challenges could contribute to widening the scope of current public debates on and definitions of migration, which tend to overly focus on *immigration*, bringing a potentially less contentious perspective into the topic. Importantly, the question of *why* privileged migrants' attitudes vary from those of less privileged migrants or from non-migrants remains. This question will be explored in the next chapter, together with the difficulty of effectively turning solidarity *discourses* into solidarity *practices*. Through the concept of 'othering-solidarity continuum', I will explore the ambivalence of solidarity and the pervasiveness of exclusionary discourses and practices.

Chapter 6: From Perception to (In)action: Migrant Solidarity in Practice.

6.0. Introduction

> (…) I can easily say that I'm coming from the top segment of society, that I studied in the best schools, and like, I was able to learn languages from my childhood, and I went to private schools, and my family belongs to the middle-upper class, so... I'm no one to say big words really. I mean, I do not represent the majority of Turkey, that's for sure. (Ayça, 31)

People with a migrant background, as well as those with important levels of educational attainment are often assumed to hold more progressive views when it comes to migration and other societal issues (Dinas et al., 2021; Dražanová et al., 2024; Fetzer, 2012; See 1.1.3 and 1.4.1). Studying the perceptions of privileged migrants (whether or not they identify as such; See 4.2.1), regarding migration in both their countries of origin and destination, can provide useful insights into the class considerations underlying their attitudes. This further underlines the usefulness of an intersectional framework (See 1.2.2). Respondents' positionality and perceived belonging to a distinct group or 'class' of migrants (or individuals) undeniably impacts their perceptions of the multiple social hierarchies and power dynamics that migration (re)produces (whether based on class, race, national origin, citizenship, etc.).[192] I therefore start off this chapter by analysing the range of arguments used by respondents to explain why their views on migration might differ from that of their co-nationals back home (6.1). In order to verify if the seemingly open worldviews of privileged migrants apply in practice, I then turn to examining the nature of their past and/or current engagement in 'migrant solidarity' activities (6.2). Lastly, I demonstrate how othering permeates respondents' solidarity practices in more or less explicit ways through the existence of a 'migrant othering-solidarity continuum' (6.3).

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[192] Although the initial ambition of this thesis was to compare the perceptions of Italians, Greeks and Turks from different socio-economic backgrounds and/or migration generations, using social class as a central comparison point, the COVID-19 lockdown forced me to revise my approach, focusing instead solely on *privileged* migrants. These participants were easier to identify and interview (online) during my field work (See 3.2.6) forcing me to lose this crucial comparative element.

6.1. Explaining privileged migrants' attitudes towards migration

Having previously outlined the range of individual-level and contextual elements affecting individuals' views about migration and described how respondents can be considered as a particular category of migrants, namely 'privileged' migrants, I now delve into the extent to which they felt that their perceptions of migration – as emigrants – differed from that of their non-migrant co-nationals.

6.1.1. Interpreting negative attitudes towards migration

While commenting on widespread migration discourses (See 5.1), respondents sometimes reflected upon how their privileged position had positively affected their views about migration, and how their positionality contrasted with that of other categories of co-nationals, namely non-migrants, justifying the alleged more hostile views of the latter.

6.1.1.1. Socio-demographic factors

Respondents regularly stressed the importance of certain socio-demographic factors – such as socio-economic status and age – in driving attitudes towards migration.[193] As demonstrated previously, respondents often reflected upon discourses portraying migration as a material or symbolic threat (See 5.1.1). Although the argument which portrayed migrants as economic competitors did not necessarily resonate with them given their privileged socio-economic background, they recognised that the dire socio-economic context in their country of origin (e.g. chronic unemployment, resource misallocation), together with an overall feeling of being abandoned by national and European authorities, increased hostility towards migrants. The economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic were often seen as an aggravating factor, exacerbating previous inequalities and resentment towards foreign 'others'. Age was identified as another relevant factor, as respondents often described older people as more conservative, or saw them as becoming more averse to change over time, confirming previous research

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[193] A recent meta-analysis by Dražanová et al. demonstrated that – amongst several individual-level characteristics – education and age are most consistently associated with attitudes towards immigration. More specifically, "more educated individuals are consistently found to hold significantly more positive attitudes toward immigration" while "older respondents hold significantly more anti-immigration attitudes than younger respondents" (2024:318).

results (Jeannet & Dražanová, 2019; Dražanová, 2021). Rhea (26), for instance, noted that the EU enlargement process had served as a generational turning point, by normalising human mobility amongst younger generations:

> (…) the young generations can understand better, they are more welcoming with migrants, and they try to help them. (…) For example, when I was younger there was this hostility, the Greek society was not yet used to migrants. They were perceiving them as somebody strange [foreign] just coexisting in the same society. And now by realising that "*Hey, we are in the European community*", you can also be a migrant, your child can be a migrant... that's how they are realising little by little that it's something really normal.

The link drawn between disadvantaged socio-economic positions and/or old age on the one hand, with less open attitudes towards migration on the other, is consistent with previous research. For instance, Jaskulowski and Pawlak (2020) have similarly shown that 'middling migrants' living in Poland mainly conceived of racism as originating almost exclusively from lower social classes and the elderly, who could be characterised by low educational levels and certain communication inabilities.[194]

6.1.1.2. Geographical differences

Because they mostly originated from places that had not been primarily affected by migrant arrivals (See Figure 12) – such as hotspots in islands of Sicily or the Aegean Sea, or the Southern Turkish provinces bordering Syria – respondents often admitted that they did not necessarily have a full and accurate understanding of the situation on the ground, and largely sympathised with local populations who had experienced large migrant arrivals first-hand. As noted by Francesca (32), who was originally from Sardinia: "You should ask someone coming from Sicily probably, or from Lampedusa, what is their perception. If they say the perception is the same, then it's the same! (laughs)". Furthermore, respondents felt that migrant solidarity was "deeply location-specific" (Nikos, 29). Some mentioned the notorious North-South divide to explain variations in attitudes across the Italian territory. Indeed, Northern Italian cities (where most Italian respondents had either grown up, worked or studied in) were often perceived to be more culturally diverse and economically prosperous, hence more likely to accept and integrate migrants into the local workforce. For others, attitudes varied according

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[194] I will however argue in 6.3.2 that racist discourses are also prevalent – albeit often more subtle – in the discourses of educated people (including young people) with a migration background.

to city size ("the smaller the place, the bigger the trouble" according to Marina, 23), or to area type (urban centres, islands and port cities were portrayed as more accustomed to continuous population inflows/outflows and intercultural mixing than rural and inland territories).[195]

6.1.1.3. Misinformation and lack of exposure to migrants

As outlined in 4.1.2, the vast majority of respondents had acquired 'cosmopolitan capital', which was a defining feature of their privileged social status as migrants in Brussels. They often viewed themselves as educated and well-informed, with a sound understanding of complex transnational socio-political issues (such as migration). In contrast, people who lacked an interest and/or an educational background in international affairs were deemed misinformed (or even dis-informed) about such issues and more prone to embracing ethnocentrist and populist discourses. As a former city councilor in Turin, Raffaele (42) explained having witnessed first-hand how effective anti-migrant propaganda was amongst the poorest and less educated population segments, who tended to see migration as a zero-sum game. As remarked by Christos, who called for an educational reform in Greece, "[more education] is linked to [less] prejudice, and to openness". Similarly, Osman (36) felt that "in general, when the level of education is low, you have more tendency to be racist" (See 5.2.1). Ioanna (35) and Marina (23) both regretted the fact that many young people's disinterest in international politics and disengagement from the EU led, at best, to a lack of concern for migration issues, and, at worst, to overt hostility. Ricardo (33) felt that low knowledge levels and the polarisation of the migration debate had resulted in "a very dangerous cocktail" standing in the way of empathy and reason:

> Nowadays, on migration politics, it's such a mixture of factors that come from a lack of knowledge in the history of the world, in what we did as Europeans, and that is still creating problems nowadays. (…) there are so many problems but I really think that improving the level of education can really solve human problems (…). A better understanding of things and making it easier for [people] to understand, to empathise and to leave things with a calmer mind and moderation, because nowadays (…) there's no more grey, there's no more discussing things. It's only yes or no, black or white, (…) so you're against migration or you're pro migration. No, I mean, this is not the way things work, you know! (laughs).

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[195] Importantly, some respondents stressed the complexity of the matter in practice by giving some counter examples of small-sized municipalities which had displayed high levels of hospitality towards newcomers. Ricardo (33) and Marina (23), for instance, respectively cited good practices from Riace and Lampedusa in Sicily.

Some Italian respondents also alluded to a form of collective amnesia regarding Italians' emigration past, stressing the integration challenges Italian emigrants had faced in their places of destination. They thus regretted their compatriots' reluctance to learn the lessons from this collective past (See 4.2.2.1).

In addition to this lack of knowledge about the causes and consequences of migration, respondents also explained that some of their co-nationals' lack of direct exposure to migrant populations could lead to ignorance and hostility. As seen previously, racialised migrants and groups (those perceived as visibly 'non-white', such as Arab/Muslim or black migrants) were often thought to pose a cultural threat in respondents' respective countries of origin (See 5.1.1.2). As such, respondents described how the relatively recent nature of immigration into their countries of origin (compared to traditional immigration countries such as France, Germany or Belgium) and resulting lack of exposure to non-white populations could explain natives' reluctance to accept otherness. Recounting a documentary set in a Greek refugee camp, Ioanna (35) regretted that encampment prevented meaningful interactions between local communities and migrants, fuelling prejudice and misinformation:

> The people in the village never interacted with the people in the camp. They had solid opinions about the life of the people in the camps through the Greek television. But they never interacted with them. You know, imagine that you are living in a village and that two kilometres outside there is a camp, and you do not have, like, a true experience with these people, you don't interact, you don't speak... Those people come to your village, they have coffee next door, but you have never spoken to them! But you consider them criminals, or whatever, blah, blah, blah, because you are only watching the news or following social media...

In addition to a structural lack of interest in international affairs and exposure to migrant populations, respondents also attributed othering to harmful public narratives rooted in misinformation instead of facts or expertise. Respondents criticised how such discourses (such as those presenting migration as a crisis; See 5.1.2) resulted in an oversimplified and negative framing of migration and migrants. For Ioanna (35), racist discourses were on the rise due to people's tendency to pursue confirmation bias by "reading what already confirms their beliefs". Some respondents described how certain learning experiences had equipped them with resources which had enabled them to better grasp the complexity of the causes and consequences of migration, and thus better resist dehumanising narratives circulating in the media. For instance, Stella (26) mentioned attending lectures by migration experts while Rhea (26) referred to an insightful exchange programme she had participated in back in 2017:

When I participated in [this] programme for the refugees, to raise awareness, (…) We understood that there is this kind of ignorance let's say, on the part of the society, for the refugees. Because when we spoke with [the refugees], and we visited camps, and we also made different projects with refugee children... many of them said that of course, they wanted to go back to their country. I mean no one wants to go [to Greece/Europe] because (…) you know, there is this kind of hostility. But still, they were eager, and even the children had already started learning the language. (…). So, they were somewhere in between, like, with the desire to go back but still realising that "*yeah but we are here for so many years, so we have to start to at least, integrate, as much as we can*".

For many respondents (mainly Italian ones), the problem had more to do with deliberate disinformation attempts on the part of politicians and media outlets, than with mere misinformation. As such, they felt that the public debate around migration in their country of origin was overly politicised, mediatised and polarised, exacerbating migrant othering discourses. As residents living abroad who were not directly (or no longer) affected by systemic socio-economic issues, respondents felt relatively spared from such disinformation efforts, or were at least able to reflect upon it as unbiased 'outsiders'. In comparison, their co-nationals back home were perceived as being the primary targets of such discourses. Some respondents firmly condemned the rising influence of far-right populist discourses, which blamed the grim socio-economic context on migrants and instrumentalised people's dissatisfaction with the EU to frame migration as a 'crisis', a 'threat' or a 'problem' (See 5.1). Respondents interpreted this both as a way for politicians to evade responsibility for structural domestic issues and to gain political support. As summarised by Adriana (39):

(…) I think that Italians have always been a very welcoming people, you know, a very welcoming country. But I think lately (…) a more populistic approach has taken over. I think [politicians] have (…) let's say, exploited this feeling of fear of immigration (…). I think if they were happy with their economic and social situation, they wouldn't really care about, you know, foreigners trying to save their lives and reaching their country, to be honest. But it's nice to, let's say, create some fog, and tell them [the natives] that *they* [the immigrants] are the problem. Not the society, not the economy, not everything else... I think it's a great distraction.

Many felt that this approach had culminated in the exclusionary state practices implemented during Matteo Salvini's coming to power as Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister (between June 2018 and August 2019).[196] These policies included the closing of Italian ports to migrant rescue boats, which Andrea (31) described as "refusing people and holding them

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[196] All the interviews took place before Giorgia Meloni (*Fratelli di Italia*) became the Italian Prime Minister in October 2022.

hostage at Italian shores" (See 2.1.2). They further observed that such deceptive narratives had even permeated mainstream public debates, normalising othering discourses amongst everyday citizens, as well as traditional left-wing and so-called progressive parties.[197] The constant and polarising coverage of migration in the media (particularly around so-called crisis periods) was also perceived to have instrumentalised citizens' fears and emotions, "overexaggerating" the challenges posed by migration, eclipsing other pressing topics and further exacerbating migrant othering. Andrea (31), for instance, recalled with frustration having been "bombarded" with news about migration during the summer of 2015, prior to moving to Brussels:

> When I was in Milan, I remember one day, I was in the office. (…) we had (…) this kind of area where people could just relax for a while, and there were newspapers. (…) Once, I remember that I was just passing by, and I just gave a look briefly to the newspapers, and something struck me. I put all the newspapers together, there were like fifteen or twenty newspapers. And in the first page, the first words, they all had the word 'migrants'. So you would just put them like this (gestures) and it would be 'migrants, migrants, migrants'. But every day. *Every day*. So I think it was exhausting, and I think it was also ridiculous. Ridiculous because – as if it was the only thing that happened, right?

6.1.2. Information-seeking practices

Looking at respondents' media practices offers us insights into how they handle information produced by the media, which play a key role in shaping the overall narrative about migration (Güell & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2024; See 1.1.3.3). When asked about the ways in which they remained informed about migration issues, or the type of sources they valued, respondents cited, in order of importance, traditional media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers including the online press), their personal experience and firsthand insights, social media, the (indirect) insights of friends and/or relatives back home, and, to a lesser extent, institutional sources (e.g. governmental sources, NGO reports, academic publications).

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[197] For instance, Carla (32) regretted that former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi (Democratic Party) had embraced the "let's help them at home" discourse (See 5.2.3.4), while Ricardo (33) observed that the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding with Libya had been signed under Renzi, paving the way for Salvini's far-right and anti-immigration policies.

6.1.2.1. Media practices and secondary insights

Respondents typically relied on a mix of national and international press and media outlets[198] and often explained which sources they deemed more trustworthy, and why. For instance, they often perceived international newspapers and TV channels as more objective and less politically biased than national ones (particularly national private TV channels) and/or placed value in understanding how domestic issues were interpreted from an external perspective. Others cross-checked different sources of information and/or consulted outlets from across the political spectrum in order to develop an informed opinion. Younger respondents were relatively less inclined to watch news on the television, which some described as "overwhelming" and "superficial" information coverage (Marina, 23; Tolga, 26), relying on online news instead.[199] Online tools were mainly cited by respondents from the youngest age group (18-35), but also by Turkish respondents. Indeed, the latter often referred to the crackdown on press freedom in Turkey, relying instead on international and/or alternative or social media, which were deemed more reliable.[200] Can (24) for instance, explained that Twitter (now X) constituted a crucial information source due to censorship in mainstream Turkish media, further clarifying: "we only have one or two channels that are not owned by anyone close to [President] Erdoğan". Similarly, Tolga (27), described the benefits of several online platforms that he used, such as Reddit, YouTube, but also *Ekşi Sözlük*, which he described as "a Turkish type of Reddit":

> Reddit is pretty good, but *Ekşi Sözlük* is even better because that has existed since the nineties so it's a much, much bigger community where Turkish people are active anonymously. And it's much better than news, because there of course people can more easily talk about anything. (…) so I think if you really wanna get a good pulse of what's happening in society, (…) on the Internet you cannot censor everything (…) Or let's say you cannot easily control the flow of information, so... there, it's probably the easiest way to get a good view of everything. I mean, you see both, you see also people who are more on the government side, you see people from every side, and you get to have an idea of what are people thinking about, what's going on...

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[198] National media outlets (press, TV, radio) cited included Ekathimerini and To Vima (Greece), La Reppublica, Internazionale, Corriere de la Serra, Il Post, RAI 24, La 7 (Italy), and Söscü (Turkey). Most were followed online or through satellite TV. International outlets included The Guardian, BBC, the Financial Times, The Economist, Arte, Le Monde, France Inter, Politico, Le Soir, Al Jazeera, Reuters, Euronews.

[199] Respondents mainly cited Twitter (Now 'X'), Facebook, and LinkedIN.

[200] In 2024, Turkey was ranked 158th (out of 180 countries) in Reporters Sans Frontières' annual world press freedom index. According to RSF's website, press freedom is defined as "the ability of journalists as individuals and collectives to select, produce, and disseminate news in the public interest independent of political, economic, legal and social interference and in the absence of threats to their physical and mental safety".

Importantly, several middle-aged respondents were particularly critical about social media, deeming them biased and unreliable information sources. Others – who were still aware of their limitations – felt that social media were a unique tool that allowed them to express their political views about migration issues, to follow the activities of migrant solidarity organisations (such as those working in Search and Rescue), updates from vocal and influential people on this issue (e.g. journalists, politicians, activists, practitioners), or to spread positive migration narratives amongst their personal circles (see quote by Nikos in 6.2.1.4).

In addition to traditional and social media, and albeit to a relatively lesser extent, several respondents also cited institutional sources stemming from governmental/international institutions[201] and NGOs, as well as academic sources and scientific publications.[202] Eirini (53) and Osman (36) both believed that such organisations were the most likely to provide credible and evidence-based data which could shape public opinion and policies more appropriately. While recognising that reports published by INGOs such as Amnesty International were somewhat "partial" and "not 100% independent", Osman (36) commended the fact that the data contained in their reports came from first-hand insights. As a lawyer, he valued the weight of legal arguments brought forward by fellow law practitioners, particularly given the situation of the rule of law in Turkey:

> Amnesty International (…), they really try to reflect the situation with data. And I also know that they are collaborating with lawyers in Turkey (…) who are dealing with migrants. (…) It's not easy being a lawyer in Turkey! If you are dealing with migration or criminal law, political issues, or with human rights. It's not the same as being a lawyer in Belgium or being a business lawyer like me! This is another issue. So these lawyers obviously need support in Turkey.

A final (and key) source of information consisted of indirect – personal and professional – insights from respondents' friends and relatives who were still living back home, particularly through social media (See 4.3.1). As observed by Iraklis: "thanks to technology, there are no distances anymore (…) it doesn't matter where you are anymore". While some respondents recounted how their relatives back home supported arguments that painted migrants as a threat, others managed to use some of their relatives' accounts precisely to counter this argument. For

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[201] For instance, respondents referred to information emanating from the Greek Ministry of Interior, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), the Greek government and its Permanent delegation to the EU, as well as official migration statistics released by the EU.
[202] Because many respondents worked in international affairs, particularly in EU institutions or national/regional delegations, they often relied on official insights on migration obtained through their workplace in Brussels.

instance, Iraklis had learned from friends that local island communities and migrants had found ways to live together peacefully overtime:

> Greece's economy relies a lot on tourism, tourism relies a lot on the islands, (…). In the beginning, there was an issue about all these migrants coming in from the East, from Turkey. And we opened these camps in the islands that would [supposedly] scare tourism, that would threaten a vital pillar of the economy. And it has not actually realised, you know, they found a *modus vivendi* there and, we have the migrants but at the same time on the same island we have the hotels where tourists come and enjoy, so …. And I understand from friends who live there that actually the migrants help the economy over winter. Because in winter, when the tourists go, [migrants] actually spend (…) [money] in the local economy.

In addition to reported experiences and secondary observations, respondents valued the professional first-hand insights of friends or relatives working in the field of migration, perceiving them as reliable insider information. These included "teachers, people who work in the camps or asylum services" (Ioanna, 35), friends working at national and EU institutions dealing with migration, but also people assisting and/or documenting the difficult conditions of people on the move in key transit areas given their position as NGO workers, doctors, reception centre workers and even journalists/photographers. Andrea (31) and Carla (32), for instance, both reported gaining a better understanding of the difficult living conditions of migrants at the Franco-Italian Ventimiglia border[203] through the accounts of such friends, while Ricardo (33) had received key insights into the shortcomings of Italy's internal migrant redistribution scheme thanks to a friend:

> (…) the boats were physically arriving in the South and in the ports... but then, there was this system in Italy of dispatching the migrants around the country so, there were issues everywhere. A very good friend of mine was managing an immigration centre in Bologna and told me that it was a disaster because there was no political will to give them money. So they were kind of keeping these people in prison because they still had to decide politically and operationally what to do, where to put them, so... they were staying there hungry. Angry and hungry.

Some had first-hand knowledge through family members who had a direct experience with migration. Christos (53), for instance, explained that thanks to his wife's occupation, he had received insights into the micropolitics of migrant children's education in Greece, giving him insider knowledge "about how the Greek government was fighting those people" (both migrants and civil servants that were addressing their needs):

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[203] See Trucco (2020) for a detailed account of the evolution of the migration situation at the Southern French-Italian border before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

> (…) on the one hand you have (…) one service created to place as many children as possible in schools, and make sure that they don't suffer from racism, etc. etc., convince the local communities that it's okay if they have five Iraqi children in their school... and on the other hand you have other ministries, or other services, fighting these people. (…) and really sort of conducting guerrilla warfare constantly against them, and driving them to despair, and to resign sometimes, so... I know that there I could even tell you that, officially, the Greek state is not doing much.

This inside knowledge directly influenced Christos' view that a "generous step" should be taken towards promoting the rights of migrant children… "because they have a chance of becoming entirely Greek" and because "the usual fears" that apply to older migrants do not apply to them. Like other respondents, he believed that his country should actively invest in migrant children's education and that not doing so would be a "lost opportunity" for receiving societies (See 5.1.4 and 5.2.1).

6.1.2.2. Personal insights as complementary information sources

Although respondents' personal insights into migration often remained indirect and theoretical, they sometimes included direct socialisation experiences with migrants. Indirect experience usually consisted in following classes or conferences on asylum and/or international migration or drafting master's theses on the topic.[204] According to Stella (26), these theoretical insights served as an alternative, more pragmatic, source of information on migration:

> So, I was not that biased from what I heard on the news, because the news were really portraying it really, really, badly. (…) Not that I'm saying that there was no immigration (…) but it was more: "*they're coming, and we cannot let them come, we have to block the boats*" etc. etc.

In some cases, respondents' theoretical insights were later put in practice through direct exposure and experience in the migration field, particularly through internships and or volunteering experiences (See 6.2.1.2), but also through political experience. Raffaele (44), for instance, recognised that his previous responsibilities as an elected local representative within a centre-left coalition between 2011 and 2016, and more specifically his competencies in social affairs, in a district that was strongly "affected by migration" (namely the *Porta Palazzo* district in Turin), had durably influenced his commitment to migration matters, particularly towards advocating for a positive narrative change amongst the Italian public (See 6.2.1.3).

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[204] For instance, Nikos (29) wrote his Master thesis on Frontex, Francesca (32) on EU migration policies, and Giulia (24) on unaccompanied minors in Europe.

A minority of respondents had directly witnessed the migration situation in their home country, including in areas which were impacted the most by migrants' arrivals such as Italian and Greek islands, reception centres, and the Turkish/Syrian border (See 6.2.1). Whilst in some cases, witnessing the situation first-hand led them to empathise with migrants, in others, it contributed to mixed or negative feelings about the overall situation (see Zeynep in 6.3.2 below). As observed previously, other respondents felt that their hometowns had changed for the worse, sometimes drawing a direct link between immigration and growing insecurity (See 5.1.1.3). Some acknowledged that migration had considerably transformed certain landmarks such as the Taksim neighbourhood in Istanbul. Murat (36) similarly explained that the migrant smuggling business had changed the face of Kemeraltı Bazaar in his native Izmir in the past decade. He went on to describe how vendors were overtly selling low quality boats and safety jackets, aimed at people attempting the dangerous crossings across the Eastern Mediterranean route. Rather than criticising immigration itself, other respondents criticised the rise of overtly racist acts targeting immigrants. Emanuele (42), for instance, recalled a racist incident when he was riding on a bus in Naples in 2015 during which black men "with their big bags of selling supplies"[205] were verbally attacked and insulted by other passengers. Ricardo (33) explained that his hometown in Northern Lombardy was one of the strongholds of the far-right *Lega Nord* political party and had witnessed a clear shift of othering targets, from (Italian) Southerners to foreigners:

> I mean, there's always been this mentality, of, you know, rich Northern Italy against the poor South of Italy. So now, there has been a kind of a change of targets: everyone is against the migrants more, so people in the South they're ok but now the migrants are not ok.

Other respondents acknowledged that migrants were less visible (and that, as a result, their presence was seen as less problematic) due to residential segregation, adequate socio-economic integration and/or to their hometowns being traditionally more open to cultural exchanges.[206] Alexandros (62), for instance, explained that his native town of Thessaloniki was "rather calm" compared to Athens:

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[205] Quote translated from French.
[206] Respondents specifically referred to Thessaloniki, Genoa, Bologna, the Lombardy region more generally, and to privileged neighbourhoods of Istanbul and Izmir.

> I mean, we don't see immigrants on our streets, (...) they're working, they're discreet. (...) We don't really experience the problem ourselves. There are camps a few kilometres outside of town but I wouldn't say we're affected by anything at all.[207]

Interestingly, living in Brussels sometimes played a positive role in reducing cultural threat perceptions for some research participants. Carla (32), for instance, who recalled having been exposed to very few black people in Italy, acknowledged that having a black doctor in Brussels challenged her own preconceptions, which had been shaped by how migrants are largely portrayed in Italy: "In Italy, this would be impossible. At the moment, black people mainly sell bracelets on the beach. They're not surgeons, cardiologists... unfortunately. Nor business owners".[208] Several respondents who had grown up in the 1990s recalled that their first exposure to migration took place at the height of Albanian immigration to Italy and Greece (King & Mai, 2008; See 2.1.1 and 5.1.3). Nikos (29) strongly remembered this moment:

> I would think of (…) the Albanians coming to Greece in the nineties, which basically meant that I grew up in a high school which was very mixed, because *a lot* of people came to work and their kids being born in Greece. Because I was born in 1992. So they were already established, and it was the first generation born in Greece. (…)

Several respondents mentioned forming relationships with foreigners which had helped them familiarise themselves with some of the challenges faced by migrants, and, as a result, better empathise with them. Ioannis (25) admitted "taking an interest" in migration thanks to a Nigerian friend of his who "told [him] the story of his arrival in Greece, which was quite touching" and "inserted [him] into the world of the migrant issue". Similarly, Antonis (41) explained that his office had hired an Albanian university student back in 2012 who had struggled to obtain Greek nationality despite speaking the language, having graduated from a Greek university, and having parents living and working there. This gave Antonis "a personal glimpse into the limitations of the Greek approach" in terms of citizenship. He welcomed the fact that second-generation migrants had since obtained the possibility to acquire Greek nationality since a law passed by the left-wing Syriza government in 2015 (Reuters, 2015):

> (…) it goes in the right direction if you ask me, because of course I think you need some criteria when you admit people in the country – I mean in Belgium I think you have to speak one language and work for five years and pay taxes (...) – But in Greece you know, it was practically impossible

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[207] Quote translated from French.
[208] Quote translated from French.

for anyone who is not of Greek origin in a way to get the nationality, and I think that's not clever from all points of view.

Beyond having migrant friends and colleagues, others also mentioned having had positive experiences with migrant employees back home. Flavio (60) mentioned the two Albanian domestic care workers who used to take care of his mother, praising their devotion and hard work: "they stayed there from 8AM to 10PM, seven days a week. No one in Italy, no Italian, could accept this kind of job".[209] Other respondents shared their positive migrant hosting experiences at a community level. Iraklis, for instance, recalled how his parents had hosted an Albanian family in the 1990s, who helped them on their farm in exchange for food and shelter, developing a strong personal bond over the years. Cristiana (57) recalled a similar experience from her teenage years when Vietnamese refugees fleeing the war arrived in Italy and had been generously welcomed into her local community. She further stressed the contextual and individual differences that had made their integration easier than today's migrants (See 5.1.3):

> (…) there was great solidarity. I remember my parents organising with other families in link to the parish, to the church, to organise how to help them, not only to get them an apartment etc. but to learn the language, to take care of the children, with the school, everything. (…) I remember we also had a table tennis player, (…) And he used to come very often to eat, to have dinner with my family, etc. It wasn't an exception because it was a quite common situation for Italian families to host some people or other families from Vietnam, eating together, to spend a weekend somewhere, etc. And now, they are really integrated. After 40 years. But the integration happened from the beginning. Because they were craft workers. And it wasn't difficult for them to find a job at that time. It was a completely different era (...) it didn't create any problems for the society.

6.1.3. Conclusions

Respondents often interpreted the prevalence of certain migration discourses (See 5.1), citing factors such as age, geographical elements (territorial differences, city size), a lack of education about and/or exposure to migrants, stressing their unique positionality and point of view on that matter, as highly educated and outward-looking individuals (See 4.1). Privileged migrants also seemed to distinguish themselves through their information-seeking practices. Besides the fact that respondents relied overwhelmingly on secondary information sources (e.g. traditional

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[209] See Ambrosini (2013) and Sahraoui (2019) for further insights on elderly care by foreign and racialised workers in different European contexts.

and social media) due to their being abroad, many claimed a direct experience with migration or migrants, serving as a complementary source of information and contributing to shaping their perceptions on the topic in a positive manner (See also 6.2.1). My findings therefore confirm the perceived importance of certain socio-demographic elements (e.g. being young and/or holding important levels of cultural capital), as well as positive intergroup contact and exposure (including indirect exposure) to migration. These were all thought to reduce threat perceptions (particularly those related to economic concerns), and to complement the positive effects of respondents' lived migration experiences on creating empathy with migrants in general (See 4.2.2). Naturally, these elements are not only attributable to people living outside of their country of origin. They also apply to individuals with similar socio-economic profiles living in their country of origin. In fact, respondents often referred to personal experiences which took place before emigrating.

6.2. Migrant solidarity in practice: Opportunities and challenges.

Moving on from respondents' *perceptions* of migration, I now focus on their *practices* of migrant solidarity (or lack thereof) – understood as a range of material (non-discursive, quantifiable) practices of interpersonal solidarity (See 1.3.2) – to assess the extent to which their actions matched their words.[210] I asked respondents whether they had taken part in any migration solidarity activity in their country of origin or in Belgium, as well as how they felt that they could, as emigrants, influence mentalities or policies back home with regards to migration issues (See Appendix 3). Respondents' profile as transnational migrants (See 4.3.1) encouraged me to explore the extent to which their practices could amount to social and/or political remittances (Krawatzek & Müller-Funk, 2019; Levitt, 1998) and bring about additional benefits (such as creating empathy through direct exposure and intergroup contact with other migrants). Their answers revealed a variety of non-mutually exclusive practices undertaken at an individual or collective level, as well as their limitations.

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[210] Material practices of migrant *othering* (e.g. attending anti-immigration protests and other overtly hostile practices) have never been reported by respondents, justifying their absence from the present analysis.

6.2.1. Migrant solidarity practices

As discussed in Chapter 1, migrant solidarity practices can manifest in many ways which are summarised in Figure 24 below. I focus here on 'primary' solidarity practices, namely those that are initiated at the individual or community-level, as opposed to 'secondary' solidarity led by state actors (Frère & Mertens, 2018).

Figure 24. Overview of Respondents' Migrant Solidarity Practices.

| 01 Financial and/or material donations | 02 Work and/or education-related experiences | 03 Social and political engagement | 04 Influencing mentalities | 05 Contributing to institutional change |

6.2.1.1. Financial and/or material donations

The most common practice (cited by around half of respondents) consisted of making financial and/or material donations to migrant populations, or to causes seen as ancillary. Such initiatives were generally aimed at gathering and donating money and/or basic items (e.g. food, clothes, toys) that would ultimately benefit underprivileged migrant populations in respondents' country of origin and/or in Belgium. This support was primarily provided in an *ad hoc* manner, in response to singular events, such as the 2015/2016 arrivals of forced migrants in the Greek hotspots, or in the North Station area of Brussels, but also during the COVID-19 crisis. Donations were generally meant to support migrants who had been forced into situations of homelessness or encampment. Some respondents had an interest in supporting specific categories of migrants such as women, children, or students. Yusuf (68), for instance, justified his choice to undertake "targeted donations" towards Syrian university students in Turkey for the past years as follows:

> I don't like to donate to anonymous things. I need to know where it's going and be sure. So we are mostly supporting students. Because I think education is important for them too. And educated Syrian refugees are not a danger for the society in the future. If not [educated], it is a danger, a potential danger.

Importantly, respondents' donations did not always target migration specifically but touched upon it indirectly, denoting a concern for cross-cutting causes ranging from food security, poverty, child welfare and education, to healthcare, human rights, or environmental conservation. Donations were mainly channelled through trusted local and international NGOs, philanthropic institutions and/or UN agencies. Many respondents had also been influenced to donate by friends or relatives, recognising that their donations were rarely spontaneous. Respondents' workplace, school, university, church or sports team sometimes served as a channel for such solidarity practices too.[211] For instance, Deniz (42), recalled a Christmas party in her former office in Turkey whereby employees had collected and donated money to a refugee organisation instead of offering each other gifts.

6.2.1.2. Work and/or education-related solidarity experiences

Another solidarity practice consisted in taking part in migration-related projects, whether through respondents' work, studies and/or similar experiences, thus offering *time* to the cause in addition to, or instead of, money. One such channel – particularly popular amongst Italian respondents and respondents under 35 – included volunteering and/or conducting internships in relation to migration (n=14, See Table 10). These experiences mainly consisted in providing underprivileged migrant communities with humanitarian assistance or local socio-economic integration support. In most cases, they took place on a short-term basis, in the country of origin (a minority of respondents had volunteered abroad, including in Belgium), via local NGOs or universities.

Table 10. Respondents' migration-related volunteering experiences.

	Activity	Role
In their country of origin		
Rhea, 26	Participated in an Erasmus exchange programme in 2017 aimed at raising awareness about the situation of refugees in Greece	Participating in workshops, visiting refugee camps, meeting with key public stakeholders
Dimitra, 22	Volunteered for one of her university's associations	Organised donations for refugees (clothes, food)

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[211] The role of religious actors and political parties was also discussed. For example, Ioannis (25) stressed the role of the Orthodox Church in organising donations for migrants in Greece, while Emir (36) explained that the European branch of the AKP party (the Union of European Turkish Democrats or EUTD) organised activities (e.g. donation campaigns, food distributions) in favour of refugees in Europe. The Turkish Office for Turks Abroad (see 2.2.2.1) also funded NGOs in Turkey.

Giulia, 24	Volunteered at a shelter for migrant women in 2018; Conducted a 2-month internship at a SPRAR[212] shelter for asylum seekers outside of Bologna	Community building (e.g. playing with children); Providing administrative support (e.g. job search)
Marina, 23	Volunteered for an INGO during her university years in Italy; regularly volunteered with a charity in her hometown during the school holidays	Preparing meals; Providing moral and administrative support to people in situations of precarity (including migrants)
Pietro, 27	Participated in a student-led project to promote the socio-economic integration of migrants at university in 2015	Liaised with public integration centres and identified training opportunities and language courses for migrants in a small Northern Italian town
Stella, 26	Volunteered with her church at a migrant first aid camp near the Slovenian border	Facilitating access to services for beneficiaries
Luigi, 44	10-month civic service within a cultural centre supporting Eritrean migrants in Milan during his youth (following a one-month volunteering experience in an NGO in Ethiopia)	Support to the organisation of social and cultural activities (weddings, religious ceremonies, after-school sports activities), tending to elderly people.
Gianna, 49	Volunteered as an Italian teacher at a language institute before starting to work	Teaching Italian to two children from Peru and Ecuador
Silvio, 52	15-month civic service with an organisation working on migrants' economic integration in Milan	Doing mock job interviews with migrants, matching their skills with job offers in private companies and the agricultural sector
Can, 24	Interned at an NGO in Gaziantep (southern Turkey) working with Syrian refugees	Fundraising and conducting ethnographic research
In Belgium		
Raffaele, 42	Volunteered for a Brussels-based migrant support platform	Preparing breakfasts, cleaning up rooms in a migrant shelter
Abroad		
Alexia, 25	Conducted a three-month internship at a migrants' rights organisation in London	Working on a database of migration-related legal cases, with a focus on Greek court cases
Ekaterina, 24	Created her own humanitarian charity during the pandemic Volunteered in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon (close to the Israeli border) Volunteered in a Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon	Participates in social visits ("*maraudes*") Worked on projects related to water and sanitation access Spent time with children, teaching them French and English

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[212] Italy's System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) was created in 2001.

Andrea, 31	Volunteered with a search and rescue NGO in Lesvos, Greece in 2017	Spotting incoming boats transporting people in need, helping out in refugee camps (transporting belongings, playing with children, teaching European languages)

Another example consists of work-related activities. Besides Stefanos (69), who had direct work experience in migration in the context of the EU's response to the migrant arrivals in Greece in 2015/2016, a handful of respondents had been exposed indirectly to this issue through their current or previous job, whether in Brussels or elsewhere. Meltem (50), for instance, felt that her occasional involvement in projects that touched upon migration had enabled her to learn about best practices that could be "valuable for migrants in Turkey". This in turn led her to become actively involved in activities promoting migrant entrepreneurship in her current role. Iraklis considered that his office's programmes on trade and sustainable development contributed to improving economic conditions in migrants' countries of origin, thus reducing their need to migrate and "indirectly helping on the migration issue".[213] Many respondents were involved in public, commercial and/or cultural diplomacy in their day-to-day activities. In this capacity, Güven (59) explained that he had attempted to organise a public event inviting the Mayor of the Flemish city of Mechelen and the then-Mayor of the Southern Turkish town of Kilis to exchange about their migrant-hosting experiences:

> [Bart Somers] was selected the best mayor in the world because he had done a lot of good projects for immigrants. So, I wanted to invite him, and I wanted him to make a speech... so he could tell us how he did that, to inspire our... actually, I wanted to invite him and the mayor of Kilis [Hasan Kara] (…) because Kilis at that time was a very immigration-affected city. Because there were more migrants than the real [Turkish] population.

Higher education was seen as another way to contribute (in)directly to migration issues. Can (24), who had enrolled in a Master in Conflict and Development explained: "I've decided to do something that is more in line with my ideals… I recently figured out (…) I want to study migration and refugees (…) and I've had enough of lobbying for businesses (he laughs)".

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[213] This recommendation to "address the root causes of migration" is discussed in 5.2.3.4.

6.2.1.3. Socio-political engagement

Other respondents were also (in)directly involved in migrant solidarity practices through their social and/or political engagement. For instance, Flavio (60) had co-founded – three decades prior – the Italian chapter of a major international NGO tackling food insecurity, while Marco (43) had launched a platform aimed at connecting entrepreneurs with innovation opportunities on both ends of the Mediterranean in response to the 2015-2016 migrant arrivals, believing that "emigrants are more entrepreneurial" due to the adversities they have had to face to secure decent livelihoods:[214]

> The issue they have is [a lack of] access to capital, access to knowledge, and access to business opportunities. And so, (…) we are helping [them] do that. (…) [the platform] was born because I was watching TV and seeing the migrants. (…) Because at the time I said: "*Listen, I see the migrant crisis. I see we have an issue also with innovation and start-ups in Europe, I've been in the sector, I know things, so I think I can find the solution*".

Adriana (39) and Ayça (31) had both co-founded networks aimed at facilitating their co-nationals' integration in Belgium.[215] By investing their time and energy in these networks, these respondents aimed to foster a sense of community amongst – privileged – Italian and Turkish communities in Brussels (See 4.3.1.2). Ayça, for instance, described her organisation as "a solidarity platform for Turkish people", and particularly students and young professionals "who deserve somehow to make it here and to stay here".

A minority of respondents had also engaged in migrant solidarity activities in Brussels.[216] Christos (53), for instance, reported participating in a march aimed at showing solidarity with migrants who were staying in the Parc Maximilien in Brussels,[217] while Luca (30) took part in several meetings of the Brussels-based collective *Apriamo I Porti* ("Let's Open the Ports")

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[214] Such essentialising statements serve as yet another example of the othering-solidarity continuum introduced in 6.3 below.

[215] Even though a majority of participants were *affiliated to* such organisations, I refer here to respondents who had *created* such networks (See Appendix 2).

[216] Luigi (44), who had been involved in the Brussels branch of the Italian Democratic Party, acknowledged that their conversations had more to do with "Italians migrating to Belgium and what we could do locally, here, to support newcomers" than with immigration into Italy.

[217] Parc Maximilien (a public park located by the Brussels-North train station) became a symbol of the refugee reception crisis in Belgium in 2016. Hundreds of asylum seekers who were waiting for feedback on their application started sleeping in the park, sparking citizen-led initiatives of migrant solidarity (Mescoli et al., 2018).

which condemned the port closures ordered by Matteo Salvini in 2018, and serves as a perfect illustration of transnational social mobilisation.[218]

6.2.1.4. Influencing mentalities

In addition to these tangible solidarity practices, respondents stressed their potential to act in favour of migrant solidarity through influencing mentalities, often specifying under which conditions this could be realistically done (See 6.2.2). This form of engagement could be understood as social remittances. A little under half of respondents were rather positive about their capacity to influence the mentalities of their co-nationals back home, or the fact that their migration experience could transform their own views about the topic. Some felt that their co-nationals back home could definitely benefit from emigrants' "external perspective" (Angeliki, 31), or "more developed views" (Stella, 26) because "usually, the ones that are abroad are more detached (…) from the situation [back home], so they can criticise everything more objectively, and they can have a better idea of how things should go, in policy, in economy, in everything" (Alexia, 22). They often recognised that in the current context, emigrants like themselves were mostly products of the 'brain drain' and thus formed part of an educated and valuable elite which kept strong emotional ties with their homeland. In addition, they could become useful sources of social remittances (Levitt, 1998) given their strong skill level and transnational connections (or, in other words, due to their significant levels of cosmopolitan capital; See 4.1.2). Nikos (29), for instance, felt that he could best influence his peers through his social media, by sharing content that promoted positive and/or less sensationalised narratives about migration. He further acknowledged that it was easier to convince people "in between" than to "change the mind of racists". Stefanos (69) explained that he could influence individuals back home through sharing his opinion and presenting "balanced arguments" that could help debunk misperceptions. For Flavio (60), this was a matter of persuading people back home that Brussels' multicultural model was enviable and replicable:

> I think that living here you can experiment a more multiracial and multicultural life and society. (…) Brussels is a melting pot. So coming back, you know, it's been an occasion to communicate to people living in Milan that it's possible to live in (…) a town, with people coming from abroad, from everywhere, without feeling... bad (laughs).

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[218] According to its website, the collective's aim is "to resist the xenophobic and discriminatory reforms of the Italian government and promote migration policies based on the principles of solidarity and respect for human rights". In order to do so, it organises awareness-raising events on migration debates that are relevant to the situation in Italy, and citizen-mobilisation actions "to influence migration policies in Italy from Brussels".

Similarly, Gianna (49) felt that "the idea of being welcoming is something that we are receiving [abroad], and that we need to give to others", while Pietro (27) hoped to make people realise, through his own migration experience, that "migrants are oftentimes more of a resource for a country rather than a liability, or something to be necessarily afraid of":

> You see, by bringing our experience as migrants to third countries. (…) You bring your story and you tell [people back home], "*I left the country and I went abroad and, you know, it's not necessarily that easy to integrate in a new culture to understand other people's habits if they are not from your own country*". And also, I think we will be able to show them that it's better when people *come* to your country rather than when people *leave* your country.

Güven (59), who was disappointed by people's overall incapacity to empathise with migrants, explained that he always sought to "educate" people in his circles whenever they said "something wrong". Another example is that of Adriana (39) who reckoned that some of her friends back in Italy valued her opinion due to her significant international experience, further recognising that many Italians had already solicited her advice regarding emigrating. Importantly, several respondents recognised that their migration experience and potential experiences of discrimination had personally helped them become more open-minded and/or empathetic towards other, less privileged, migrants. Can (24), explained that living and studying abroad had "changed [his] opinion about a lot of things" and had made him "less centrist". Stella (26) predicted that, if she were to return to Italy and start a family there, she "would never raise [her] child as a racist". Raffaele (42), explained that travelling could allow people to broaden their horizons and move away from a self-centred 'victim mentality':

> I think that travelling could help everyone be more tolerant, ok? And that we should have some public policy to oblige people to travel in a way or spend at least a couple of months abroad, to open up their minds, to see something else, to live something else. So, travelling [contributes to minds becoming] a little bit more... impartial and neutral. And to understand that we are not the only ones in danger... You know, Italians are always like that, you have this attitude to be always the... less lucky ones.

6.2.1.5. Contributing to institutional change

Many respondents also felt that emigrants could play a role at a more institutional level, through exposure and access to relevant decision-makers. As such, they felt that they could influence migration policies and have "more leverage" (Nikos, 29) in Brussels – as a crucial international

decision-making centre – than in their country of origin.[219] Indeed, many respondents felt that migration was, first and foremost, "a European issue" (Markos, 61; See 5.2.2). Respondents recognised that their co-nationals involved in EU institutions, such as the European Commission or the European Parliament, as well as in national ministries and NGOs were more likely to "be exposed to best practices" (Silvio, 52) and thus best placed to lobby and have a tangible impact on migration policies. Anastasia (55) cited the example of a friend, a Greek academic and migration expert based in Belgium who had been consulted by Greek authorities to share his expertise on intercultural relations, immigration and integration:

> He has been asked, in Greece, to give seminars there, when all this immigration arrived, so that people from the local administration would know how to develop projects and how to develop integration strategies. And so, sometimes, they can ask for specialists on the subject that come from the Greek diaspora, to help. But he's a specialist of the subject. He's not *just* a person of the diaspora. (…) he could also speak Greek to them to explain things, and also has a knowledge of what is happening in Greece.

Similarly, Tolga (28) suggested that Turkish immigrants in Belgium could reflect on how Belgian institutions had managed their own socio-economic and political integration, to inspire the design of improved and context-appropriate integration policies in Turkey:

> (…) we could also, from this [migration] experience [in Belgium], help policy-makers in Turkey develop similar models, or maybe even improve models based on lessons that we have learnt, (…) to integrate, or to more successfully tackle the problem of immigration. I mean, I don't think immigration itself is a problem, it only becomes a problem when you don't have proper institutions to handle these immigrant people and to add them to your workforce.

Other respondents felt that they had maintained a strong emotional connection with their homeland despite the geographical distance, and still formed a part of their country's public opinion. As such, they felt they had a crucial (and positive) role to play through exercising their voting rights. For instance, Silvio (52) acknowledged the existence of a "clear-cut line in the Italian political landscape" dividing the centre-right and the centre-left on migration issues, justifying the importance of voting to influence both the public debate and policies on the matter. Certain respondents were dissatisfied with the current political offer or aware of the limited influence of the diaspora's vote in practice (See 6.2.2.3). Yet, they recognised that they could influence migration policies by displaying a "more realistic than emotional" view on the

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[219] For instance, Raffaele (42), who had served as an elected official back in Turin recognised that he had been "very committed to this public discussion" and reflected upon the difficulties of pushing an impactful solidarity discourse amongst his constituents.

topic (Ioanna, 35), and by preventing ultra-nationalist parties from gaining political power. Carla (32), for instance, explained that statistically, Italians abroad were more left leaning than their counterparts back home.[220] Whilst stressing the heterogeneity of the Greek diaspora, Ioanna (35) acknowledged that Greek 'expats' like her tended to perceive migration more positively than their co-nationals in Greece as well as second or third-generation Greek emigrants living in distant continents, who were out of touch with the latest societal evolutions:

> (…) us, like, the expats, we are people who studied in Greece, we understand it, we were born and raised and studied, and we just live abroad. So, our connection to the country is more realistic. And most of us are thinking – to be honest, that's a generalisation (…) people like me I would say, like-minded people who live abroad, have a more positive perception of migration, and potentially could influence decision-making in that sense. But I think it depends. Diaspora has a lot of shades as well. I don't think we can put them in one box...

Conversely, some respondents acknowledged having supported centre-right parties or believed that many diaspora Greeks showed "conservative" tendencies (Antonis, 41; Christos, 53; Ioanna, 35) or tended to be on the "centre" of the political spectrum (Theodoros, 64), noting that this could have an opposite (negative) effect on migration policies.[221] Turkish respondents largely emphasised the Turkish's diaspora's pro-AKP (and thus, conservative) tendencies (Khoojinian & Özgüden, 2018), resulting in its overwhelming and quasi-automatic support for the policies put forward by the Turkish state – including its initial pro-migration stance.[222]

6.2.2. Barriers to action

6.2.2.1. Reflecting upon one's actions, or limits thereof

Respondents demonstrated varied motivations behind their actions (or lack thereof), demonstrating high levels of reflexivity in the process. Some respondents reflected upon the role of their early socialisation (upbringing and family values, including in some cases, religious values) to justify their practices of solidarity (See 1.1.3). As remarked by Ricardo

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[220] The 2022 general elections indeed saw Italians in Belgium vote in majority for the Democratic Party (PD, centre-left), with 46,32% in the Senate and 34,3% in the Chamber, way ahead of the far-right coalition which eventually won the elections (The Brussels Times/Belga, 2022). See also Battiston & Luconi (2019) for an analysis of the vote of Italians abroad during the 2018 parliamentary elections.

[221] Respondents, even those with stated centre-right tendencies, always drew a moral line at supporting far-right political parties, such as the Golden Dawn party in Greece, or *Lega* and *Fratelli di Italia* in Italy.

[222] See also 5.2.2 on the specificity of the Turkish context, whereby the AKP government adopted a pro-migration 'open door policy' at the onset of the Syrian conflict.

(33), for instance: "I am not more pro helping the migrants because I am a migrant myself, but because of my values". Similarly, Carla (32), explained:

> (...) It's not just because I live in Brussels that I think this way. It also depends on how we were brought up by our parents initially. So I know that for instance, my mother back then had black friends, and even friends of diverse sexual orientations, you see? So for me, it's always been normal to be accepting of others.[223]

For others, they were linked to more pragmatic reasons, such as gaining valuable experience in the context of their studies. Others, such as Marina (23), reflected upon their advantaged situation to explain their empathy:

> (…) we didn't really live first-hand the difficulty of, like, coming all of a sudden to another country, or, being Italian, like, losing your job from one day to another. I've always been very safe from this point of view. And I'm very much sure that this is just a matter of luck and fortune. Because it could have happened also to my family, (…) to me, (…) to my friends. It could happen to me in the future! Like to be a migrant for... any reason. I don't know, I'm thinking about like, climate change. Italy is one of the first country that is going to disappear if we don't take climate change more seriously. And Italians in the future could be the first climate migrants forced to leave their country because we won't be able to live here any longer. (…) I always try to help people because I think that being in their situation, I would like to have someone helping me.

A minority of respondents reported not having done anything – or much – in favour of migrant solidarity. Reasons included COVID-19 restrictions, geographic distance from their home country, as well as a lack of interest, time, skills, networks or awareness of potential opportunities, but also being too young.[224] Importantly, I did not provide respondents with a definition of 'migrant solidarity practice', often resulting in a restrictive interpretation of this notion when asked about it. Follow-up questions and prompts allowed them to widen the scope of solidarity practices beyond pro-migrant activism (e.g. volunteering with NGOs, hosting migrants at one's home or defying the law to assist them) to include other expressions of migrant solidarity that have been outlined above (e.g. material donations, influencing mentalities and/or the institutional landscape). For example, respondents sometimes downplayed the role of their donations, regretting that these were "not enough" yet necessary, particularly coming from privileged individuals who were not able to contribute directly to a

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[223] Quote translated from French.
[224] Indeed, some of the youngest respondents (those in their early twenties) were only teenagers during the 2015/2016 migrant arrivals.

cause through their skills. Alexandros (62) candidly reflected on his monthly donations to four different international NGOs as a means to "ease his conscience":

> You know, we spend money on anything! Consumerism dominates our lives! To buy a pair of trousers (…) I can spend 150, 200 euros! But I can't give 20 euros a month to an organisation? I mean... it's shameful, you know, (…) I don't know if this eases my conscience, but I feel I'm doing something (…) because I have one or two friends who are in these organisations. If there are people who sometimes give their lives working for these causes, (…) well, I'm not strong enough, I think, to go to Africa to do work on the ground. The people who do this, you have to try and support them in some way or another. So I have a lot of admiration for these people and I try to help them with what they do. What I do is really the minimum of the minimum, really, it's nothing! (laughs).
> EH: It's something!
> Alexandros: If I were richer, I tell you, I'd give a lot more.[225]

Angeliki (31) ironically referred to her actions (making punctual donations, signing petitions) as "slacktivism".[226] She reflected: "I do it anyway because I guess it can play a role and it's better than doing nothing at all. Could I do more? Yes, certainly. But I could also do less".[227] She further criticised the sensationalist and paternalistic approaches driving certain humanitarian campaigns, which always led her to question the motivations behind her solidarity practices:

> (...) for example, I see ads on Instagram – which is the social network I use the most – showing small children crying, for Yemen, wearing rags... and it always makes me uncomfortable because... it's a bit sensationalist. I understand that they do it to encourage people to donate, but I don't want to think: "*Oh poor victim! I, the white saviour am going to help them*" (...). If I'm helping someone, I'd like to help them live with dignity, and not become posters for [a cause]. Again, this doesn't diminish the value of humanitarian action, but I don't really like that approach. So every time I give something, I always ask myself whether I'm doing it to help someone or to tell myself that I'm a good person.[228]

Similarly, despite feeling saddened by the situation on the Greek islands in the summer of 2015, Ioanna (35) was aware of her limited skills, observing: "we cannot just say: "I'm gonna go there and volunteer, take me!". NGOs have specific needs (…) and sometimes the best way to contribute is to provide them with financial support (…) so I haven't done more than that". In the same vein, Andrea (31), who had volunteered for a migrant search and rescue organisation in the Greek island of Lesvos in 2016 (See Table 10), criticised the fact that many international

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[225] Quote translated from French.
[226] Slacktivism refers to militant activities that occur online and that are generally perceived as effortless.
[227] Quote translated from French.
[228] Quote translated from French.

volunteers had been driven by a selfish quest for adventure rather than by a sincere motivation to help (amounting to a form of 'voluntourism', a combination of volunteering and tourism):

> (…) I think that most [volunteers] came from very far away, and they wanted an experience. They wanted to feel that they're useful somehow. And I think in that specific moment, taking into consideration the [bad] weather, the European-Turkey Deal and everything, of course the experience would be less adventurous, right? But I knew and we knew that we couldn't get [into Moria], right? And it would be very difficult to get in. And even if we did, I mean, we wouldn't really have helped in that kind of situation. So, I didn't go to Moria, because, to me, it was not needed. Probably it [would have been more about taking] this kind of experience and memory back, than [about] how useful I could have been to them.

Giulia (24), similarly put into perspective the often-romanticised vision of volunteering that prevailed amongst many young respondents. Having enjoyed her volunteering experience at a refugee reception centre in Italy, she nonetheless realised during that occasion that the relations between the volunteers and the shelter residents were bound in unequal power dynamics and that, despite her eagerness to form bonds with the latter, it had been difficult to do so in practice.

6.2.2.2. The challenge of influencing mentalities and public decisions

Although some respondents acknowledged the existence of governmental efforts aimed at harnessing the potential of their residents abroad, they often regretted the lack of suitable diaspora engagement strategies (e.g. economic or return incentives) that would "harness the potential" of the diaspora (Cavounidis, 2015; Mavrodi & Moutselos, 2017) and allow them to contribute their knowledge and skills to the betterment of their country. As a result, respondents questioned the potential role of their social remittances when it came to migration and other societal matters. Instead, they thought that they could have a bigger impact at a micro-level, at the level of their friends and relatives, who were deemed more likely to trust them and value their personal opinion and experience, as well as their educational credentials and professional expertise gained during their migration experience. Can (24), for instance, believed that emigrants' influence had more to do with their acquired skills and resulting social standing rather than their migration experience itself:

> I don't think it's about being abroad or not, but I think it's (…) about your title, the power that you have. If I manage to become something in this field, then for sure I will have a huge impact, even from abroad. And because I'm still young I have that hope (laughs). So I don't think it's about being abroad or not, (…) it's more about, you know, the cultural capital that you have.

Yet, other respondents were unsure about their capacity to influence mentalities back home, often stressing the fact that it was difficult to change individual opinions on a topic as sensitive and polarising as migration. This would be the case in particular with people from different socio-economic backgrounds, holding opposite worldviews and/or no international experience. As such, they often regretted the double standards that led their interlocutors to ignore that respondents were migrants themselves or to perceive them as a more deserving category of migrants (See 4.2 and 5.1.3.).

Some respondents stressed that their influence would more likely function on an individual rather than collective basis due to the absence of a formal and influential diaspora organisation in Belgium. This point was regularly made by Greek respondents, who recognised that unlike in the United States, there was no "full-fledged Greek lobby" (Ioannis, 25) in Brussels. This was partly due to Greeks' geographical proximity with and regular visits to their homeland (See 4.3.1), but also because their strong presence in EU institutions countered that need. Similarly, others acknowledged that it was difficult for the diaspora to form a "community with a voice that can influence the public debate" (Luca, 30). Deniz (42) also doubted that "a collective voice [could] ever be created amongst the diaspora". Although Osman (36) recognised that people with a high social status had easy access to government officials, he believed that the efficiency of a narrative ultimately depended on the openness of the person receiving the message, rather than on the one delivering it. Importantly, he also stressed the fact that certain professional functions required a non-partisan stance, particularly on issues as politically divisive as migration.[229]

6.2.2.3. Structural challenges to the diaspora's transformative potential

Many respondents felt that they had a limited political influence in their home country, hindering their transformational impact as potential agents of social change. Greek respondents notably criticised limitations associated with their voting right, and more specifically the operational restrictions requiring Greeks living abroad to return to Greece to vote.[230] To them,

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[229] The majority of respondents assumed somewhat diplomatic functions, either working for or being affiliated to an organisation that sought to protect and promote the political, economic, and/or cultural interests of their country of origin and/or of its citizens (See 3.2.3).

[230] Whilst the Italian and Turkish states allow external voting, most Greeks need to return to Greece to be able to vote (See 2.2.2.1). Although a law on the facilitation of absentee voting was eventually adopted in the Greek Parliament in December 2019, some restrictions remain (Anastasakis & Kalantzi, 2021).

this revealed the problematic and opportunistic ways in which the Greek state engages its diaspora. Some explained that these restrictions were put in place precisely because political parties (particularly on the Left) were concerned about losing votes and having to give in to the diaspora's political demands. Christos (53) explained:

> (…) the reason why the Greek state has not, up until now, facilitated the vote of the diaspora Greeks, is precisely in order to keep the Greek political system intact from the influence of these very large numbers of people, who don't depend on the Greek partisan, political and clientelist system, and who therefore can really cause an earthquake in that respect! If you made it really practically easy for them to vote, every time, (…) they wouldn't be the majority, but they could really skew the results in very important ways.

Although Italian respondents mentioned having elected Members of Parliament who represented foreign constituencies, they generally perceived that their political weight was extremely limited.[231] Furthermore, as pointed out by Lorenzo (63), their role had more to do with "bringing out the interests of Italian migrants back into Italy" and figuring out "how to care for Italian migrants" rather than for foreigners coming to Italy.

Others shared their frustration about the structural inadequacy of the political system, which often led to mistrust and disillusion about the transformative potential of elections, including on migration issues. Whilst believing that "voting is the perfect way to influence politics", Raffaele (42) acknowledged that "half of the population in Italy does not believe in politics". Others regretted the lack of appropriate candidates and the more systemic shortcomings of their country's representative democratic systems. Osman (36), for instance, explained that the main issue in Turkey was that "the brilliant minds do not get involved in politics", the latter being mainly used for personal advancement rather than to contribute to the common good. Due to their overall disenchantment with politics, some respondents admitted voting for whoever their family member had told them to vote for, putting in a blank vote, or voting for small parties with limited influence. Giulia (24) regretted the overall lack of a solidarity-orientated approach in Italy, regardless of the political party in question:

> Well, you know, in general even left-wing parties do not really have a narrative of welcoming. But of course, it's better than Salvini and his friends, ok? (laughs). So yes, voting of course, it's always what you can do. But yes, in general I feel that Italy is not really ready to change the

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[231] Italians residing abroad are allowed to vote for eight members of parliament (two for North and Central America, two for South America, three for Europe and one for the rest of the world), and four senators (one for North and Central America, one for South America, one for Europe, and one for the rest of the world).

narrative, because even left parties at the end, (…) it's not so [much about] arguing *against* migrants, but it's not even "*let's do something for migrants*".

Lastly, several Italian and Turkish respondents stressed that due to the toxic state of the public debate in their country of origin it had become particularly challenging to influence mentalities and public decisions regarding topics as divisive as migration, or minority rights more generally.[232] Some felt that this extreme polarisation made it impossible to have constructive discussions about migration, leading to a more comfortable *status quo* or to a de-prioritisation of migration questions (See 5.2). Samet (59), for instance, explained that the current political situation in Turkey made it difficult to "do anything constructive" or to "offer anything that people will take seriously", acknowledging that "in a normal, civilised society, you can ask for accountability and suggest solutions". Yusuf (68) – and other Turkish respondents – rightfully stressed that the Turkish diaspora was a crucial source of votes for Erdoğan's AKP party and that it tended to unequivocally support its policies.[233] Can, 24 , who sympathised with Turkey's People's Democratic Party (HDP),[234] recognised that migration was not necessarily factored in when voting because countless other issues took centre-stage during elections in Turkey; in particular, democracy-related concerns.

Others questioned the overall purpose and usefulness of voting in a country in which they did not live in. Angeliki (31), who had spent most of her life in Belgium, recognised that she benefited from political decisions made by others, while remaining indifferent to Greek politics, coining this contradictory phenomenon a "passerby effect". To her, it made more sense to vote for Belgian municipal elections than Greek ones:

> To be perfectly honest, I prefer to vote here in my *commune* [municipality], where it affects me directly – I have the right to vote for my commune, even though I don't have the Belgian nationality – rather than vote in Greece, where… well, what difference does it make to me? It

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[232] Besides Turkish respondents, who regularly criticised the highly centralised nature of the AKP regime, Italian respondents also recognised the growing risk of authoritarianism in their country. For instance, Marco (43) predicted that Italy was "on the verge of going back to fascism", using the case of Brexit to illustrate the interconnectedness of structural political dysfunctions and anti-immigrant sentiment. Although this was not yet the case at the time of the interview, Giorgia Meloni (from the neofascist party *Fratelli di Italia*) became the Italian Prime Minister in October 2022, proving him right.

[233] However, like any diaspora, that of Turkey is highly heterogeneous. Respondents strongly distanced themselves from the image of Turkish guestworkers and their descendants, who were overly-portrayed as conservative, religious and coming from a rural background. Instead, respondents often identified as 'modern' or 'secular' Turks, confirming the transposition of Turkey's 'secular/modern' divide into the transnational space (See 4.3.2.3).

[234] The HDP is one of the main opposition parties in Turkey. It is known for its pro-Kurdish stance and its support for minority rights more generally.

doesn't change much. It's a bit selfish to say, but I'm not going to influence [a governmental] authority which is not going to have any impact on me. I'm not going to vote for extremists of course, but that's another question![235]

Deniz (42) similarly believed that, with regards to influencing migration narratives and policies, Turkish residents abroad could play an instrumental role in their destination country precisely because many of them had become European citizens:

(…) if they [the Turkish diaspora] raise their voice and say that refugees have rights, that they can live in the society peacefully, like the diaspora themselves have been living for so many years, then this ultra-right wing, exclusionary jargon cannot continue [in Europe]. Because that's the fallacy of the democratic system, you know? Politicians need voters to vote for them. So if the voters demand that politicians fulfil their international obligations and open the doors to refugees, providing them with a safe space, then even the right-wing politicians would have to change their jargon, otherwise they won't be elected. So as a grassroots movement, the diaspora can do a lot of things, (…) by influencing the policies in the country that they live, rather than the country that they came from.

Some also questioned the *jus sanguinis* rule which allowed people with Greek or Italian ancestry to vote despite having lost touch with their ancestral homeland. Similarly, many respondents also felt that their potential influence was limited because some of their co-nationals back home questioned the legitimacy of their opinion on immigration matters. In particular, they felt (wrongly) portrayed as overly privileged and out of touch with the practical realities of migration matters in their homeland. As summarised by Emanuele (42): "in Italy, we are seen as the lucky ones who managed to go abroad and make money, and who do not have to be confronted with all this on a daily basis".[236] This often resulted in their outside perspective and voice being ignored or dismissed, by those embracing an anti-migrant rhetoric. Ioanna (35) regretted that such a way of thinking had also permeated the youth, refuting the common cliché that younger generations were necessarily more hospitable:

There are a lot of young, educated, Greeks who are, you know, more welcoming, and less hostile towards immigrants, but they do not live in Greece anymore, like me! And then you have another portion of the population, who lives in Greece, so sometimes, someone might say, you know: "*But I live here, I know better, I understand better! These are my very legit concerns. How would you know, you live abroad!*". And they might be more hostile. So, I think the youth is also quite divided.

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[235] Quote translated from French.
[236] Quote translated from French.

Respondents also explained that using their own migration experience in Belgium as an argument to counter such discourses and promote more positive migration narratives might not resonate with their co-nationals, either because they were deemed to belong to a distinct and more deserving category of migrants (i.e. highly skilled, European, having migrated voluntarily) or because the socio-economic and political contexts in Belgium and their country of origin differed too much to be deemed comparable.

6.2.3. Conclusions

Although several respondents acknowledged the potential role that they could play by transmitting ideas and knowledge (social remittances) to their communities of origin and relevant stakeholders back home, – particularly as privileged migrants with newly acquired social and cultural capital – they rarely saw it as a collective, conscious and systematic endeavour which could amount to structural societal change. Instead, most solidarity practices took place at an individual level, with financial and material donations being the most common amongst respondents, yet largely perceived as insufficient. Other identified practices included education or work-related experiences (e.g. volunteering, internships, civic services). These activities positively impacted respondents' attitudes, increasing their direct exposure to – and thus understanding of – underprivileged migrant populations.[237] Lastly, seeking to influence mentalities and public decisions in respondents' country of origin or pushing for wider societal change, notably on migration issues, through various forms of social and/or political engagement, were considered as additional ways of practising migrant solidarity.

6.3. Shifting along the migrant othering-solidarity continuum

As seen above, research participants were conscious of their unique positionality as privileged migrants and of how it could have positively impacted their attitudes towards migration and migrants. At the same time, some of their observations show that being a privileged migrant is, in practice, and in itself, not a sufficient determinant of migrant solidarity practices, and may also lead to othering. Having analysed the different (im)material solidarity and othering

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[237] Material donations were more frequently cited by Greek and Turkish respondents, and more often by men, whilst volunteering was mostly cited by Italians, as well as female and younger respondents. The trend of volunteering appeared clearly amongst younger respondents (under 35), which could potentially explain generational differences in terms of attitudes.

practices of my respondents brings me to the argument that such practices are neither linear nor fixed. Rather, they form part of a subtle continuum. Going beyond common representations of attitudes towards migration as binary (as either 'for' or 'against' migration (See 1.4.3), I further posit that othering permeates most solidarity practices.

6.3.1. Summarising indicators of migrant solidarity and othering

Migrant othering and solidarity take shape in a multiplicity of material and immaterial practices, which are summarised in Figure 25 below. On the one hand, some of respondents' practices can essentially be perceived as amounting to or leaning towards migrant solidarity. These include identifying as a migrant or, at the minimum, showing reflexivity around their position as privileged migrants or individuals (See Chapter 4), as well as embracing so-called 'positive' discourses about migration such as those stressing destination states' 'duty of hospitality' or that migration should be seen as an 'opportunity' (See Chapter 5). Another strong indicator of solidarity consists in having had (positive) direct and indirect exposure to and/or contact with other migrants (See Chapters 4 and 6), confirming the relevance of intergroup contact theory. Lastly, making financial and/or material donations to migration-related causes, seeking to influence individual mentalities or promoting wider institutional change leading to more positive migration narratives and less restrictive migration policies (See Chapter 6) count as additional examples of solidarity-oriented practices. On the other hand, whilst examples of migrant solidarity practices were rather straightforward, respondents' migrant othering practices were more elusive, consisting of exclusionary discourses rather than overt practices of exclusion (such as reported participation in anti-migrant protests or support for far-right parties).[238] These discourses essentially manifested in the classist and/or Islamophobic remarks pronounced by some respondents (See Chapters 4 and 6), as well as in the reproduction of discourses representing migration as an economic, cultural and/or security threat, as a 'crisis' or those establishing clear distinctions between migrant categories based on certain criteria of (un)deservingness (See Chapter 5). Othering discourses could also be found in respondents' reported support for restrictive immigration policies, which exacerbate symbolic and material boundaries between a so-called host society ('us') and incoming migrants ('them') (See Chapter 5).

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[238] This could naturally be explained by a sampling bias, and potentially, to self-censorship on part of respondents.

Figure 25. Overview of migrant othering and solidarity practices.
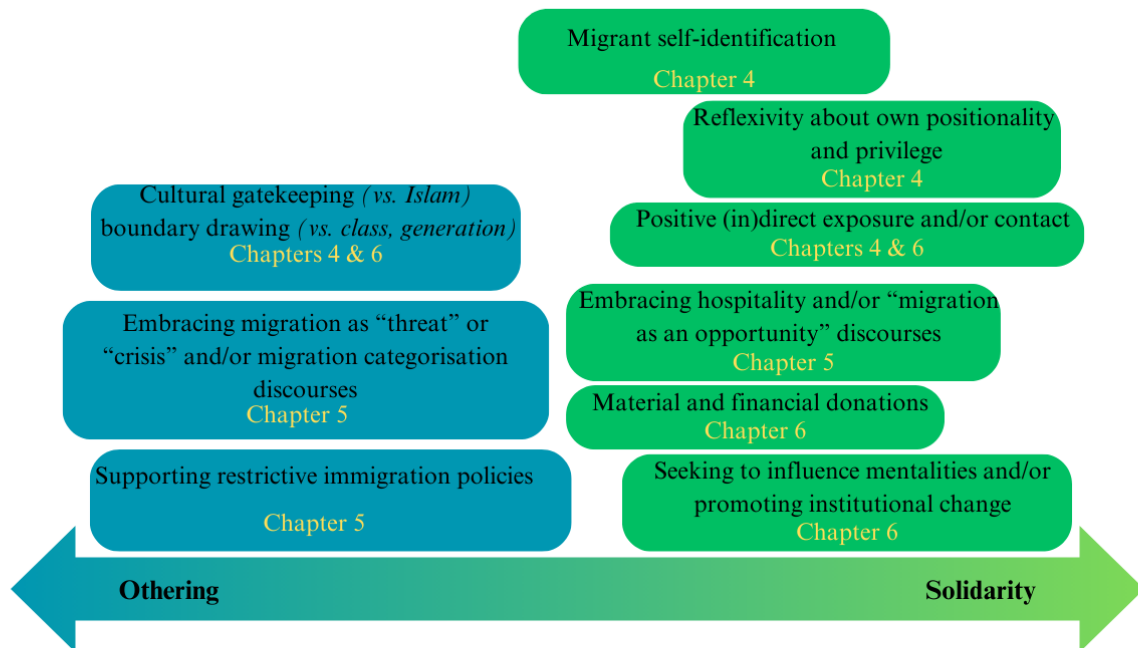
6.3.2. The othering-solidarity continuum: Beyond a binary representation of migration perceptions

Having reiterated the main othering and solidarity practices arising from my interview data, I now illustrate how respondents' practices/discourses sometimes shifted during the interview from one end to the other of what I coin the 'othering-solidarity continuum'. Although the above-mentioned practices can serve as indicators of migrant solidarity and othering, they are, in fact, interconnected and non-mutually exclusive. In other words, a person embracing any of the identified solidarity discourses or undertaking any of the solidarity practices listed on the right-hand side of Figure 25 may very well practise a form of migrant othering listed on the left-hand side, and vice versa, blurring the lines of what it means to be supportive of migration or not. This is why such practices are represented as a spectrum, or continuum, instead of a table with strict boundaries.[239]

On the one hand, my data reveals cases of solidarity-oriented behaviour or discourses from respondents who had expressed a negative opinion about migration or migrants at another point during the interview. As seen in the previous chapters, a small group of respondents – mostly

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[239] This representation of attitudes as fluid and placed on a continuum echoes the dynamic typology of migrants' acceptance developed by Ambrosini (2016; See Table 6).

older men from Greece, but also younger women demonstrating strong meritocratic ideals – felt that migration (and particularly migration from Africa or the Middle East) potentially posed a cultural and/or security threat to Western societies. This sometimes resulted in racist and Islamophobic comments, which overtly essentialised racialised migrants as criminals or stressed their cultural incompatibility with a 'majority population' deemed to be white and Christian in the case of Greece and Italy, and belonging to the majority ethnic Turkish population in the case of Turkey (See 4.3.2.3 and 5.1.1.2). In such cases, the othering-solidarity continuum can be illustrated through the (rare) instances in which these respondents drew on humanitarian arguments to explain that they were in favour of receiving forced migrants. Although seemingly solidarity-oriented, these respondents usually considered 'forced migrants' – particularly women and children – to be more legitimate than other categories – such as so-called 'economic migrants' – and contributed to othering by embracing migrant categorisation discourses (See Figure 25 and 5.1.3).[240] Interestingly, some of these respondents downplayed the racist undertones of their remarks, prefacing them with expressions such as "don't take it in a racist way, but…" (Gerasimos, 68). Others were more aware of their racist biases, demonstrating a form of reflexivity. Upon discussing the importance of *philoxenia* (traditional hospitality) in the Greek context, Alexandros (62) recounted a discussion with his own mother, whom he believed embodied this notion, and had once called him out on his racist behaviour:

> One day, I remember, I was watching TV and I was a bit upset, and made a rather racist comment... And [my mother] immediately (...) said to me: "*You know, what you're saying is wrong, Greeks shouldn't say it, because we've been all over Europe, we've been all over the world, we were forced [to emigrate] in the fifties, because of the war too*" (...). The Greeks had to immigrate to survive! (...) So she immediately made me understand that I should shut my mouth and think about that. And she was right, she was right...[241]

The continuum can be further illustrated in the testimonies of respondents who did not identify at all as migrants, but who expressed positive views towards migration throughout the interview. Indeed, although identifying as a migrant could help create empathy with underprivileged migrants and stress the shared humanity of migrants regardless of their nationality, race, or socio-economic status, it did not necessarily serve as a prerequisite for

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[240] As demonstrated in 5.1.3, respondents mobilised several criteria of (un)deservingness to explain or justify distinctions between migrants (e.g. migration driver and perceived level of agency, nature/duration of stay and perceived economic contribution, race/ethnicity, economic context, population size).
[241] Quote translated from French.

migrant solidarity. Respondents who did not self-identify as 'migrants' usually did not do so because they felt a strong sense of belonging in Brussels, because they identified otherwise (e.g. as 'EU citizens', 'expats'), but also because they were aware that they belonged to a privileged category of migrants (See Figure 18). In such cases, reflexivity around their own positionality played an equally – if not more – important role than actively identifying as a migrant. This was the case of Emanuele (42), who did not identify as a migrant (but rather as a "luxury migrant"), and vehemently denounced the normalisation of racist and/or xenophobic discourses throughout our discussion. Another example is that of Cristiana (57), who was in favour of "helping migrants in their country" (an argument which is often tied to calls to restricting immigration, See 5.2.3.4, yet called for Italians to exercise more solidarity towards the end of the interview:

> (…) [what] we did for the people coming from Vietnam at the beginning, I think we can do the same now. But people are really fed up with the situation. So they don't think that it could be possible. But I think it could be possible.

Besides these examples, the othering-solidarity continuum is mainly illustrated through examples of respondents who generally appeared in favour of migration but who – more or less consciously – embraced hostile discourses or called for restrictive immigration, integration and/or citizenship policies at another point in the conversation. For instance, Marco (43), who openly identified as an "economic migrant" (which could be understood as a sign of self-awareness and openness) and sympathised with migrants and the challenges that they faced, called for increased controls at the EU's external borders, further arguing that migration could be avoided by addressing its "root causes".

Another pertinent example of othering amongst seemingly pro-migration respondents consisted in criticising Greek and Italian citizenship law, specifically the *jus sanguinis* principle, which allowed Italians and Greeks living in distant continents to claim Greek or Italian citizenship despite having lost all contact with their ancestral land.[242] For instance, upon

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[242] In the late 19th Century, newly independent Latin American states called upon Southern European labour workers to support their growing economies, leading to 1.8 million Italians settling in Argentina and an additional 1.2 in Brazil between 1876 and 1915. During that same period, more than 4 million Italians (mostly from Southern Italy), and about half a million Greeks entered the United States (Baby-Collin et al., 2021: 249). According to Tintori and Romei, "(…) between 1998 and 2010 at least 1,003,403 individuals got Italian citizenship by descent at Italian consulates abroad and were automatically added to the AIRE registry. 73.3 % of the total new Italian/EU passports were released in Latin American countries" (2017:53). Additionally, "according to the UK census of 2011, nearly 10% of the UK residents holding an Italian passport were born in Latin America" (2017:55).

exchanging about the political weight of the Greek diaspora towards the end of the interview, Antonis (41) had some reservations about affording voting rights to certain of his co-nationals who had grown completely disconnected with Greece's daily realities, and who could potentially "distort" electoral results:

> (…) I think there is a legitimate concern with the way the Greek nationality is given. For example, I have a cousin who's half-American, half-Greek (…). They don't speak a word of Greek, but they have a Greek passport. And the question is: Should you give these people, who know nothing about the country, a vote, you know? (…) if you vote, I guess you should know what you're voting about, and have some understanding of what the major issues are in the country and make an informed choice.

Another manifestation of othering inherent to 'solidaristic' discourses can be found in some problematic undertones of mainstream 'positive' migration discourses, particularly those stressing the duty of hospitality (See 5.1.4) or migration 'as an opportunity' (See 5.1.5). Indeed, these discourses can (unintentionally) run the risk of reproducing migrant categorisation discourses and utilitarian perspectives, notably by reinforcing the 'refugee/migrant binary' (Hamlin, 2022) or encouraging 'highly-skilled' and 'chosen' immigration over forms of immigration that are seen as less valuable and desirable from an economic standpoint. In addition to stressing the vulnerability and deservingness of 'forced' migrants over 'voluntary' migrants, hence reifying binary migrant categories and concealing the interconnectedness of migration drivers in practice, mainstream humanitarian discourses sometimes dehumanise people on the move by representing them as helpless 'victims' devoid of agency (Mainwaring, 2016; de Haas, 2024), thus fuelling sensationalist narratives. Whilst condemning hostile behaviour towards migrants, Gerasimos (68), for instance, referred to them as "miserable creatures circulating in the darkness, trying to find food or becoming thieves, inevitably". Similarly, certain discourses that promote diversity may also run the risk of essentialising cultural differences and reifying migrants' 'otherness' (See Table 2; see quote by Eirini in 5.2.3.3). In that sense, solidarity and tolerance sometimes conceal a form of othering.

Lastly, some interviews featured counter-intuitive reactions or discourses from respondents who could be deemed tolerant in light of their demographics or previous personal experience with or exposure to migrants. This was the case whenever young and highly educated respondents expressed concern over the demographic changes underway in their country of origin (See quote by Ayça in 5.1.1.2) or reproduced dehumanising discourses about migrants,

framing their presence as a security threat.[243] For instance, Ekaterina (24), originally from the island of Lesvos, recounted how her perception of the situation on the island had started changing in 2015, when she was barely 18-year-old. Although she firmly condemned the human rights violations faced by people on the move as a result of the hotspot policy, having even volunteered in the infamous Moria camp, she casually used the loaded terms of "turning ghetto"[244] and *ensauvagement*[245] to convey her growing feelings of immigration-related insecurity and turmoil in the island:

> (...) I suddenly saw Lesvos *devenir ghetto, se ghettoïser* [turning ghetto, becoming ghettoised] (...) I was torn between several feelings: sadness, despair. These people were not being treated well (...) so it was outrageous from a humanitarian point of view. (...) And my first reaction was that we're going to have to help them. But as I grew up, understanding the problems behind it and seeing my own island with a feeling of insecurity (...), in Greece, I'll tell you, (...) we never used to lock our doors, our windows, nor our cars. But everything changed with the crisis. (...) And what hurt me was the image of "the racist Greek" afterwards. (...) And Lesvos, my island, only known for Moria camp (...) Also there are drug problems (...) it's not like in France. Drugs are still hidden in Greece, even though they exist (...). So when you see such amounts of drugs, and people who have become *ensauvagés* [turned savage] because of destitution – because destitution pushes you to [that]... – well, it's shocking! It creates negative reactions from some Greeks who just saw a *bordel* [a mess] coming.[246]

Similarly, having had firsthand experience in migration-related issues was not always sufficient to positively impact respondents' perceptions of migration. For instance, as demonstrated in 4.3.2.3, Zeynep (36), who had worked on migration-related projects at the Syrian-Turkish border, actively distanced herself from previous generations of Turkish emigrants in Brussels and felt uncomfortable about the recent demographic changes brought about by Syrian immigration in Turkey. Due to having witnessed cases of fraud on the part of Syrian camp-dwellers (See 5.1.1.1), her personal experience was particularly negative. This shows that it takes more than mere direct experience with migrants to positively impact attitudes towards

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[243] Licata & Klein (2002) similarly found that identifying strongly with Europe and the humanistic values it is meant to embody does not necessarily translate into greater immigration support. Analysing the role of European self-identification on tolerance towards immigration among a small sample of Belgian students, they witnessed a paradox whereby "many strong European identifiers associated Europe with values they subsequently betrayed by expressing xenophobic attitudes" (2002:21).

[244] Although the term 'ghetto' historically refers to the Jewish quarters of a city, it has gradually turned into slang to informally refer to segregated areas which are associated with a high concentration of marginalised groups, as well as high levels of poverty and crime.

[245] *Ensauvagement* could be translated as "turning savage" or "becoming wild". This term was initially used by French far-right movements to criticise the perceived impacts of immigration on French society, but has since been mainstreamed by Emmanuel Macron's former Minister of Interior, Gérald Darmanin (Onishi & Méheut, 2020).

[246] Quote translated from French.

migration. Indeed, the quality and perception of that experience (positive or negative) matters considerably.

6.3.3. Conclusions

These examples of the othering-solidarity continuum illustrate the somewhat counter-intuitive omnipresence of othering – and particularly of *covert* expressions of prejudice – in privileged migrants' practices, despite their supposed inclination to value difference. They show that, rather than being considered an absolute and all-encompassing moral value, solidarity often comes with 'terms and conditions'. For instance, solidarity was often expressed towards certain categories of migrants who were perceived as more deserving than others. Some of these examples also put into perspective the generalised assumption that young people, as well as left-leaning individuals and those with high levels of educational attainment, are necessarily open to change and difference. They warn us against essentialising privileged migrants as being unconditionally solidarity-oriented towards other migrants, regardless of the unequal power dynamics the latter may be subjected to.

6.4. Conclusion

Considering past research on drivers of attitudes towards migration, and based on qualitative insights obtained from privileged migrants, this thesis assesses the extent to which their attitudes towards migration might differ from that of their (non-migrant) co-nationals. Whilst literature has sometimes argued that people with lived migration experiences are – under certain conditions – less hostile to migration than their native counterparts, my interview data sometimes suggested otherwise. Besides stressing the importance of socio-demographic factors linked to, amongst others, their age and level of educational attainment, respondents referred to their distinct information-seeking practices and personal (in)direct exposure to and contacts with migrants to justify why they might perceive migration differently than their co-nationals back home. Yet, as observed by Christos (53), the relationship between emigrants and (positive) migration attitudes is not "an obvious marriage".[247] According to some respondents,

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[247] For instance, he explained that Greek emigrants could notably feel resentful towards immigrants and the Greek state (which is insufficiently listening to their voices and catering to their needs, while immigrants in Greece are receiving plenty of policy attention), or that Albanian immigrants could act as gatekeepers vis-à-vis 'newer' immigrants.

considering emigrants' voices when shaping immigration policies could cut both ways: while some felt that emigrants tended to be more open-minded than their co-nationals back home, other believed that they were, on the contrary, more conservative. This supports the findings of Just & Anderson (2015) who had highlighted the existence of migrants' 'dual allegiances', towards both their origin and destination states, thus bringing nuance to oversimplistic representations of migrants as being necessarily supportive of migration.

This chapter further demonstrated that diaspora members' migrant solidarity practices do not necessarily amount to social and political remittances, either because these practices had overwhelmingly taken place prior to their international migration experience, or because respondents believed that structural challenges (often tied to the crisis of representative democracy), limited their potential role when it came to transforming migration representations and policies in their country of origin. As *emigrants*, respondents expected to be listened to on emigration matters rather than on immigration matters, the latter being (wrongfully) seen as of no concern to them. Importantly, solidarity appeared more prominently in discourses than in tangible acts or stated behaviour, denoting the existence of a 'value-attitude gap' (Barr, 2006).[248] As a result, migrant solidarity was mostly expressed at an immaterial, discursive level. As *immaterial* practices, discourses – and particularly othering discourses – remain extremely relevant to my analysis. Indeed, othering defines "a process in which, through discursive practices, different subjects are formed, hegemonic subjects – that is, subjects in powerful social positions, as well as those subjugated to those powerful conditions" (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011:27).

Lastly, this chapter drew on the concept of othering-solidarity continuum to show how solidarity regularly takes place in parallel to othering. Indeed, my data reveals that, rather than cancelling each other out, othering and solidarity are in fact interconnected and complementary. Instead of denoting a "polarisation of opinions" (Rea et al., 2019) vis-à-vis migration and promoting a binary opposition between 'pro' and 'anti' migration stances, my findings show the significance of intermediate, ambiguous, positions when it comes to issues as complex and transversal as migration. Defined by powell & Menendian as "a set of

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[248] The concept of 'value-attitude gap' has been mostly used in the field of environmental activism to denote the gap between individuals or organisations' stated intentions, and their actual environmental behaviours. In my sample, this gap can be illustrated by the few respondents who expressed a strong pro-migrant stance whilst not having taken part in any solidarity practice (See Carla, 32).

dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities" (2016:17), the concept of othering enables the use of an intersectional framework covering xenophobia, racism, classism, islamophobia and sexism (amongst others) in a complementary manner. It further draws from an 'us versus them' logic that contributes to establishing the figure of a 'Migrant Other' (Schenk, 2021). Studying privileged migration means highlighting the social hierarchisation of migrants (based on their national origin, administrative status, race, religion, gender, class, socio-economic status, etc.) both in social representations and in policy. As such, the concept of othering is a particularly valuable tool for the field of migration studies and for the ever-growing sub-field of *privileged* migration studies.

General Conclusion

> I think it's a common phenomenon in Western societies, in Europe at least, that in recent years, we have been kind of stepping away from (…) a common European identity and values, and we are much more oriented towards rediscovering national, cultural and even local identities. (…) how we relate to our own identity should be related to how we relate to migrants. Because I think that if we nurture a false sense of self-identity, we are in a way closing our doors to diversity and to migrants, we come to see them as a threat. Instead, if you nurture a positive sense of your identity, culturally rich and morally grounded, you cannot avoid not reconsidering your attitude towards migration and the migrants. So it's also a matter of how you live your own identity, which really plays a role in how you see [the migrants].

This quote by Silvio (52), who urged his fellow Europeans to accept that their national identities were constantly evolving and enriched through cultural diversity and migration, illustrates the intrinsic interconnectedness of migration, identity and diversity questions in Europe. More importantly, it shows that it is possible to frame these linkages in a positive manner rather than as something to be feared. Developing a more complex understanding of attitudes towards migration and deconstructing common hostile discourses was indeed one of the starting points of this thesis. More specifically, my research explored how the migration experiences and migration perceptions of privileged migrants in diverse Brussels affect their othering-solidarity practices towards other migrant populations. This overall question was broken down into several sub-questions which were addressed in the different empirical chapters of this thesis and yielded several key findings.

Chapter 4 notably explored how respondents' migrant self-identification (or lack thereof) influenced their attitudes towards other migrants in general, and whether acknowledging their own privileged situation had impacted these dynamics. I started by demonstrating how my 54 respondents could be considered 'privileged migrants' considering four immaterial advantages related to their levels of mobility, agency, international (social and cultural) capital as well as to their sense of belonging in Brussels. I then questioned the idea that *becoming* a migrant automatically meant *identifying* as one by demonstrating the complexity of the migrant self-identification process amongst respondents, presenting the main reasons that made them identify – or not – as migrants, and placing these arguments along a spectrum to stress their non-linear nature. I then sought to verify whether identifying as a migrant contributed to producing empathy towards other migrants, and particularly towards less privileged ones. I

notably found that acknowledging one's privilege(s) was equally, if not more important than solely identifying as a migrant: Indeed, some respondents who did not strongly identify as migrants were amongst the most solidarity-oriented. Likewise, some of those who strongly identified as migrants sometimes embraced hostile discourses against other migrants, illustrating the migrant othering-solidarity continuum I later developed in Chapter 6. Respondents notably expressed their empathy with underprivileged migrants by reflecting upon their country's current and past emigration or upon their own family's history of emigration, by stressing the shared and universal challenges faced by people on the move regardless of their socio-economic status, by drawing on cosmopolitan ideals and, lastly, by recognising their privilege(s). This first empirical chapter also explored the extent to which living in a cosmopolitan and diverse context (such as that of Brussels) was likely to transform respondents' perceptions of migration in general. Although they did not necessarily acknowledge it or explicitly name it as such, respondents' experiences and practices were deeply embedded in a transnational space, reducing the emotional and geographical distance between their places of origin and destination. This was confirmed by four transnational practices they overwhelmingly relied on: maintaining contact with their relatives back home (both online and through regular physical visits); staying informed about politics and other general developments happening back home; maintaining cultural habits and traditions (mainly through language and food); and most importantly, engaging with their co-nationals in Brussels through social, professional, cultural and/or political activities. I further observed the continued relevance of national and class belonging in driving privileged migrants' intergroup contacts, even in so-called multicultural and diverse contexts. For one, respondents had very limited interactions with Belgians. They also noted the coexistence of different communities (or 'bubbles') whom were deemed to live parallel lives. In some cases, these limited contacts led respondents to formulate othering discourses, which mainly amounted to cultural gatekeeping and Islamophobic claims, as well as class-based boundary drawing.

Chapter 5 moved the focus away from Brussels, interrogating whether and how the growing political and media-related salience of migration-related debates in Italy, Greece and Turkey had influenced respondents' perceptions of migration back home and more generally. In order to gauge their perceptions of migration back home, I deliberately refrained from offering respondents clear definitions of migration and migrants, allowing them to frame the discussion around the patterns, discourses, and policies they deemed the most relevant – and problematic. The rich insights obtained from these discussions allowed me to identify five influential

migration-related discourses, which respondents embraced and/or rejected with varying levels of intensity. The first three discourses veered towards *migrant othering* and consisted in depicting migration as a 'threat' (thus confirming the relevance of integrated threat theory), as a 'crisis', or in justifying the relevance of differential treatment based on identified 'migrant categories'. Conversely, the two other prevalent discourses leaned towards *migrant solidarity*. They involved presenting migration as an (economic or cultural) opportunity for European societies and stressing the humanitarian duty of hospitality. As I later argued in Chapter 6, although these two latter discourses actively support a more positive framing of migration, they can become problematic if not critically reflected upon. Besides reacting to public discourses, respondents were very vocal about public policies put in place to address migration at the national and supra-national level. Interestingly, respondents appeared more concerned about how migrants' presence was handled by policy makers rather than about migrants' mere presence, rarely framing migrants as *the* problem. Given Italy, Greece and Turkey's positions as key countries of transit and arrival along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes, respondents were naturally very critical of the long-lasting absence of a fair redistribution mechanism stemming from the Dublin agreement. Respondents felt that this lack of international solidarity had been exacerbated in recent years, and particularly in the aftermath of the 2015-2016 arrivals, through the hotspot approach and the externalisation deal signed between the EU and Turkey in March 2017. Respondents' criticism of migration governance practices sometimes led them to formulate alternative policy recommendations. Whilst a minority seemed to favour selective or restrictive immigration measures, others called for greater reception and inclusion. Such policy options included introducing a fair migrant redistribution mechanism, implementing selective immigration controls (with a focus on expanding complementary migration pathways), promoting a mutually beneficial integration process, and "addressing the root causes" of migration.

Lastly, Chapter 6 sought to identify and analyse key migrant othering and solidarity practices (both material practices, amounting to concrete actions, and immaterial practices, such as discourses) pursued and/or resisted by respondents. As a starting point, I delved into whether respondents felt that their perceptions differed from those of their co-nationals who had remained in their country of origin. They frequently argued that socio-economic status and age affected migration attitudes positively, but also pointed to geographical differences (as they mostly came from areas that had not been primarily affected by migrant arrivals) and that their high levels of 'cosmopolitan capital' had protected them from being primary targets of

misinformation and of disinformation attempts emanating from certain political and media actors. In describing their information-seeking practices, many respondents perceived themselves to be particularly well-informed, notably through cautious media consumption practices, but also through their own firsthand insights or those of trusted friends and relatives back home. In order to gauge the extent to which (subjective) perceptions led to (objective) practices, I then systematically assessed the migrant solidarity practices they had engaged in back home, in Brussels or elsewhere. I identified five main practices, namely: making financial and/or material donations; taking part in migration-related projects through one's work, studies and/or similar experiences; getting socially or politically engaged; influencing the mentalities of their co-nationals back home (e.g. social remittances); and contributing to institutional change. Importantly, respondents showed a lot of self-awareness around the role they could realistically play, downplaying their influence and transformative potential, citing structural and institutional barriers to meaningful action (e.g. inadequate diaspora engagement policies, a generalised lack of consideration for the opinion of diaspora members). I eventually turned to presenting the main argument of this dissertation, namely that respondents' migrant othering and solidarity practices are best understood as situated along a continuum, rather than as being reflective of an 'either/or' dynamic or binary opposition between othering on the one hand, and solidarity on the other hand. After summarizing the key indicators of migrant othering and solidarity considered across the empirical chapters of this thesis, I delineated two main ways in which the continuum can be illustrated. The first consists in (the very few) examples whereby respondents who appeared largely hostile to immigration or who did not identify at all as migrants, ended up expressing views of solidarity at another point during the interview. Yet, the continuum is predominantly illustrated by the fact that othering subtly permeated most of my respondents' solidarity practices. Indeed, my interview data unearthed many instances whereby seemingly 'pro-migration' respondents consciously or unconsciously embraced hostile discourses or supported restrictive or selective migration policies later on in the conversation.

All in all, this qualitative research confirmed the overall relevance of intergroup contact and integrated threat theories, which despite their distinct premises, appeared more complementary than ever. Indeed, whilst the former theory posits that increased and meaningful contact across groups is necessary to reduce prejudice, the latter contends that symbolic and realistic threats reinforce conflicts between groups. Although these theories are commonly put forward in quantitative studies focused on attitudes towards migration, this is less the case in qualitative

research. Nonetheless, they were extremely relevant in the testimonies of respondents and spontaneously brought up. For instance, Ekaterina (24) believed that building "friendly contacts with migrants" was a prerequisite for "deconstructing stereotypes" and overcoming prejudice, giving the example of her nephew back home who had bonded with a Syrian refugee over sharing a *shisha*. Similarly, 'threat' narratives were consistently drawn upon by respondents. Importantly, due to their privileged socio-economic position, the perception of cultural (symbolic) threat was more prevalent in their discourses than that of economic (realistic) threat. By proposing the concept of 'othering-solidarity continuum', this research also endeavoured to move beyond simplistic representations of people's attitudes towards migration. The social reality is far more complex than people being either *for* or *against* migration. The notion of continuum allowed me to highlight, on the one hand, the pervasive and ubiquitous nature of othering in people's discourses, and, on the other hand, the fact that solidarity is, more often than not, conditional and selective. Echoing concepts of 'structural' or 'everyday' racism, this research suggests that, rather than being the exception, racism (and other forms of othering that 'migranticised' people face) is the rule. In light of the prevalence of migrant categorisation discourses and of the differential treatment they often produce in practice, another takeaway from this research consists in its attempt to widen the scope of who can be considered a migrant, through the use of the concept of 'privileged migrants'. Indeed, the concept allows for a more honest and objective representation of people on the move, stressing the fact that so-called 'expats' are first and foremost 'migrants' and cautioning against the double standards that such categories produce. Similarly to how the concept of racialisation stresses the ways in which race is socially constructed and used to render people inferior according to their phenotypic appearance, the concept of 'migranticisation' can be useful in showing how the migrant label is an inconsistently applied social construct. Pushing for a more comprehensive definition of migration allows for its normalisation and 'de-exceptionalisation' (Cabot & Ramsay, 2021), and directly counteracts sensationalist narratives around it.

This research has been deeply transformative on a personal level. Respondents' testimonies and reported experiences at times surprised, challenged, moved and even upset me. Using my personal experience as a privileged migrant as a starting point, my initial assumptions about how people with lived migration experiences felt about migration – regardless of their privileged status – were tested along the research process. On the one hand, I expected that more respondents would identify as migrants, considerably underestimating the impact of the EU free mobility regime on fostering a sense of belonging to a group of 'mobile EU citizens'

that were to be distinguished from 'migrants'. I also overestimated the role that my respondents thought they could play as transnational agents of change, or as migration 'advocates' or opinion shapers. Their testimonies brought to light some barriers to action that I had not anticipated or was not aware of, such as the fact that many of them felt that their voice was often overlooked, not only by their co-citizens, but also by national authorities. This somehow limited the relevance of the concept of 'social remittances' which I had initially envisioned as being central to my analysis of respondents' migrant solidarity practices. On the other hand, I was (pleasantly) surprised by the fact that several respondents spontaneously referenced concepts that had guided my research design and conceptual framework, such as those of 'privileged migrants', 'cultural capital', 'privilege', or 'migration as threat'. Respondents' testimonies provided important lessons on how to promote alternative and less hostile migration discourses. Beyond the need to consider national identities as ever-evolving, raised by Silvio in the opening quote of this conclusion, respondents regularly stressed the need to consider migration not only through a historical lens (for instance by stressing Mediterranean countries' longstanding emigration past) but also through a long-term perspective, notably by cautioning against the stigmatisation of migrant youth by receiving societies. Several respondents indeed stressed the fact that neglecting the next generation of adults, currently comprised of migrant children and youth, could only backfire by creating resentment and dissent. Youth's transformative potential was actively acknowledged, particularly in an ageing European context. Such reflections were sometimes linked to the view that integration was a bi-dimensional process (requiring equal efforts on the part of newcomers and local communities) or that migrants should automatically be perceived as potential future citizens, placing the focus on *belonging* instead of othering. This normalisation of population movements, and the re-humanisation of people on the move echoes with calls for the 'de-migranticisation' of research on migration and integration (Dahinden, 2016). Based upon the observation that migration research tends to "normalise migration- and ethnicity-related difference", Dahinden indeed suggests "reorienting the focus of investigation away from 'migrant populations' towards 'overall populations'" (2016:2). Indeed, my data shows that, rather than being directly tied to their migration experience, some respondents' attitudes can be more significantly linked to their class belonging, EU citizenship, and/or to their acquired social and cultural capital. As such, it is likely that my findings could also apply to non-migrants with similar socio-economic backgrounds to my respondents. Lastly, this research encouraged me to critically reflect on 'positive' migration narratives (i.e. discourses stressing the humanitarian duty of hospitality or the economic and cultural benefits of migration), which

can indirectly (re)produce forms of othering by downplaying the agency of people on the move, or by encouraging their commodification (See also de Haas 2024). Rather than attempting to formulate an alternative positive narrative on migration, this thesis calls for drawing upon current positive discourses with caution and acknowledging their shortcomings.

The limitations of my work (See 3.2.6) encouraged me to identify leads for future research. Amongst other things, the methodological and conceptual scope of this research could be expanded by mobilising different methods – both quantitative and qualitative – and capturing additional population samples. Using mixed methods could yield richer and more complex findings that would apply to a more representative segment of the emigrant population in Brussels, or across a wider set of contexts. For example, this research could be scaled up through a large-scale panel survey administered to a wider and randomised sample that would include migrants of different socio-economic backgrounds, national origins, legal statuses, and generations residing in Brussels. A longitudinal survey could additionally capture the evolution of these perceptions over time. For instance, systematically comparing how the perceptions of privileged migrants vary from those of underprivileged migrants would prove extremely valuable in furthering our understanding of privileged migration altogether. Similarly, the use of a control group composed of Belgian respondents or of national groups whose countries facing less immigration comparatively to Greece, Italy and Turkey but are still widely represented in Brussels (e.g. France, Portugal or Eastern European countries), could be considered in exploring additional intergroup variations. Focus group discussions and participant observation could be utilised to gain more insight into what may help distinguish or bring together these different sub-groups. Various techniques of discourse and media (including social media) analysis would also help highlight the resonance of certain discourses amongst respondents. Another interesting aspect would consist in systematically comparing the attitudes of migrants in the place of destination with those of non-migrants in the place of origin, through a multi-site transnational case study (e.g. comparing the perceptions of Italians, Turks, Greeks – or other nationalities – abroad and back home).[249] Lastly, moving beyond the case of Italians, Greeks and Turks in Brussels, this study could easily be replicated across multiple, so-called 'super-diverse' cities hosting significant and diverse migrant populations (e.g. New York, Washington D.C., Geneva, London, Dubai).

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[249] As I found this point crucial, polls and literature on perceptions of immigration in Italy, Greece and Turkey were incorporated into my analysis as secondary data sources (See 2.1.3).

This PhD research sought to contribute to the broader literature on attitudes towards migration and privileged migration in two main ways. First, it endeavoured to widen the scope of current studies on migration perceptions by focusing on the oft-overlooked yet unique perspective of people who are migrants themselves, and notably of 'privileged migrants'. By questioning how privileged migration experiences and social positions affect the migration perceptions and othering-solidarity practices of my respondents, I shed light on the crucial role of class and race considerations in sustaining symbolic boundaries between migrant outgroups. My findings call for caution when associating individuals' high levels of socio-cultural capital with 'progressive' views on migration. In addition to being influenced by structural elements linked to the geographic context under consideration, migrant solidarity and othering practices are simultaneously shaped by a complex mix of elements (ranging from individuals' core values and their multiple and intersecting social identities and positionalities, to their direct lived experiences, and indirect insights gained from trusted information sources). Second, this research proposed to move beyond binary thinking by bringing a more nuanced and complex understanding of attitudes towards migration. This was done by questioning existing dichotomies between proponents and opponents of migration, between 'positive' and 'negative' migration discourses, as well as between 'good' (deserving)' and 'bad' (undeserving) migrants, amongst others. Shedding light on the generalisation of covert practices of migrant exclusion through the concept of 'migrant othering-solidarity continuum', enabled me to stress the limits of solidarity and the subtle embeddedness of multiple systems of exclusion affecting 'underprivileged' migrants (ranging notably from xenophobia and racism to islamophobia and classism).

In conclusion, in the face of increasingly hostile migration narratives, it appears appropriate to assess how the opinion of the 'middle segments' (Dixon et al., 2018, Dixon et al., 2019) or 'anxious middle' (Katwala & Sommerville, 2016) can be influenced, rather than that of those who are already deeply convinced that migration is either an opportunity or a threat; clearly in favour or against it. In any case, just like women can be anti-feminist or young people can be express reactionary views, people with lived migration experiences can be xenophobic.
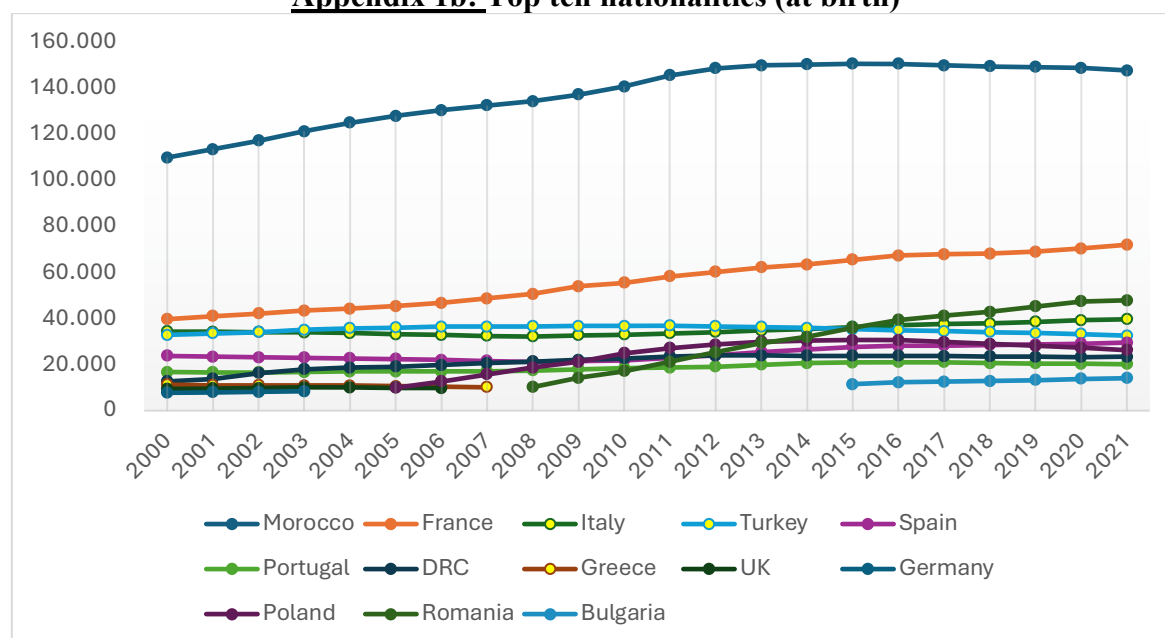
Appendix 1: Top ten nationalities in the Brussels-Capital Region (2000-2021)

Appendix 1a: Top ten nationalities
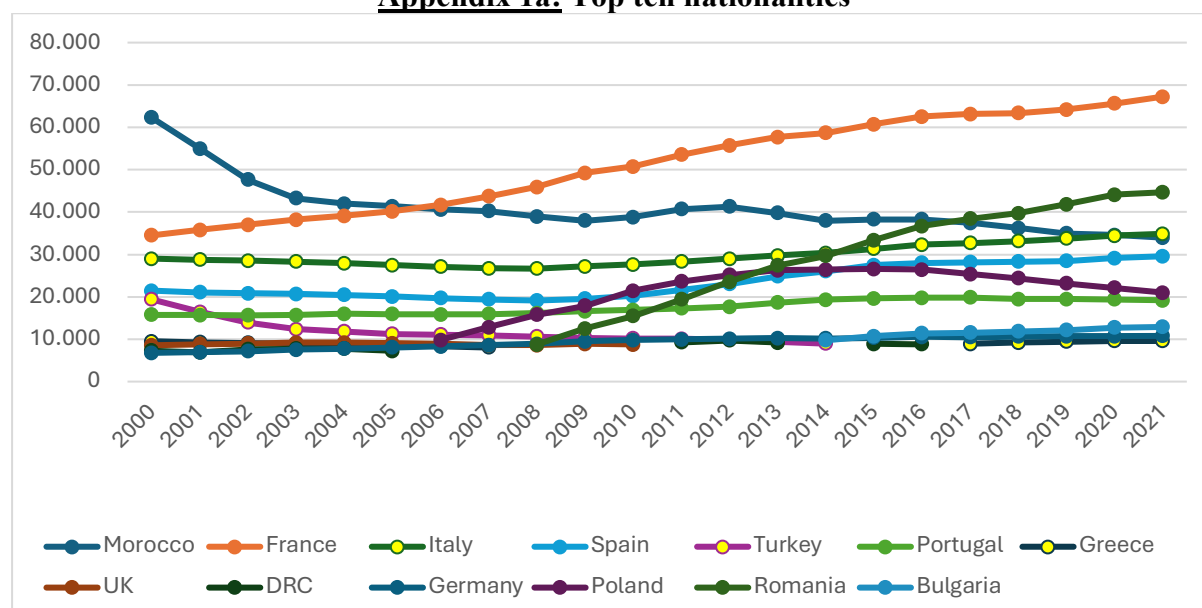
Graph elaborated by author. Source: IBSA Brussels. Figures last updated on 15/03/2022.

Appendix 1b: Top ten nationalities (at birth)

Graph elaborated by author. Source: IBSA Brussels. Figures last updated on 15/03/2022.

Appendix 2: Mapping of Italian, Greek and Turkish organisations in Brussels

Public, commercial and cultural diplomacy actors
• Italian, Greek and Turkish embassies
• Italian, Greek and Turkish consulates
• Italian, Greek and Turkish permanent representations to NATO
• Italian and Greek permanent representations to the EU
• Permanent regional representations to the EU (20 Italian regions)
• Political party representations (e.g. AKP, CHP, HDP for Turkey, PD for Italy…)
• Members of the European Parliament (Italy and Greece)
• COMITES Belgio (*Comitato degli Italiani all'estero*)
• Chambers of commerce, ex: the Union of Hellenic Chambers of Commerce (UHCC), the Belgo-Italian Chamber of Commerce (BICC), Brussels' representative office of the Union of chambers of commerce and commodity exchanges of Turkey (TOBB)
• Commercial organisations, ex: the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV), the General Confederation of Italian Industry (Confindustria), the Italian Trade Agency (ITA), the *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti*, the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEİK), the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSIAD), the Turkish Economic Development Forum (iKV)
• Public cultural institutes, ex: Italian Cultural Institute, Yunus Emre Institute)

Independent organisations (mostly active in the cultural realm)
• *Centre hellénique et interculturel de Bruxelles* (CHIB)
• Périple Hellenic Literary and Art Centre
• *Piola Libri*
• Regional cultural associations (ex: Pontic Dance Association *Kamian Ken Argos ; Association culturelle de Thrace ; Association des Crétois de Belgique ; Centre culturel et sportif des Constantinopolitains de Belgique*.).
• Emiliano-Romagnoli Bruxelles
• Brussels' Kurdish Institute
• Private think-tanks and research agencies (ex: SETA Foundation; Ambrosetti; Italian Agency for European Research (APRE).
• Alternative media: ex. Newsville.be, Info Türk.
• International schools
• Churches, mosques

Community-based and professional networks
• Network of Young Italians in Belgium (REGIB)
• Digitalians network
• Turkish Business Association (TÖSED)
• ARGO Hellenic Network
• *Gruppo di Iniziativa Italiana* (GII)
• *Patronati* (trade unions) e.g. Acli Belgio or INCA-CGIL
• Casi-Uo
• EYAD – *La Maison de la Turquie*
• Facebook groups (ex : *Italiani a Bruxelles* (35.2K members), Italiani a Bruxelles/Italian expats in Brussels (13.1K members), Turkish Expats in Belgium (1.5K members), *Communauté hellénique de Belgique* (579 members)
• AGORA-EU Google Group (1K members)
• Bruxircle
• ALLILONet Brussels branch

Appendix 3: Interview guide (in English)

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The Hugo Observatory

MAGYC
Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

INTERVIEW GUIDE

PhD study on diasporas' perceptions of migration in Italy, Greece and Turkey

Section 1: Self-identification and experiences as a foreign national living in Brussels and overall relation to the home country (+- 15 min)

1.1.   Can you tell me about your decision to move to Brussels?

Follow-up questions (based on initial answer):

- When did you move here?
- Where did you move from?
- Is it the first time that you live abroad or outside of your hometown? *[Ask for details]*

1.2.   How would you define yourself/identify as an [Italian/Greek/Turk] living in Brussels?
- Would you identify as a 'migrant'?
- Why/why not?
- Do you feel that other terms may be more appropriate? (Ex: Italian/Greek/Turkish national, immigrant, expat, diaspora member, foreigner, foreign national, human, European citizen, world citizen, diplomat...)
- What is your definition of a "migrant"?
- Is your nationality an important part of your identity?
- Which other aspects of your identity would you say are equally or more important, and why? (Ex: local/regional identity; European identity; cultural identity; global identity; religious identity; professional/class identity; gender identity; ethnicity; other)

1.3.   Brussels is home to one of the most diverse populations in the world. In your experience, what do you feel are the pros and cons of living in such an environment?
- How would you describe your interactions with Belgian nationals?
- How would you describe your interactions with your fellow nationals in Brussels?
- How would you describe your interactions with other foreign nationals in Brussels?
- Do you feel that you 'belong' in Brussels?

1.4.   Besides your profession, do you feel attached to your home country?
- If so, how? *[Ask for details,* ex: family/friends back home; voting from abroad (and other civic duties) ; property/residence back home; involvement with your national community in Brussels; personal/professional projects back home; speaking the home language (in Brussels); Intention to return; sending funds back home; other)
- If not, why?

Section 2: Perceptions of the migration situation in the country of origin (+-30min)

2.1.   [Italy/Greece/Turkey] gets a lot of media and political attention with regards to migration. What event or situation (if any) is or has been particularly concerning to you when it comes to migration issues back home? Why?
- Were you personally affected by this event/situation? *(if so, explain)*
- Were your relatives (e.g. family, friends) or your home community (e.g. neighbours, local community) directly affected by this event/situation? *(if so, explain).*

2.2.   The 2015/2016 situation has been widely described as a "crisis". Do you agree? Why/why not?

2.3.   How hospitable would you say the [Italian/Greek/Turkish] people and government are towards migrants?

- Are you generally in favor of [Italy/Greece/Turkey] receiving migrants? Why or why not? *(e.g. impacts on country's cultural life and economic life)*
- Do you think that solidarity should extend to people moving because of the effects of climate change and disasters? Why or why not?

2.4. Do you feel that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way migration issues are seen in [Italy/Greece/Turkey]?
- Would you say it is now seen more positively or negatively? *(e.g. role of migrant essential workers vs. migrants presented as carriers of the disease or calls to close the borders)*
- What about *your* perceptions of migration? Have they changed since the start of the pandemic?

2.5. How do you stay informed about what is happening in [Italy/Greece/Turkey], including about migration-related matters, and why? [Ex: traditional media (press, radio, TV) - e.g. local/national/Belgian/international; Internet and social media; Institutional sources (e.g. government, international organisations) ; Scientific sources (experts); Accounts from people/relatives back home ; First-hand (personal) experience ; Other]
- Any media outlets in particular?

Section 3: Migration as a potentially transformative experience, influencing migrant solidarity - hostility practices (+-10min)

3.1. Are you (or were you ever) involved in any solidarity activities in support of migrants in your home country?
- If so, why and how? (Ex: Financial donations; material/in-kind donations; volunteering in an NGO; social/political activism (e.g. demonstrations, petitions, voting); migration-related profession; other (e.g. sheltering a migrant, being part of an advocacy network)
- If not, why not?
- Under which conditions would you be willing to get involved in such activities? (e.g. more time, networks, financial resources, trust in authorities, political status/weight from abroad...)
- *[If respondent manifests their clear opposition to migration]*: Did you ever take part in anti-immigration activities (e.g. demonstrations)?

3.2. Are you (or were you ever) involved in any solidarity activities in support of migrants in Belgium?
- If so, why and how? (Ex: Financial donations; material/in-kind donations; volunteering in an NGO; social/political activism (e.g. demonstrations, petitions, voting); migration-related profession; other (e.g. sheltering a migrant, being part of an advocacy network)
- If not, why not?
- Under which conditions would you be willing to get involved in such activities? (e.g. more time, networks, financial resources, trust in authorities, political status/weight...)
- *[If respondent manifests their clear opposition to migration]*: Did you ever take part in anti-immigration activities (e.g. demonstrations)?

3.3. Do you feel that you and your fellow citizens living abroad can have an influence on migration policies back home?
- If so, how? [Ex: political activities (e.g. voting, campaigning, supporting political movements); influencing discourses/mentalities (of your fellow nationals in Brussels); influencing discourses/mentalities (of your fellow nationals back home); other]
- At which level? *(e.g. domestic, Belgian, European level)*
- If not, why not?

Section 4: Closing questions

4.1.   What do you feel are the three most important challenges facing your country/hometown? *(e.g. unemployment, the economic situation, immigration, climate change, crime, etc.)*

4.2.   Would you like to add anything?

4.3.   Could you please refer me to some of your colleagues for a similar interview?

Thank you for your time and precious insights. I will keep you informed about my research. I remain available if you wish to contact me in the future regarding my thesis or the MAGYC project.

Appendix 4: Biographic information form (in English)

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Interview code: _____

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FORM

Nationality/citizenship: ☐ Italian ☐ Greek ☐ Turkish
☐ Other (*specify second nationality and year of obtention*): _____

Age: _____   **Gender:** _____

Place of birth: _____

Hometown (*if different from above*): _____

Last place of residence (before moving to Brussels): _____

Current *commune* of residence in Brussels: _____

Date of arrival in Brussels (*month and year*): _____

Current residence status:
☐ **EU Citizen**   ☐ **Non-EU citizen**

☐ Short-term stay (< 3 months)   ☐ Short-term stay (< 3 months)
☐ Long-term stay (> 3 months)   e.g. tourist, visitor, business visa
☐ Permanent residence (> 5 years)   ☐ Long-term stay (> 3 months)
                                                       e.g. work permit, student visa, family reunion
                                                       visa, international protection...
                                                   ☐ Permanent residence (> 5 years)

Last diploma obtained (*specify field*): _____
☐ None   ☐ High School diploma   ☐ Bachelor   ☐ Master   ☐ PhD
☐ Technical/vocational diploma   ☐ Other:_____

Current occupation (*specify title and organisation*): _____
_____

Three last occupations (*specify title, organisation (or sector) and location*):
1: _____
2: _____
3: _____

Marital Status: ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Other: _____

Household members and dependents (in Belgium):
☐ None ☐ Partner (*specify nationality*): _____
☐ Children: (*specify number, age, nationality*): _____
☐ Other (*specify relationship, age, nationality*): _____

Appendix 5: Detailed list of respondents

	Pseudonym	Nationality	Gender	Age	Arrival year	Affiliation
1	Carla	Italian	F	32	2011	National/regional representation
2	Ioannis	Greek	M	25	2019	EU institution/body
3	Antonis	Greek	M	41	2005	Commercial organisation
4	Alexandros	Greek	M	62	2018	National/regional representation
5	Marina	Italian	F	23	/	Commercial organisation
6	Can	Turkish	M	24	2018	Commercial organisation
7	Luca	Italian	M	30	2016	Cultural organisation
8	Lorenzo	Italian	M	63	1995	Commercial organisation
9	Mario	Italian	M	52	1999	Cultural organisation
10	Tolga	Turkish/ Belgian	M	28	2001	Commercial organisation
11	Francesca	Italian	F	32	2017	Commercial organisation
12	Emanuele	Italian	M	42	2009	Commercial organisation
13	Andrea	Italian	M	31	2019	National/regional representation
14	Pietro	Italian	F	27	2018	Commercial organisation
15	Murat	Turkish	M	36	2018	Commercial organisation
16	Marco	Italian	M	43	2007	Commercial organisation
17	Meltem	Turkish	F	50	2013	Commercial organisation
18	Massimo	Italian	M	33	2013	Commercial organisation
19	Emir	Turkish/ Belgian	M	36	/	Commercial organisation
20	Flavio	Italian	M	60	2020	National/regional representation
21	Luigi	Italian	M	44	2005	EU institution/body
22	Cristiana	Italian	F	57	2015	National/regional representation
23	Gianna	Italian	F	49	2017	National/regional representation
24	Giulia	Italian	F	24	2019	National/regional representation
25	Raffaele	Italian	M	42	2017	National/regional representation
26	Adriana	Italian	F	39	2008	Commercial organisation
27	Angeliki	Greek	F	31	1990	National/regional representation
28	Panagiotis	Greek	M	N/A	2016	National/regional representation
29	Anastasia	Greek	F	55	1988	Cultural organisation
30	Theodoros	Greek	M	64	2015	Commercial organisation
31	Yusuf	Turkish	M	68	1995	Commercial organisation

32	Gerasimos	Greek	M	68	1995	Commercial organisation
33	Markos	Greek	M	61	2004	Commercial organisation
34	Stefanos	Greek	M	69	1983	EU institution/body (retired)
35	Iraklis	Greek	M	N/A	1987	EU institution/body
36	Eirini	Greek	F	53	1991	EU institution/body
37	Stella	Italian	F	26	2020	Other organisation
38	Christos	Greek	M	53	2005	EU institution/body
39	Nikos	Greek	M	29	2017	Other organisation
40	Ioanna	Greek	F	35	2015	Other organisation
41	Osman	Turkish	M	36	2017	Commercial organisation
42	Güven	Turkish	M	59	1994	Commercial organisation
43	Samet	Turkish	M	59	1995	Commercial organisation
44	Rhea	Greek	F	26	2019	National/regional representation
45	Deniz	Turkish	F	42	2017	Commercial organisation
46	Dimitra	Greek	F	22	2021	National/regional representation
47	Melis	Turkish	F	48	2008	Commercial organisation
48	Alexia	Greek	F	25	2021	EU institution/body
49	Zeynep	Turkish	F	36	2018	Commercial organisation
50	Anita	Italian	F	30	2015	Commercial organisation
51	Ayça	Turkish	F	31	2017	Other organisation
52	Paola	Italian	F	40	2010	Commercial organisation
53	Konstantina	Greek	F	23	2021	National/regional representation
54	Ekaterina	Greek	F	24	2021	EU institution/body

Appendix 6: The most international communes in the Brussels-Capital Region

Note: The right-hand side of this table shows the top ten *communes* with the most Italian, Greek and Turkish nationals (the top five communes – for each nationality – are highlighted in green, the remaining top ten in blue). While Italians and Greeks are most numerous in Brussels-City, Turks are mostly represented in Schaerbeek.

Distribution of Italian, Greek and Turkish nationals in the 19 communes of the Brussels-Capital Region (with ranking).

Rank	The most international communes *(Total number of foreign nationals)*	Total	Rank	The most international communes *(Italians, Greeks and Turks only)*	Italians	Greeks	Turks	Total
						(rank in brackets)		
1	Brussels-City	186,916	1	**Brussels-City**	**5,281 (1)**	**1,796 (1)**	**1,390 (2)**	8,467
2	Schaerbeek	131,451	2	**Schaerbeek**	**2,860 (4)**	**799 (5)**	**3,157 (1)**	6,816
3	Anderlecht	121,929	3	**Ixelles**	**4,683 (2)**	**1,051 (2)**	272 (7)	6,006
4	Molenbeek-Saint-Jean	98,112	4	**Anderlecht**	**2,919 (3)**	612 (7)	**617 (4)**	4,148
5	Ixelles	87,488	5	**Etterbeek***	**2,640 (5)**	**808 (3)**	147 (9)	3,595
6	Uccle	84,774	6	**Woluwe-Saint-Lambert**	**2,113 (8)**	**801 (4)**	184 (8)	3,098
7	Woluwe-Saint-Lambert	58,010	7	**Uccle**	**2,360 (6)**	475 (10)	136 (10)	2,971
8	Forest	56,281	8	**Saint-Gilles**	**2,145 (7)**	562 (8)	101	2,808
9	Jette	52,854	9	**Molenbeek-Saint-Jean**	**1,720 (10)**	289	**552 (5)**	2,561
10	Saint-Gilles	49,196	10	**Forest**	**1,989 (9)**	331	61	2,381
11	Etterbeek	48,331	11	Woluwe-Saint-Pierre	**1,397**	735 (6)	129	2,261
12	Evere	43,061	12	Evere	958	197	403 (6)	1,558
13	Woluwe-Saint-Pierre	41,996	13	Saint-Josse-ten-Noode	653	116	**789 (3)**	1,558
14	Auderghem	34,723	14	Auderghem	750	504 (9)	39	1,293
15	Saint-Josse-ten-Noode	27,124	15	Jette	843	183	203	1,229
16	Berchem Sainte-Agathe	25,441	16	Watermael-Boitsfort	443	107	12	562
17	Watermael-Boitsfort	25,221	17	Berchem Sainte-Agathe	381	73	106	560
18	Ganshoren	25,189	18	Koekelberg	370	67	107	544
19	Koekelberg	21,873	19	Ganshoren	374	75	70	519

Table elaborated by author. Source: IBSA Brussels, 2021.

Appendix 7: Ethical clearance

LIÈGE
université

Comité d'éthique en Sciences humaines et sociales

Liège, le 22 janvier 2020

A l'attention de Mme. Elodie Hut
Faculté de Science sociales & Observatoire Hugo
Université de Liège
4000 Liège

Nos réf. : 20200101

Madame Elodie Hut,

Le CESHS a examiné votre projet *Perceptions of the Migration (Governance) Crisis Back Home: Comparing Insights from Greek, Italian and Turkish Migrants in Brussels.* Il estime que les questions d'éthique soulevées par l'approche et les méthodes envisagées sont abordées avec efficacité de manière générale ; en cela, leur traitement ne pose pas de problèmes majeurs. Vous avez accordé au dossier un soin particulier quant au traitement à venir des données personnelles recueillies. Le comité d'éthique vous engage cependant à être des plus prudentes quant à la levée de l'anonymat des personnes enquêtées qui n'y verraient pas d'inconvénient et de s'assurer que ces derniers ont bien été mis au courant des tenants et aboutissants de l'usage de leur identité.

Le Comité estime donc que le présent projet de recherche rencontre les critères communément admis et pratiqués par la communauté universitaire en termes d'éthique et d'intégrité scientifique. Dès lors, dans ce cadre et pour ce projet, nous émettons un avis favorable, sans réserve.

Vous souhaitant bonne réception de la présente et plein succès dans vos recherches, je vous prie de recevoir, Madame Hut, mes salutations distinguées.

Florence Caeymaex,
Présidente du Comité d'éthique en Sciences humaines et sociales

Place du 20-Août, 7 – 4000 Liège

Appendix 8: Consent form

LIÈGE université
The Hugo Observatory

MAGYC
Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

Interview code:

CONSENT FORM

PhD study on diasporas' perceptions of migration governance in their country of origin

I am willing to participate in a research interview with Elodie Hut (PhD Candidate, University of Liège).

I have been informed, I agree with, and I understand that:

- My participation is **voluntary** and **can be interrupted at any time**. I may refuse to answer any questions without any consequence and ask clarifications about the meaning of questions.

- The information collected through this interview is **anonymous and confidential**. None of my personal data will be published. My responses will be anonymized when processed by the researcher and my name and contact information will be solely used for communication purposes.

- My **personal data will be stored on the University of Liège's secure server (DoX)** until completion of the project. I may withdraw my data from the project at any time by contacting Elodie Hut, (elodie.hut@uliege.be).

- I am entitled to ask for a copy of the PhD thesis upon completion.

I further agree:

☐ That the interview **will be recorded** to facilitate transcription and data analysis;
☐ To **be kept informed** about the progress of the PhD project and to be included in the MAGYC project's mailing list: _____

Date: Date:

Signature of research participant: Signature of interviewer:

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